



**SECRETARIAT OF THE CONFERENCE ON INTERACTION
AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES IN ASIA**

**СЕКРЕТАРИАТ СОВЕЩАНИЯ ПО ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЮ
И МЕРАМ ДОВЕРИЯ В АЗИИ**

№SOC/508

*Enclosure:
as stated,
on 21 pp.*

The Secretariat of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) presents its compliments to the CICA Member States and has the honour to forward the revised Minutes of the Senior Officials Committee meeting held on 14 March 2024.

The Secretariat avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the CICA Member States the assurances of its highest consideration.

Astana, 16 April 2024



**MEMBER STATES
OF THE CONFERENCE ON INTERACTION
AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES
IN ASIA**



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№SOC/508

Секретариат Совещания по взаимодействию и мерам доверия в Азии (СВМДА) свидетельствует свое уважение государствам-членам СВМДА и имеет честь препроводить пересмотренный Протокол заседания Комитета старших должностных лиц, состоявшегося 14 марта 2024 года.

*Приложение:
упомянутое,
на 21 лл.*

Секретариат пользуется случаем, чтобы возобновить государствам-членам СВМДА уверения в своем весьма высоком уважении.

город Астана, 16 апреля 2024 г.



**ГОСУДАРСТВА-ЧЛЕНЫ
СОВЕЩАНИЯ ПО ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЮ
И МЕРАМ ДОВЕРИЯ В АЗИИ**

Қосымша:
аталған,
21 п.

Азиядағы өзара іс-қимыл және сенім шаралары кеңесінің (Азия Кеңесінің) Хатшылығы Азия Кеңесіне мүше мемлекеттерге өзінің зор ілтипатын білдіре отырып, 2024 жылғы 14 наурызда өткен Аға лауазымды тұлғалар комитеті отырысының қайта қаралған хаттамасын жолдауды өзіне мәртебе санайды.

Хатшылық осы мүмкіндікті пайдалана отырып, Азия Кеңесіне мүше мемлекеттерге өзінің зор ілтипатын тағы да растайды.

Астана қаласы, 2024 жылғы 16 сәуір

**АЗИЯДАҒЫ ӨЗАРА ІС-ҚИМЫЛ ЖӘНЕ
СЕНІМ ШАРАЛАРЫ КЕҢЕСІНЕ
МҮШЕ МЕМЛЕКЕТТЕР**



Secretariat

MINUTES OF THE SENIOR OFFICIALS COMMITTEE MEETING 14 March 2024

The Senior Officials Committee (SOC) meeting was held on Thursday, 14 March 2024 in Astana in the hybrid format. Mr. Alibek Bakayev, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, chaired the meeting.

The initial draft agenda and draft annotated agenda (SOC/2024-I/Agenda/1 of 5 February 2024, SOC/2024-I/Agenda/2 of 11 March 2024), the decisions taken (SOC/2024-I/DEC/1 of 14 March 2024) and the List of participants are available on the CICA website (<https://www.s-cica.org/index.php?view=page&t=soc-meeting-14-march-2024>).

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted without any changes.

2. CICA Chairmanship in 2024-2026 and the Seventh Meeting of the CICA Ministerial Council (MC) in 2024

Agenda item 2 was discussed after all other items of the agenda.

The Chairman reminded the SOC that in October 2022 Azerbaijan made a kind offer to assume CICA Chairmanship in 2024-2026. The decision on this matter was still pending, as one Member States expressed a special view on this. In the course of 2023 and in the beginning of 2024, the Chairmanship and the Secretary General had held a broad range of consultations at various levels to resolve the issue.

The Chairman informed the SOC that as of 14 March 2024 there was no longer a special view on the Chairmanship bid of Azerbaijan and consensus was in place and that opened the way for the Chair to launch the formal procedure of decision-making on Chairmanship in 2024-2026. The Chairman proposed that the SOC

make a recommendation for the Ministerial Council to adopt the following decision through the silence procedure.

“The Ministerial Council decides that the Republic of Azerbaijan will be the CICA Chair in the years 2024-2026 and will host the Seventh Meeting of the CICA Ministerial Council in 2024 and CICA Summit in 2026.”

India fully supported the Chairmanship of Azerbaijan, however requested to have sufficient time to consider the draft MC Decision. Russia, China, Türkiye, Palestine, Bangladesh, Israel welcomed and supported the Chairmanship of Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan expressed its appreciation to all Member States for their support and suggested that most Members States had already officially supported its bid in 2022, hence the period of silence procedure could be rather short, also keeping in mind the upcoming Nauryz holiday season.

