

Press release on the SCO Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs meeting

On 23-24 May 2016, Tashkent hosted a regular meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), chaired by the Uzbek party.

The meeting was attended by Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan Yerlan Idrisov, Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi, Foreign Minister of Kyrgyzstan Erlan Abdyldaev, Foreign Minister of Russia Sergei Lavrov, Foreign Minister of Tajikistan Sirodjidin Aslov and Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan Abdulaziz Kamilov, as well as SCO Secretary-General Rashid Alimov and Director of the Executive Committee of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) Yevgeny Sysoyev.

As part of the preparations for the SCO Heads of State Council meeting in Tashkent scheduled for 23-24 June 2016, the ministers discussed the current state and development prospects of interaction in various areas of the SCO activity, and improving the organisation's role in international and regional affairs. The diplomats emphasised that the SCO, acting in accordance with the Shanghai Spirit of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, mutual consultations, respect for cultural diversity and a desire for common development, has established itself as an influential player in contemporary international relations in the 15 years of its existence. Participants in the meeting confirmed their shared commitment to strengthening the role of the SCO on the global stage while abandoning any bloc and confrontational approaches to the existent regional and international issues, as well as to refusing to act against other countries or international organisations.

The diplomats also exchanged opinions on the implementation of the decisions taken at the SCO Heads of State Council meeting on 9-10 July 2015 in Ufa. The ministers noted that much work has been done since the Ufa summit to improve the SCO activities, as well as deepen fruitful cooperation within the organisation in politics, security, economy and culture. They also noted the importance of the adoption of the Action Plan to Implement the SCO Development Strategy towards 2025, which will be submitted to the SCO Heads of State Council.

The ministers decided to introduce for consideration by the Heads of State Council the signing of memorandums on the SCO membership obligations for the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to obtain the status of the SCO member states.

The ministers praised the signing of the memorandums on giving the status of SCO dialogue partner to Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia and Nepal.

They also noted the need to involve observer states and dialogue partners in practical cooperation within the SCO. They spoke in favour of further improving the regular consultations mechanism with the observer states and dialogue partners in order to increase the efficiency of cooperation in various areas.

They confirmed that, in accordance with the Charter and other SCO documents, the development and implementation of measures to jointly counteract terrorism, separatism and extremism in all their forms, as well as the illegal production and trafficking of drugs, transborder organised crime, cybercrime, illegal migration and human trafficking, illegal trade of weapons, ammunition and explosives, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems will remain a priority of cooperation within the SCO.

In accordance with the decision of the SCO Heads of State Council of 10 July 2015, the ministers emphasised the importance of the further development of the SCO convention on counteracting extremism, which will facilitate the strengthening of the legal framework in this area together with the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism and the SCO member states Cooperation Programme in Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism for 2016-2018.

The ministers noted the importance of international efforts to draft universal rules of responsible conduct in the information space that will include the principle of respect for state sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs of states, peaceful settlement of conflicts and respect for human rights and freedoms. The ministers hope to continue constructive discussions of this issue within the newly established UN Group of Governmental Experts (UN GGE) on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security.

The ministers reaffirmed the intention of the SCO member states to cooperate in internet governance based on the need to internationalise this work and to ensure equal rights of all countries to participate in it and their sovereign right to govern the internet in their respective national segments. The ministers stressed the importance of strengthening the SCO's international contacts and promoting interaction with international and regional partner organisations.

They exchanged opinions on current regional and international issues, their main development trends and the strengthening of security and stability in the region.

The ministers noted the importance of improving global governance mechanisms based on the UN Charter goals and principles and continued efforts to

create a fair and equal world order with a view to strengthening political and economic stability.

They reaffirmed the SCO member states' commitment to the consistent strengthening of the UN's central coordinating role in international relations based on international law, including the UN Charter goals and principles. This concerns primarily joint efforts to maintain global stability and security, promote international cooperation, independence and equality, to ensure the right of countries to choose their government systems and development paths, mutual respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, peaceful settlement of international disputes, non-use of force or threat of force, and respect for universal UN principles and norms in the fight against terrorism, separatism, extremism and other types of crime, challenges and threats.

The ministers spoke in favour of the speedy adoption of the UN Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism and the creation of an effective venue for broad cooperation against regional security challenges and threats.

The ministers are convinced that this evil can only be defeated and eliminated through redoubled joint efforts, the elaboration of measures to deal with both the symptoms and roots of this problem and consolidated international efforts based on international law and shared comprehensive approaches.

They noted the importance of coordinated political approaches to the fight against terrorism and interaction with international and regional organisations, SCO observer states and dialogue partners and other countries in order to create conditions for promoting a cooperative fight against terrorism in new realities. The ministers called for strengthening the UN's leading role in safeguarding international peace and security and for holding broad consultations as part of the search for a "package solution" to reforming the UN Security Council in order to enhance its transparency and effectiveness with due regard for the interests of unity among the UN member states but without setting artificial deadlines and without enforcing proposals that did not receive broad support from the UN member states. The ministers noted that rapidly restoring peace and stability in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is a major factor in maintaining and strengthening security in the region. They advocate the settlement of the internal conflict in Afghanistan through the continued inclusive national reconciliation process and believe that these efforts should come from Afghans themselves under the guidance of Afghans. The UN must play the central coordinating role in international cooperation on Afghanistan.

The ministers confirmed the importance of a political settlement of the Ukrainian crisis on the basis of strict compliance with the Minsk Agreements of 12 February 2015.

The ministers are convinced that the crisis situation in the Middle East and North Africa must be resolved in conformity with generally recognised norms of international law, principles of mutual respect for interests and through a wide-ranging political dialogue between all the warring parties involved in the conflicts. The ministers affirmed the need to preserve the unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity and stability of Syria and noted that there is no alternative to resolving the crisis by political means, which will allow the people of Syria to independently determine their own future, on the basis of the political process under UN auspices and in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2254.

The ministers noted the importance of close cooperation in the area of disarmament and arms control, the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. They believe that the speedy enactment by each party of the Protocol on Security Guarantees to the Central Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty will make a considerable contribution to strengthening the global nuclear non-proliferation regime.

The ministers affirmed the commitment of their states to maintaining law and order on the high seas based on the principles of international law, as formalised by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. All disputes should be resolved peacefully through friendly talks and agreements between the concerned parties, without their internationalisation or foreign interference. In this connection, the ministers called for fully respecting all provisions of the above-mentioned Convention, as well as the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and guiding principles for its implementation.

The ministers praised the practical implementation to date of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) regarding Iran's nuclear programme as an important step for expanded international cooperation in the interests of strengthening regional and global security and stability.

The ministers believe that the unilateral and unconstrained buildup of missile-defence systems by one state or a group of states, without any consideration for the interests of other countries, can prove detrimental to international and regional security and stability. They are absolutely convinced that it is impermissible to maintain one's own security at the expense of the security of others.

The ministers approved the draft Tashkent Declaration of the SCO's 15th Anniversary and a communique on the results of the meeting of the SCO Heads of State Council, as well as a report on the work of the Organisation's Secretariat in

2016, submitted by SCO Secretary-General Rashid Alimov. They heard a report by Yevgeny Sysoyev, Director of the Executive Committee of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure.

The ministers also adopted decisions on a number of issues regarding the Organisation's activities and the upcoming meeting of the SCO Heads of State Council in Tashkent.

The ministers praised the efforts of the Uzbek side, now presiding in the SCO, to prepare for a meeting of the SCO Heads of State Council in Tashkent. The meeting was characterised by an atmosphere of friendship and mutual understanding, which is customary in relations between the SCO member states.