

Press release on the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Council of Foreign Ministers meeting

On 20-21 April 2017, Astana hosted a regular meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) attended by Foreign Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kairat Abdrakhmanov, Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China Wang Yi, Foreign Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic Erlan Abdyldayev, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Tajikistan Sirodjiddin Aslov and Foreign Minister of the Republic of Uzbekistan Abdulaziz Kamilov.

Foreign Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kairat Abdrakhmanov chaired the meeting.

SCO Secretary-General Rashid Alimov and Director of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure Yevgeny Sysoyev also took part in the meeting.

President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev received the heads of the national delegations.

The ministers discussed the state and development of SCO activities after the 23-24 June 2016 meeting of the SCO Heads of State Council in Tashkent and the November 2-3 2016 meeting of the SCO Heads of Government Council in Bishkek.

While preparing for the upcoming 8-9 June 2017 meeting of the SCO Heads of State Council in Astana, the ministers approved the draft Astana Declaration of the SCO Heads of State and a communique on the results of the meeting of the SCO Heads of State Council reflecting the organisation's short-term approaches and goals.

In execution of the Tashkent Summit's decisions, the ministers submitted draft decisions on completing the procedure to admit India and Pakistan into the SCO and to recognise their status as full-fledged SCO member-states to the SCO Heads of State Council for consideration.

They stressed that the admission of new SCO member-states and the expansion of cooperation with observer states and dialogue partners was important for expanding and enhancing the organisation's potential.

The ministers called for further expanding cooperation between SCO member-states to counter today's security challenges and risks, primarily in the fight against terrorism, separatism, extremism, trans-border organised crime and illegal drug trafficking, and efforts to strengthen international information security and emergency response.

The ministers emphasised the importance of consistently implementing the Treaty on Long-Term Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation between SCO Member-States for the purpose of promoting mutual understanding, respect and fruitful cooperation in areas of common interest, turning mutual borders into borders of eternal peace and friendship, including the resolution of border issues based on friendly talks.

The ministers noted the need to unfailingly honour the goals and principles of the UN Charter, other generally recognised standards of international law primarily aiming to maintain peace and security, expand cooperation between states, mutually strengthen independence and sovereignty, guarantee equality, the right to independently determine one's future and options for political, socioeconomic and cultural development, mutual respect for territorial integrity, the inviolability of borders, non-aggression, non-interference in domestic affairs, the peaceful resolution of disputes, the non-use of force or the threat of force. They once again emphasised the key role of the UN Security Council as the main body assuming fundamental responsibility for maintaining international peace, stability and security under the UN Charter.

The ministers advocate the UN's more pronounced leading role in maintain international peace and security. They believe that intergovernmental talks on UN Security Council reform which aims to increase its membership and efficiency should be conducted through the broadest possible consultations during a search for a "package solution" in the interests of maintaining the cohesion of UN

member-countries, without establishing any artificial deadlines or forcibly implementing options that are not actively supported by UN members.

The ministers believe it is important to unfailingly honour the provisions of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, to ensure the comprehensive and well-balanced promotion of all goals and principles formalised by the document, to enhance the Treaty's efficiency and universal nature, to promote the process of nuclear disarmament and strengthening the global nuclear weapons non-proliferation regime under conditions of equal and indivisible security for everyone, with due consideration for the entire combination of factors influencing international stability, as well as assisting equitable and mutually beneficial cooperation in using nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

The ministers are confident that the soonest possible enactment of the Protocol of Guarantees to the Treaty on the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone for all signatory states would make a substantial contribution to maintaining regional security and strengthening the global nuclear non-proliferation regime.

The ministers praised the efforts of the government and the people of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to assert a peaceful, stable and economically stable state that will be free from terrorism, extremism and drug-related crime, proceeding from the UN's central coordinating role in international efforts to stabilise this country and ensure its development. They advocated the continuation of work by the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group in the interests of assisting the restoration of peace in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

The ministers noted the importance of the international community's efforts to resolve the situation in Syria by diplomatic methods and stressed that talks based on mutual trust and mutual understanding were the only option for overcoming the conflict in that country. They voiced confidence that the Astana process would create the necessary conditions for finding an acceptable solution to the Syrian crisis by the concerned parties under the UN-sponsored Geneva process, and that it would make a worthy contribution to establishing peace and stability in Syria.

The ministers advocated the fastest possible restoration of peace in Ukraine on the basis of completely and unconditionally honouring the Minsk agreements of 12 February 2015 by all the parties.

The ministers noted efforts to implement the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian Nuclear Programme between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, plus Germany) and the European Union.

The ministers noted the importance of further developing and expanding intra-SCO economic cooperation in the context of global economic development trends. In this connection, they supported the decision of China to hold the “One Belt, One Road” international cooperation forum in Beijing in May 2017.

The heads of delegations believe it is necessary to further expand partner-like relations and to establish contact between the SCO and other international organisations, including the UN, the UN’s Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia.

The ministers consider it necessary to promote intra-SCO cultural and humanitarian cooperation for strengthening mutual understanding, for the mutual enrichment of cultures and for circulating information about the customs and traditions of SCO member-countries’ peoples.

The ministers noted that high-level events, held in October-November 2016 at the UN Headquarters in New York that dealt with practical aspects of UN-SCO cooperation in countering modern threats and challenges, primarily the approval of the UN General Assembly resolution on cooperation between the UN and the SCO, had become an important step in elevating mutual cooperation to a new level. They also praised the results of a joint event organised by the UN Office on Drugs and

Crime and the SCO Secretariat that focused on the drug threat (Vienna, 13 March 2017).

The ministers believe that the involvement of the SCO and its member-states in the EXPO-2017 International Specialised Exhibition whose main theme is “Energy of the Future” to be hosted by Astana will provide a new impetus to multilateral and bilateral cooperation, and that it will also help strengthen the SCO’s image and prestige on the international scene.

They approved a report on the work of the SCO Secretariat in 2016, approved a draft report on the SCO’s performance in 2016 and heard information about the activities of the SCO’s Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure.

The ministers also adopted decisions on a number of issues regarding the organisation’s current activities and the upcoming meeting of the SCO Heads of State Council in Astana.

The ministers praised the work of Kazakhstan, now presiding in the SCO, including its efforts to prepare the meeting of the SCO Heads of State Council in Astana.

The meeting took place in the spirit of friendship and mutual understanding, traditional features of relations between SCO member-states.