The SOC decision: The SOC considered the issue of the next CICA Chairmanship and recommended to the Ministerial Council that it adopt a decision on the Chairmanship of Azerbaijan in the years 2024-2026 through a silence procedure with the deadline of Tuesday, 19 March 2024, 6 p.m. by Astana time.*

3. Implementation of the Road Map for CICA Transformation (RMT) (document MC/2023/CHAIR/1/Rev.2 of 21 September 2023)

The Chairman informed the SOC that the first four clusters of the RMT were on the agenda of the SOC meeting today, with the main expectation to hear the views and suggestions of the Member States. The Chairman stressed that the main approach proposed by the Chair was to ensure gradual and incremental work, organized in a structured and results-oriented way, as agreed by all Member States, ensuring that the transformation process was most effective, but not protracted, thus enabling parallel work-streams on several themes at the same time; applying the principle “from simple to complex”; proposing amendments to specific CICA documents and, where necessary, adopting new decisions and documents.

* Note by the Secretariat: thereafter, the silence procedure was not broken, and the Ministerial Council decision was adopted on 19 March 2024 (<https://www.s-cica.org/docs/202048051665fa8e4864739.pdf>).

3(a) Discussion of Cluster 1 of the RMT: “Elaborating a charter”

The Chairman stressed that the adoption of the charter would be the quintessence and the culmination of the transformation process. The Chairman noted that the document should reflect the main objectives, principles and working methods of the organization, overarching areas of cooperation and other institutional features of our organization.

The Chairman proposed that, first, a draft charter could be elaborated based on international experience and best practices, while collecting proposals from the Member States, and second, extensive consultations at all levels and relevant CICA formats would be held taking into account the ongoing discussions and possible decisions under other related clusters of the RMT.

The Chairman outlined general approaches to the content of a future Charter:

1. The charter should have a concise text, include only most fundamental parameters of the organization, while leaving details in other CICA documents.
2. The charter would reaffirm the founding and cornerstone documents of CICA – the 2002 Almaty Act, the 1999 Declaration of Principles and the 2010 Convention on Privileges and Immunities. The Chair strongly believes that we should not “reopen” these constituent documents of CICA.
3. Considering elements of other international organizations’ charters or statutes, with a view to applying best practices but without copy-paste of elements which do not suit CICA.

The Chair thanked the Secretary General for the analysis of charters of several global, pancontinental and regional organizations – the United Nations, League of Arab States, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, ASEAN, African Union and the Organization of American States.

He noted that all these documents contain many common elements, while being specific to the nature of the respective organization. On this basis, the Chair, with the help of the Secretariat, has come up with a preliminary list of elements for a CICA charter.

The Chair then outlined the following 13 initial elements which the Chairmanship recommends for reflection in the CICA charter.

1. Recognizing CICA as an international intergovernmental organization with legal personality. This is the key element. By the adoption of a charter with such an element, CICA will legally acquire the status of a full-fledged organization.

2. Reiterating commitment to the UN Charter and reaffirming CICA fundamental principles and main objectives set out in the 1999 Declaration and the 2002 Almaty Act. This is a fundamental element present in charters of many other organizations, containing main principles and objectives of the organization.

Chair stressed that, with regard to CICA, we do not need to reinvent a wheel – principles and objectives of our organization were established in 1999 and 2002 and are continuously reaffirmed, last time at the Sixth CICA Summit in 2022.

3. Membership and accession – like in other organizations, these are states which share and commit to the principles and objectives of the organization, in our case – those which have signed the 1999 Declaration and 2002 Almaty Act and will join the prospective CICA charter.

4. Briefly outlining the overarching areas of cooperation, including but not limited to CBMs and the Catalogue of CBMs, as well as new areas. These have to be identified during the transformation process, as tasked by the Sixth CICA Summit.

5. Reiterating the consensus principle of decision-making and the nature of adopted decisions and documents. This is the most important element in terms of methods of work of our organization. However, details about the decision-making procedures should be kept in the CICA Rules of Procedure.

6. Very brief definition and outline of the structure of CICA governing bodies, such as the Summit, MC and SOC, as well as the possibility of creation of other bodies. Similarly, more details should remain in the CICA Rules of Procedure.

7. Very brief definition and principles of creation of informal subsidiary bodies, informal working bodies, specialized advisory bodies or other affiliated bodies, with listing of the currently existing subsidiary and advisory bodies, and keeping flexibility for establishing new ones.

8. Very brief definition of the Chairmanship and its role, while leaving the detailed description of its functions, terms and appointment procedures where they are now – in the Rules of Procedure.

