



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

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

№SOC/712

*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 honor to convey herewith the final version of the Minutes of the Senior Officials Committee Meeting held on 19 April 2023 taking into account the comments and suggestions received from Member States.

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

Astana, 9 June 2023



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



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

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

№SOC/712

*Приложение:
упомянутое,
на 21 лл.*

Секретариат Совещания по взаимодействию и мерам доверия в Азии (СВМДА) свидетельствует свое уважение государствам-членам СВМДА и имеет честь препроводить окончательную версию Протокола заседания Комитета старших должностных лиц, состоявшегося 19 апреля 2023 года, с учетом комментариев и предложений, полученных от государств-членов.

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

город Астана, 9 июня 2023 г.



**ГОСУДАРСТВАМ-ЧЛЕНАМ
СОВЕЩАНИЯ ПО ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЮ И
МЕРАМ ДОВЕРИЯ В АЗИИ**

Қосымша:
аталған,
21 п.

Азиядағы өзара іс-қимыл және сенім шаралары кеңесінің (Азия Кеңесінің) Хатшылығы Азия Кеңесінің мүше мемлекеттеріне өзінің зор ілтипатын білдіреді және мүше мемлекеттердің түсініктемелері мен ұсыныстарын ескере отырып, 2023 жылғы 19 сәуірде өткен Аға лауазымды тұлғалар комитеті отырысы хаттамасының түпкілікті нұсқасын жолдауды өзіне мәртебе санайды.

Хатшылық осы мүмкіндікті пайдалана отырып, Азия Кеңесінің мүше мемлекеттеріне өзінің зор ілтипатын тағы да растайды.

Астана қаласы, 2023 жылғы 9 маусым

**АЗИЯДАҒЫ ӨЗАРА ІС-ҚИМЫЛ ЖӘНЕ
СЕНІМ ШАРАЛАРЫ КЕҢЕСІНІҢ
МҮШЕ МЕМЛЕКЕТТЕРІ**



Secretariat

**MINUTES OF THE SENIOR OFFICIALS COMMITTEE MEETING
19 April 2023 (online format)**

The Senior Officials Committee (SOC) meeting was held on Wednesday, 19 April 2023 in Astana in an online format. H.E. Mr Kanat Tumysh, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan chaired the meeting.

The initial draft agenda, draft revised and annotated agenda, adopted agenda (SOC/2023-I/Agenda/1 of 16 March 2023, SOC/2023-I/Agenda/1/Rev.1 of 7 April 2023, SOC/2023-I/Agenda/1/Rev.2 of 13 April 2023, SOC/2023-I/Agenda/1/Rev.3 of 14 April 2023, SOC/2023-I/Agenda/2 of 19 April 2023) and the decisions taken (SOC/2023-I/DEC/1, SOC/2023-I/DEC/2, of 19 April 2023) are available on the Secretariat's website.

1. Adoption of the Agenda

The initial draft agenda of this SOC meeting was circulated on 16 March 2023 (document SOC/2023-I/Agenda/1), and was revised thrice (documents SOC/2023-I/Agenda/1/Rev.1 of 7 April 2023, SOC/2023-I/Agenda/1/Rev.2 of 13 April 2023, SOC/2023-I/Agenda/1/Rev.3 of 14 April 2023) by adding new agenda items 2 and 6 and sub-item (a) under agenda item 10.

The Chairmanship withdrew the issue of Morocco's application for the status of CICA Observer from the agenda to hold additional consultations. Therefore, the agenda was adopted without item 2.

2. Regular review of implementation of CICA confidence building measures (CBMs) with focus on the new challenges and threats dimension

The Chairperson referred to paragraph 1.8 of the CICA Catalogue of Confidence Building Measures and the SOC decision of 15 June 2022 on conducting regular review at the SOC not less than once a year, with focus on specific dimensions, priority areas or CBMs. The modalities of the review were circulated prior to

the meeting as document SOC/2023-I/CHAIR/1 of 20 March 2023. No written inputs from the Member States were received prior to the meeting.

The Chair proposed to analyze the concept papers and events conducted in the “New challenges and threats” dimension in the period from 2020 to 2023, identify the most effective CBMs for wider implementation and develop recommendations for further update of the existing CBMs and/or introduction of new CBMs into the “New challenges and threats” dimension.