9. Definition and principles of creation of CICA executive structures as operational tools for implementation of the Member States' decisions and tasks, with reference to the role of the Secretary General as Chief Executive Officer of the organization and the Secretariat as the primary executive structure. Similarly, more detailed provisions to be discussed and elaborated during the transformation process and reflected in the updated Statute of the CICA Secretariat.

10. Privileges and immunities, reaffirmation of the CICA Convention on Privileges and Immunities and highlighting the currently existing legal capacity of the CICA Secretariat.

11. Generally on the principle of fair and equitable sharing of the organization's budget by all Member States with due account of the capacity to pay, while preserving voluntary funding. More detail to be elaborated in the updated CICA Financial Regulations and CICA Financial Rules and other separate decisions, as appropriate.

12. Reaffirmation of the location of the seat and headquarters of the organization in Astana.

13. Last but not least, description of the procedure for entry into force of the charter, its provisional application until entry into force, and procedure of introducing amendments.

Russia thanked the Chairmanship for the preliminary elements of the Charter, stressing that the Charter was the starting point that would define the work on all other clusters of CICA transformation, including the new Rules of Procedure. Russia suggested that while some elements of the Almaty Act and the Declaration of Principles could be used for the Charter, these documents were designed for CICA decades ago and are not applicable to the full extent for the Charter of the new organization in the current geopolitical reality.

Russia also suggested to define membership criteria, noting that having signed the basic CICA documents might not be enough to become a member of the future organization and membership might not be necessarily based on the current criteria. Russia stressed that we were building a new organization, as transformation meant creating something new.

Russia further asked for clarifications regarding some specific elements of the draft Charter, including “politically binding nature” of decisions, applicability of “troika” mechanism to the future organization, “provisional application of the Charter”, and how “informal subsidiary bodies” would correlate with expected mandatory financial contributions.

Türkiye noted that CICA was moving in the right direction by starting from discussing elements of a Charter, and it supported the logic of the Chair for the road ahead. Türkiye stressed the need to discuss every element of the RMT with participation of all Member States. Türkiye underlined the need to preserve and build the work on the Charter on the existing CICA acquis, such as the Almaty Act, and to introduce further improvements and new principles if needed in the Charter to reflect current realities. It stressed the need to preserve consensus and CBMs as the core functions of the future organization, noting that new areas of cooperation can also be developed. Türkiye noted the need for structured discussions on the Charter, consultations in advance of SOC discussions and active involvement of relevant experts, including from legal departments, in the drafting of the Charter.

Azerbaijan commended the Chair and the Secretariat and expressed its full support to the transformation process and its key principles, such as gradual and consensus-based approach. Azerbaijan noted that cautious approach is needed to the drafting of the Charter as it may involve sensitive elements, especially if we were to move from politically to legally binding documents and decisions.

India commended the elements of the future Charter as a good basis for further discussions and promised to engage substantially in the process. India supported the view that the CICA founding documents, such as the Almaty Act, were very important and should not be reopened.

Bangladesh supported the concept of the future Charter as proposed by the Chair. Bangladesh suggested that founding documents could be reviewed in an inclusive manner amidst the transformation and, if needed, they could be updated.

The Secretary General noted that the membership criteria, such as being territorially at least partially in Asia, as well as the notion of “troika”, already existed in the current Rules of Procedure (paragraphs 11.1 and 14.3.8).

Regarding the notion of a “politically binding character” of CICA documents, the Secretary General highlighted the current nature of CICA, which is based on the

principles of consensus and voluntariness, and noted this was a rather philosophical question for the Member States – to which extent they wish to be “disciplined” and “flexible” at the same time, what kind of approach would be good for a pan-continental organization?

The Secretary General clarified that that there was no link between the formal or informal nature of certain CICA working bodies and the budget process, noting that the CICA governing bodies may establish any additional subsidiary bodies. With regard to the mandatory budgeting, the Secretary General called on the Member States to consider this matter seriously, stressing that sharing the budget by all Member States would strengthen their ownership over the organization and improve its inclusiveness. He also underscored that CICA has a very small budget.

With regard to the provisional application of the Charter, the Secretary General explained that once the draft Charter is adopted, it would undergo signing and ratification by the Member States, and the Member States may agree that in the meantime they will implement the Charter from the date of its adoption.

Following the Secretary General’s clarifications, Russia commented that the process of building a new organization may not be necessarily based on the current Rules of Procedure.

3 (b) Discussion of Cluster 2 of the RMT: “Improving current modalities of implementation of CICA CBMs until completion of the transformation process and exploring focus areas of our cooperation within the future organization”

The Chairman reminded that in 2023 Member States have finalized the draft Ministerial Council decision on modalities of implementation of CBMs with one Member state reserving its position on the entire document. The Chairman called on that Member State to reconsider its position and join consensus.