The Chair proposed that the review result in:

- Recommendations for updating existing CBMs and/or incorporating new CBMs and/or priority areas into the "New challenges and threats" dimension;
- Recommendations on ways to keep the concept papers in priority areas up to date with current realities;
- Recommendations on ways to further increase the quality and quantity of events conducted in the "New challenges and threats" dimension.

The Chair proposed some specific recommendations to be considered as the outcome of the review:

- The SOC could invite the Member States to be more actively engaged in the initiation of CICA CBM events on a voluntary basis and organize events in line with the General Guidelines adopted by the SOC on 23 June 2021;
- Concept papers in many priority areas of the CICA Catalogue of CBMs are outdated, and the SOC could note the need to keep these concept papers up to date with current realities and priorities of Member States;
- The SOC could recommend that coordinators more actively utilize the format of “Experts Meetings” under Chapter 7 of the CICA Rules of Procedure, with the assistance of the CICA Secretariat, for raising effectiveness and increasing practical impact of CICA CBM implementation activities in specific priority areas, for more expedient and transparent negotiation of draft concept papers, in-depth analysis and review of CBM implementation at expert level, updating current or developing new CBMs or recommending specific CBM events;
- The SOC could encourage the Member States to more actively apply for open positions of coordinators and co-coordinators for certain periods of time;
- The SOC could undertake to engage in further discussion of modalities of CBM implementation within the CICA transformation process.

The Chairperson referred to the SOC decision of 15 June 2022 requesting the Secretariat to make proposals on further improvement of modalities of CBM implementation. A brief interim report of the Secretary General on this matter

was circulated to the Member States prior to the meeting as document SOC/2023-I/SEC/1 of 20 March 2023, which is available at the Secretariat's website.

The Secretary General delivered brief introductory remarks on the Secretariat's assessment of the CBM's implementation in the "New challenges and threats" dimension in the period from 2020 to 2023, highlighting that 17 events were held during that period and 11 were planned for 2023, emphasizing that for the most part these events were aimed at raising the capacity of law enforcement agencies of the CICA Member States and were of cross-sectoral nature covering several priority areas at the same time. The Secretary General noted that this dimension had significant potential for organizing joint events together with other regional organizations. The Secretary General, citing the sensitive nature of issues involved in the implementation of CBMs under this dimension, called on the Member States to ensure proper and timely preparation of relevant concept papers, agendas and lists of speakers, instructors and participants.

The Secretary General further reported on the Secretariat's proposals to improve the modalities of CBM implementation to be one of the thematic elements of the Road Map for CICA Transformation. The proposals addressed the following issues: functions, procedure and duration of appointment of coordinators and co-coordinators, purpose and status of concept papers and action plans and the process of their elaboration, the Secretariat's role in support of the Member States in implementing CBMs. It was proposed that the Member States develop and approve at the ministerial level a separate framework document comprehensively covering all general modalities and mechanisms of CBM implementation that would integrate, update and supersede Chapter 3 of the Catalogue of CBMs, without reopening the Catalogue.

The floor was open for general discussions. No comments were made.

The review was conducted taking each of the five priority areas of the dimension "New challenges and threats" one by one.

1) **"New challenges and threats (general)".** Coordinator – **Türkiye** and co-coordinator - **Afghanistan**.

The Chair noted that the draft concept paper and action plan were in progress. Under this area, 1 event was held in 2020, 7 – in 2021, 2 – in 2022. The floor was open for comments.

Türkiye thanked all Member States for supporting its activities in this priority area, noting that some of the events planned for 2023 had to be postponed due

to the devastating earthquake. Türkiye agreed that the Member States should better utilize the mechanism of Experts Meetings to improve modalities of CBM implementation, as well to elaborate specific criteria for preparing concept papers and other relevant documents, including the option of adopting a template for such documents. Türkiye further supported the ideas voiced in the report of the Secretary General.

Azerbaijan noted that its law enforcement agencies continuously participate in NCT events, observed the significant increase in the number of such events, especially those organized by Türkiye. Emphasized that these activities allow sharing vital experience and best practices.

2) **“Combating terrorism”**. Coordinator – India.

The Chair informed the meeting that Iraq had expressed intention to be a co-coordinator in this priority area proposing to consider the matter under item 3 of the agenda.

The concept paper of the priority area of combating terrorism is in progress. Under this area, one event was held in February 2023, and one is scheduled in May 2023. The floor was open for comments.

India informed the meeting that the concept paper was under review by the line agencies and would be shared with all Member States as soon as possible. India thanked Member States for the active participation in the Workshop on Counter Radicalization (February 2023) that gathered more than 40 participants from 15 Member States. India reminded that another Workshop on Misuse of Internet was planned for 25-26 May and invited all Member States to actively attend and share views. India thanked Iraq for the interest expressed by the latter to become co-coordinator.

Israel thanked India for organizing the Workshop on Counter Radicalization as it was useful. Israel noted that Iraq’s proposal to become the co-coordinator of combating terrorism needed more time for consideration.

Iraq reconfirmed its nomination for the role of co-coordinator for combating terrorism citing its comprehensive experience gained by Iraqi line agencies in countering threats from various terrorist groups including Al-Qaeda, ISIS in the last 20 years.

3) **“Security of and in the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs)”**. Coordinator – **Russia** and co-coordinator - **China**.

The concept paper of the priority area of security of and in the use of ICTs was approved by the SOC decision on 11 October 2022. One event under this priority area was organized in 2021, and one event in 2022. The Chair highlighted that by the initiative of the coordinator and co-coordinator, the CICA Summit on 13 October 2022 adopted the CICA Leaders' Statement on Cooperation in the Field of Security of and in the Use of ICTs as part of the action plan in this priority area.

The Chair noted that Russia and China had offered their services as coordinator and co-coordinator only for two years – 2022-2023, asked whether coordinator and co-coordinator were interested in extending their terms. The floor was open for comments.

Russia emphasized the significance of launching international dialogue on information security within CICA, noting that with the support of all Member States important political and practical outcomes were achieved. Russia noted that the Leader's Statement on Cooperation in the Field of Security of and in the Use of ICTs was the first thematic statement by CICA leaders in recent history of the Conference. Russia recalled the Seminar on Sustainable Development of the Internet (August 2022) which gathered a lot of participants from the Member States and raised topical issues of strengthening international cooperation in this field, digital sovereignty and others. Russia announced a workshop on digital forensics to be tentatively held in August-September 2023 with the aim of exchanging national experience and best practices, improving interaction between national relevant authorities. The concept paper and programme of the event were under preparation.

China noted that it had been actively engaging in the activities in this priority area, contributing to elaboration and discussion of relevant documents. China referred to shared interests in promoting international cooperation in the sphere of information security and stressed CICA's role as an important platform for dialogue on regional security. China expressed its readiness to enhance coordination with Russia and strive for new practical outcomes.

4) **“Combating illicit drugs”**. Coordinator – **Iran** and co-coordinator – **Afghanistan**.

The Chair noted that the concept paper had been approved in 2008 and needed to be updated. One event under this priority area was held in 2021, two – in 2022. The floor was open for comments.

Iran notified the SOC that the updated concept paper was under review by its line agencies and would be submitted to the Secretariat as soon as possible.

Iran intended to organize the third online training course on drug addiction and drug use reduction in the second half of 2023.

5) **“Epidemiological safety, public health and pharmaceuticals”**.
Coordinator – **Kazakhstan** and co-coordinators – **China** and **Jordan**.

Kazakhstan informed the SOC that the concept paper for this priority area was in progress. One event under this priority area was organized in 2021, one – in 2022. Kazakhstan announced a seminar on epidemiological safety, public health and pharmaceuticals to be held later in 2023 and encouraged the Member States to actively interact within this priority area and hold relevant events. Kazakhstan also recalled that in 2021 it initiated the transfer of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The floor was open for comments.

China noted that it had been actively engaging in this priority area, recalling that in 2020 China had shared with other Member States a special plan of COVID-19 treatment and diagnostics and technical guidelines for civil aviation, in 2021 China participated in launching COVID-19 response centre in Israel. China informed that it was studying the draft concept paper prepared by Kazakhstan and that its specialists were ready to actively participate in the upcoming events, including offline.

The SOC decision: The SOC held regular review of implementation of CICA confidence building measures (CBMs) with focus on the new challenges and threats dimension and concluded that further improvement of modalities of CBM implementation will be discussed within the CICA transformation process.