The Chair informed the SOC that it intended to collect proposals from Member States on focus areas of our cooperation within the future organization and analyze them, and on this basis would make proposals for further discussion, preferably within 2024.

Russia noted that the draft document on modalities was very important as the current CICA process should continue amidst the ongoing transformation and it

would be satisfactory to adopt the document in 2024 at the Ministerial Council meeting.

Palestine noted that the document on modalities was critical for implementation of CBMs and that the modalities, as well as the entire CICA process, should be strictly in line with international law.

Türkiye expressed a strong invitation to the concerned Member State to support the draft document on CBM modalities, stressing that this document would be a good “gift” for the Ministerial Council meeting this year.

The Secretary General agreed on the importance of the document and expressed hope that consensus would be reached before the 7th Meeting of the Ministerial Council this year.

3 (c) Update on Cluster 3 of the RMT: “Defining the international status of the Secretariat contracted personnel, including amendments to the Host Country Agreement”

The Chairman informed the SOC that the Kazakh Chairmanship, as the host country of CICA, was finalizing its internal legal procedures to introduce amendments to the CICA Host Country Agreement of 2006, which were aimed at ensuring the international character of functions of all CICA personnel by providing them the status of “international civil servants” through granting them basic privileges and immunities of international civil servants, similar to that of the UN staff.

The Chair noted that this would also improve conditions of service in the Secretariat, making it attractive to citizens of all Member States, and thereby would significantly contribute to broadening the geographic representation among the contracted staff and would make the Secretariat more internationalized.

The Chairman informed the SOC that Member States were expected to formally endorse the draft Protocol of Amendments for co-signing by the Secretary General and that the draft would be circulated to the Member States as soon as it passes approval by the relevant government agencies of Kazakhstan, prior to the adoption of a decree by the Government of Kazakhstan, and called for the Member States’ expedient support. Thereafter the Protocol would be co-signed by the

Government of Kazakhstan and the CICA Secretary General and passed on to ratification by the Parliament of Kazakhstan.

The Secretary General supported the call from the Chair, underlining that a more internationalized Secretariat meant better and more effective Secretariat, which was beneficial for all Member States.

The Republic of Korea (RoK) noted that transformation was timely, supporting the idea of a new Charter and the international status of the Secretariat staff. RoK also noted that once the new organization was created it would be easier for the Government of RoK to ratify the 2010 Convention on Privileges and Immunities.

3 (d) Discussion of Cluster 4 of the RMT: “Updating the Rules of Procedure”.

The Chair noted that the main goal and result of our work under Cluster 4 would be the codification of the established procedural practice and further improvement of *modi operandi* of the CICA governing and working bodies. First, reflecting new terms established by the Sixth CICA Summit in the Rules of Procedure (RoP), as well as codifying and reflecting improved current practices, including classification, structure and *modi operandi* of CICA bodies, as well as revisiting outdated terminology. Second, discussing possible innovations to our methods of work to make them more effective and efficient. The Chair noted that it would be feasible to elaborate, discuss and finalize the updated Rules of Procedure by the time of the Seventh Ministerial Council Meeting in 2024.

Russia questioned the need to update the RoP before the adoption of the Charter, as the terminology in the RoP must be consistent with the Charter, adding that the current RoP had been updated just recently in 2021. Russia also noted that there were some ideas on improvements, and suggested to reconsider the term of the Chair so that it would end with a Summit or Ministerial Council meeting, referring to the newly recommended decision in Chairmanship of Azerbaijan in 2024-2026.

Palestine noted that the draft Charter was an utmost priority and other documents could be addressed following the adoption of the Charter.

The Secretary General noted that all clusters of the RMT are interconnected to certain extent and the Secretariat was ready to work on all of them in parallel with some elements being agreed this year, some – in the near future. The Secretary General proposed at this time at least to reflect the decisions of the 6th Summit related to the new names of CICA bodies and executive officers. The Secretary

General agreed that the modalities of the Chairmanship's term maybe reconsidered by the MSs as there were various international practices in this regard, also suggesting that high-level meetings could be organized not only in the chairing country. This would mean a "two-phased approach" to updating the RoP.

Russia agreed that the decisions of the 6th Summit (e.g. renaming the CICA Executive Director as the CICA Secretary General) could be reflected at this phase and the rest of the RoP could be reconsidered at a later stage of transformation. It noted that the draft Charter and draft RoP could hardly be elaborated in parallel, as the former was the basis for the latter.

Azerbaijan supported Russia's position on the RoP, noting the future Charter would be an international legal document while the other CICA documents would be of politically binding nature. Azerbaijan suggested to the Member States to agree on using new terminology provisionally without reopening the current RoP, on the basis of the Astana Statement on Transformation which de-facto already renamed the relevant bodies and executive positions.

The Secretary General noted the need to implement the Summit task and reflect its decision in the current "legislation". The Chairman supported the Secretary General's approach, noting that the leader's instructions should be implemented without any further delay.

Türkiye supported the proposals of the Chair on improving the *modi operandi* of CICA, including the RoP, noting that Russia's and Azerbaijan's logic was also relevant. Türkiye called on the Member States to start work on the draft Charter as soon as possible so that all other elements of transformation could be understood better.

Bangladesh noted that the Charter was a prime document, a bedrock for all future deliberations on the RMT, requiring work without haste. Bangladesh supported aligning the draft Charter with CICA founding documents, however allowed for certain revision and update if agreed by all Member States.

The Secretary General clarified on the question of inconsistency between the terms in the Almaty Act and the current Rules of Procedure, noting that it is proposed to keep the principles enshrined in the Almaty Act, but not provisions related to modalities.

The SOC decision: The SOC took note of the progress made by the Chairmanship with support of the Secretariat and its plans on the implementation of the RMT.

4. Draft memorandum on the establishment of a Partnership Network of Leading Universities of the CICA Member States

Item 4 was considered after item 5 of the Agenda.

The Chairman noted that the creation of a Partnership Network of Leading Universities within the CICA framework was declared as one of Chairmanship priorities by President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev at the Sixth CICA Summit.

The Chairman informed that the experts meeting on 20 February 2024 finalized the draft Memorandum and recommended its positive consideration by the SWG and SOC for adoption by the Ministerial Council, and the SWG at the meeting on 12 March considered the draft Memorandum and recommended its approval by the SOC for its subsequent adoption by the Ministerial Council.

RoK supported the draft document, noting that educational cooperation was very useful and served as good investment for the future.

Türkiye expressed support to adopting the draft Memorandum at the upcoming Ministerial Council meeting.

Russia noted that the draft Memorandum was a good document, stressing the need to find a proper niche for this mechanism as other multilateral structures in the region already had similar arrangements.

Bangladesh expressed general support, noting the need to converge national priorities in the education sphere, taking into account similar arrangement within other regional organizations.

The SOC decision: The SOC approved the draft Memorandum on the Establishment of a Partnership Network of Leading Universities of the CICA Member States for its adoption by the CICA Ministerial Council.

5. Draft outcome document of the CICA Ministerial Conference on Environmental Issues

Item 5 of the Agenda was considered after item 3.

The Chairman reminded the SOC that the idea to convene a high-level conference on environmental issues was put forward by President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev at the Sixth CICA Summit to discuss approaches and seek solutions to solve environmental issues in CICA region. The Chairman referred to the SOC decision of 1 February 2024, that the Conference will be convened in the form of a CICA Specialized Meeting under Article 8 of the CICA Rules of Procedure. The conference will take place on 28 August 2024 in Astana and the invitations to all relevant ministers of the CICA Member States had been sent out by the Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of Kazakhstan through the diplomatic channels of the Chairmanship.

The Chairman informed the SOC on the progress of finalizing the concept paper of the Conference and its draft outcome document. The Chairman notified the SOC that the updated concept paper would be circulated soon and the draft outcome document would be submitted to the SWG and SOC as soon as further progress is achieved at the expert level.

Russia noted that it was important to prepare and conduct CICA activities in a gradual manner. First, the concept paper of the Conference should be finalized, then we could proceed with the draft outcome document, official invitations and programme. Russia noted that some aspects mentioned in the programme attached to the invitations circulated by the Chairmanship (including participants) needed prior consent from all Member States. Russia also noted that it was important to avoid establishing new mechanisms duplicating environmental agenda of other regional multilateral fora, like SCO, and experts should discuss the possible niche of CICA in this sphere.

The Chairman took note of Russia's suggestions and underlined the task of holding the conference at a high level.

6. Update on the other 2024 priorities of the Chairmanship

The Chairman updated the SOC on the progress in implementing the following Chairmanship priorities:

- Convening the Rally of Volunteer Movement Leaders of the CICA Countries under the auspices of the CICA Youth Council,
- Institutionalizing the CICA Finance Summit.
- Establishing a CICA Council for Sustainable Connectivity.

Russia welcomed the initiative to convene the Rally of Volunteer movement leaders, briefed the SOC on the success of the World Youth Festival held in Sochi, Russia, on 1-7 March 2024, where representatives of all CICA Member States were present.

Russia noted the importance of cooperation in financial sphere, especially with regard to using national currencies for payments and enhancing the self-sufficiency of respective financial systems. Russia suggested that line experts should discuss the added value of using CICA platform for such purposes.

China noted its readiness to work closely with the Chairmanship and all Member States on the institutionalizing the CICA Finance Summit.

The Secretary General expressed confidence that Member States were interested in closer financial cooperation and there was relevant experience of having 3 CICA Financial Summits in the past years. The Secretary General informed that the updated concept paper would be circulated in the near future.

Regarding establishing a CICA Council for Sustainable Connectivity, Russia noted that the current proposal and relevant concept paper were too general, covering many issues at once, hence the line agencies would have hard time sharing responsibility working on such broad spectrum of issues, and it would be difficult to achieve added value. Russia suggested that CICA should not pursue such a comprehensive agenda, including establishment of the Council, but rather should try finding its niche that was not covered within other mechanisms, like ESCAP and SCO.

The Chairman noted that CICA was a unique format of interaction, focusing on what unites the Member States and building mutually beneficial partnerships with other stakeholders. The Chair stressed that CICA was acting in strict adherence with the UN Charter.

7. Implementation of paragraph 15 of the CICA MC Statement on Promoting Volunteerism for Sustainable Development (document MC/2023/DEC/2 of 21 September 2023)

The Chairman referred to paragraph 15 of the Statement on Promoting Volunteerism for Sustainable Development, adopted by the MC in September 2023, stipulating creation of a dedicated section on the CICA website for the Member States to share information about their policies, strategies, research and best practices on volunteerism.

The Chairman informed that the People's Republic of China had put forward a proposal to improve the publication procedure of the information on volunteerism at the CICA website, and the SWG at its meeting on 12 March agreed on the proposal of China and recommended the SOC to approve it.

China requested the Member States to exclude sensitive issues or content unrelated to volunteerism within CICA.

Türkiye noted that the review process of such material could be rather subjective, as national views correspond to individual national interests, and observed that a guidance for review could be elaborated. Azerbaijan suggested that it would be useful to agree on criteria for information exchange, such as a clear questionnaire or template, like in military-political dimension. Russia also noted the need for criteria and rules. The Secretary General agreed that such criteria could be discussed in the future.

The SOC decision: The SOC agreed that national documents on volunteerism will be published on the CICA website on the basis of consensus, by providing all Member States a four-week-long period to review each national document and the opportunity to request the submitting country to adjust the content of the document, or to limit the access to the document on the CICA website only to the Member States, or to withdraw the document from the CICA website.

8. Draft SOC decision on an annual action plan of the CICA Think Tank Forum

The Chairman extended its warm congratulations to the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS) for being reappointed as TTF Chair for the 2024-2025 term, expressed hope that the CICA TTF would intensify its activities in developing research ideas, such as transformation of CICA and support for small and medium-

sized enterprises and exploring the untapped potential of the TTF, establishing a closer synergy between institutions of CICA, such as the TTF and the Business Council or the TTF and the Youth Council, in the future.

The Chairman referred to paragraph 4.6 of the Regulations of the CICA Think Tank Forum and informed that the draft annual action plan of the TTF for 2024 was developed by SIIS in cooperation with the co-chair of the TTF, Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies (KazISS).

The Chairman highlighted one item of the draft Plan - a symposium dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the 1999 Declaration of the Principles Guiding Relations between CICA Member States, inviting Member States to support this initiative.

The Chairman informed the SOC that the draft annual plan of the TTF for 2024 has been circulated as document SOC/2024/DRAFT/4 on 7 March 2024 for approval by the SOC. The SWG at its meeting on 12 March considered the draft annual plan of the TTF for 2024, made some amendments and invited Member States to provide comments until 31 March 2024.

China thanked the Chairmanship for appointing SIIS for another term, underlined the role of the Secretariat in coordinating TTF activities. China stressed that SIIS would continue its proactive role aiming at concrete practical results.

Russia requested a separate concept note on the symposium clarifying – along with other aspects – the potential participants of the conference.

The Chairman explained that potential participants of the symposium include CICA veterans (former diplomats, senior officials and CICA Executive Directors), current senior officials, representatives of the TTF and other experts. The Chairman notified that the KazISS would be the main organizer of the symposium.

The SOC decision: The SOC considered the draft annual action plan of the CICA Think Tank Forum for 2024 and invited Member States to provide comments until 31 March 2024

9. Establishing relations with other international organizations

9 (a) United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT)

The Chairman informed the SOC that CICA had already had a lot of productive interactions with UNOCT, including the adoption of the CICA Plan of Implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy with the help of the UNOCT, participation and addresses of UN Deputy Secretary General – Head of UNOCT V.Voronkov at CICA meetings, and regular meetings between the Secretariats.

The Secretary General updated the SOC on the history of interaction with the UNOCT and briefed on the outcomes of relevant discussion during the previous SOC meeting in December 2023. The Secretary General informed that upon the request from Member States the Secretariat had prepared a relevant concept paper that was circulated as an informational supporting material.

The Chairman reminded the SOC that the SWG at its meeting on 12 March took note of the proposal to establish partnership relations between CICA and the UNOCT and invited Member States to provide comments until 31 March 2024. The Chairman expressed its full support to the proposal and was confident that this cooperation would have a positive impact on the activities of both structures.

9(b) UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

The Chairman reminded the SOC that the SWG at its meeting on 12 March considered and recommended to the SOC to approve establishing partnership relations between CICA and UN ESCAP and he expressed support to the proposal.

The Secretary General briefed the SOC on the history of the issue and proposed next steps. He announced the CICA-ESCAP side-event dedicated to regional partnerships in leveraging digital innovations for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific region to be held on the margins of the 80th Session of ESCAP on 24 April 2024.

The Secretary General also noted the potential of establishing relations between CICA and ESCWA in a similar manner where CICA could be an outreach platform and bridge between various sub-regions of Asia.

China expressed support to the initiative, stressing the need for better cooperation in social and economic spheres.

The SOC decision: The SOC approved establishing partnership relations between the CICA Secretariat and the Secretariat of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP).

10. Concept papers, coordinators and co-coordinators in priority areas of CICA dimensions

The Chairman congratulated Türkiye on the appointment as co-coordinator in the priority area “Combating terrorism” and informed that the SOC decision on this was adopted on 11 March 2024 through a silence procedure.

The Secretary General updated the SOC on the progress with concept papers across the 18 priority areas of CICA Catalogue of CBMs, pointing out that 10 papers were updated since 2021, 6 were under work, while Trade and Investment area needed a coordinator.

The Chairman reminded that two applications for co-coordinating roles were pending since last year, namely:

Offer of Iraq to assume the role of co-coordinator in the priority area “Combating Terrorism”;

Offer of Israel to assume the role of co-coordinator in the priority area “Sustainable Development”.

The Chairman reiterated that the Chairmanship welcomed both offers and encouraged all Member States to support these proposals.

Türkiye expressed readiness to prepare a draft concept paper in the area of Trade and Investment in coordination with Co-Coordinator Kyrgyzstan and the Secretariat.

RoK informed the SOC that it had prepared an updated draft concept paper in the area of Energy Security and it would be submitted to the Secretariat for further dissemination soon.

The State of Palestine reconfirmed its strong objection to the nomination of Israel, the occupying power for the role of co-coordinator in the area of sustainable development. State of Palestine briefed the member States about the dire situation

in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly in the occupied Gaza Strip on the 159th day of war on Gaza, that is being subjected to continuous military attacks by the Israeli occupying forces, resulting so far in more than 31000 killed, out of which more than 69% are children and women in addition to destroying 85% of the Gaza infrastructure, housing units, public property, medical centers, schools and other civilian objects. The number of forcibly displaced persons inside of Gaza amount to nearly 1, 4 million.

Palestine noted that on the 5th day of the holy month of Ramadan more than 17 children in Gaza died from starvation, the hospitals in Gaza are out of medical supplies, including oxygen, and surgeries are performed without anesthesia.

Palestine stated that we were witnessing a genocide against the Palestinian people online, this is happening because one country acts with full impunity and refuses to comply with International law, while Israeli officials referred to Palestinians as "human animals "and called for wiping them out.

The State of Palestine renewed its call upon friendly and brotherly countries to pursue their efforts for an urgent and immediate ceasefire, while ensuring access to humanitarian corridors, in addition to allowing humanitarian aid to enter the occupied Gaza Strip, while reiterating Palestine's gratitude and appreciation for all those who provided financial, legal, moral, and humanitarian in kind support to help lifting the suffering of our people therein.

Therefore, State of Palestine considered that rewarding Israel especially in such times when a genocide is happening is against the principles of international law and morality.

Israel expressed its dissatisfaction with Palestine using the CICA platform to disseminate lies and discriminate against Israel. Israel stressed that they were fighting Hamas, retaliating for the terrorist attack of 7 October 2023. Israel noted that it would not use CICA platform to continue that argument, stressing that it was against the spirit of CICA, hoping to find solution to coordinators' issue soon.

Qatar supported the position of Palestine. Egypt called for immediate cease fire and humanitarian assistance in Gaza. Türkiye called for the end of bloodshed, ceasefire and humanitarian assistance in Gaza paving the way for fair and long-lasting solution. Iraq expressed its support to Palestine and called for humanitarian assistance, and for immediate cease-fire and unconditional allowing the entry of humanitarian aid into all parts of Gaza.

Jordan expressed its support to Palestine and its plight, calling for the end of war and humanitarian relief in Gaza, opening horizon for political settlement where Palestinian state would exist side-by-side with the State of Israel. Jordan also supported the CICA process and its goal, including its transformation into an organization.

Israel reassured the SOC that the humanitarian aid was going into Gaza, however Hamas and other groups were stealing it, while Israel was working with Egypt and Jordan on alternatives.

Russia thanked all Member States actively working as coordinators and co-coordinators for preparing and updating relevant concept papers. Russia announced two CBM events in the area of ICT security planned to be held in 2024 and called on all Member States to join the upcoming seminars.

11. Presentation by the Secretary General of the annual financial report for 2023

The Secretary General presented the annual financial report for 2023 that had been circulated via Secretariat's Note No. BDG/186 of 14 February 2024. The Secretary General highlighted that in 2023 the Secretariat had an approved budget of 2,860,000 USD. Voluntary contributions received by the Secretariat in 2023 amounted to 2,023,450 USD. Considering exchange rate differences, the Secretariat's expenses in 2023 totaled 1,880,924 USD, equivalent to 65.8% of the approved budget. Savings in 2023 amounted to 142,526 USD dollars, which were secured by the Secretariat's effective financial management and cost-saving measures.

The Secretary General expressed sincere gratitude to the Member States that regularly make voluntary contributions to the Secretariat's budget. In 2023, these countries included China, Kazakhstan, RoK, Tajikistan, Türkiye and UAE. In 2024, CICA has received a contribution from Kuwait. The Secretary General noted that it would be highly appreciated if more Member States demonstrated such goodwill and expressed their support for CICA through voluntary contributions.

The Chairman also encouraged the Member States to actively provide voluntary contributions to the CICA Secretariat which would enable the Secretariat to support Member States' cooperation within CICA and all its activities.

China reconfirmed its readiness to continue making voluntary contributions to the CICA Secretariat to support its work. Bangladesh informed the SOC that it was considering making a voluntary contribution soon and encouraged other Member States to do the same in order for CICA to run more activities. Russia noted that the Secretariat could be supported not only by making financial contributions but also by seconding its diplomats to the Secretariat. Russia pledged to continue its professional representation in the Secretariat personnel.

The SOC decision: The SOC took note of the financial report for 2023 and expressed appreciation to the Secretary General for effective management of financial resources.

12. Any other business

12 (a) Announcement on convening the first meeting of the Project Review Committee of the CICA Fund.

The Chairman announced the first meeting of the Project Review Committee of the CICA Fund to be held in May 2024 and requested Member States to kindly nominate officials to the PRC as soon as possible - before 30 April 2024 - so that activities related to the identification and approval of the CICA projects could start without further delay. The Chairmanship thanked Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Pakistan for nominating officials to the Project Review Committee. The Chair also encouraged Member States to propose projects for the Fund and called for financial contributions from the Member States or from their national agencies to implement projects to achieve the CICA goals. The Chairman informed the SOC that Iraq had already made the first pledge to the Fund.

12(b) Update by the Secretary General on the status of ratification of the CICA Convention on the Privileges and Immunities.

The Chairmanship extended its appreciation to the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the People's Republic of China for signing and ratifying the Convention.

The Secretary General updated the SOC on the status of ratification of the CICA Convention on the Privileges and Immunities, noting that nine Member States – Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Russia and Türkiye – have ratified the Convention. He thanked these Member States and

reminded that the Convention requires 14 ratification instruments for its entry into force.

The Secretary General stressed that another nine Member States – Cambodia, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Pakistan, Palestine, RoK, Tajikistan and Thailand – had completed internal legal procedures and signed the Convention, but had not ratified it yet. He urged these Member States to do so as soon as possible.

12 (c) List of SOC members and focal points

The Secretary General reminded the SOC that the Secretariat kept track of CICA Member States' Senior Officials and focal points for facilitating work and prompt and effective communication between the Member States. The corresponding table was available in the restricted part of the CICA website in the SOC section. The Secretary General kindly called on all Member States to review these data from time to time and not to hesitate to contact the Secretariat to update it as needed.

12 (d) COP-29

Azerbaijan informed the SOC that it was honored to chair and host COP-29 this year, providing valuable platform for interaction, inviting CICA to utilize it as well. Azerbaijan suggested that the CICA Secretariat organize a side-event on the margins of COP-29.