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

The current status of concept papers and action plans on implementation of CBMs under the priority areas of the CICA dimensions was circulated by the Secretariat in document SOC/2023-I/INF/1 of 6 April 2023.

The Secretary General updated the SOC on the current status of concept papers, coordinators and co-coordinators in priority areas of CICA dimensions. In particular, 7 concept papers were up-to-date, 4 draft concept papers were in the pipeline, 5 concept papers were being prepared by coordinators and co-coordinators, concept paper for combating illicit drugs (adopted in 2008) needed to be updated and there was no concept paper for trade and investment. It was proposed that Kyrgyzstan and Türkiye as current co-coordinators for trade and investment consider preparing relevant paper. It was noted that the

concept paper for security of and in the use of ICTs was adopted for 2022-2023 and, therefore, a concept paper for the next period was needed.

(a) New coordinators or co-coordinators, if any

The Chair called on the Member States to apply for the open positions of coordinator in priority area trade and investment and co-coordinators in priority areas agriculture and finance.

The Chair proposed the SOC to consider a request from Iraq to assume the role of co-coordinator in priority area combating terrorism, strongly welcoming the intention of Iraq, acknowledging the experience of Iraq in the fight against terrorism, including against Al Qaeda and ISIS terrorist groups, and that Iraq as co-coordinator would share experiences and best practices and help to strengthen our cooperation in this priority area. The floor was open for comments.

Israel reiterated that it needed more time to consider the issue.

The Chair asked whether Russia and China considered extending their terms as coordinator and co-coordinator for the priority area “Security of and in the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs)” after 2023.

Russia noted that it needed more time to consider extension of its term.

China informed that it was ready to coordinate with Russia on the issue.

(b) Updating concept papers, if any

The Chair proposed the SOC to consider and approve the draft Concept Paper on Sustainable Development. This draft concept paper was prepared in July 2022 by Thailand in its capacity as coordinator in this priority area and undergone several rounds of written negotiations. As no further comments had been received from Member States, the draft concept paper was submitted for approval by the SOC on 3 April 2023. The floor was open for comments.

Russia thanked Thailand for preparing the detailed concept paper and reflecting all the views from Member States, noting that it would serve as a good base for further interaction in this sphere.

Thailand thanked Member States for support and reminded that it was going to organize an online training course on BCG immunization for tourism industry later this year to discuss both sustainable development and tourism.

No further comments or objections were raised.

The SOC decision: The SOC approved the Concept Paper on Sustainable Development.

Russia requested the floor to thank the Republic of Korea for preparing an updated concept paper on energy security, noting that the document was substantive and raised many important issues and interesting ideas for CICA Member States. Russia requested to extend the deadline for the concept paper's consideration as the current deadline of 5 May 2023 was insufficient.

The Chair supported Russia's request and set the new deadline to be 30 May 2023 for this concept paper, as well as for an updated Concept paper on information technology.

4. Introduction and discussion of the draft Road Map for CICA Transformation

The Chairperson referred to the Astana Statement on CICA Transformation adopted by the Sixth CICA Summit in October 2022, launching the structured, inclusive and transparent negotiations process of gradual, incremental and consensus-based transformation of CICA into a full-fledged regional international organization. The Chairmanship was requested to make proposals with the assistance of the Secretary General and in close consultation with the Member States, on a road map of necessary measures in the transformation process (RMT) for consideration by the Member States in 2023.

The draft RMT prepared by the Chairmanship with the assistance of the Secretariat was circulated to all Member States on 7 April 2023 in document SOC/2023-I/CHAIR/2. Additional consultations with Member States on the draft RMT were held by Secretary General.

The Chair introduced and presented the draft RMT (presentation is available on Secretariat's website) and called on all delegations to engage in substantive and interactive discussion of all its elements. The floor was open for comments.

Thailand noted that the budget reform was the most important part of the RMT and therefore more information was needed on the scale of assessment of possible mandatory financial contributions. Thailand agreed that the UN funding system was the best model available with its three-step approach to the scale assessment. Thailand also requested to clarify how mandatory contributions would correlate with the CICA Fund.

The Secretary General informed the meeting that discussions on budgetary reform were a mid-term task. The Secretary General proposed that the UN budget model should be thoroughly analyzed and modified according to CICA requirements and specifics. As for the CICA Fund, the Secretary General underlined that it was an autonomous mechanism within CICA that would be funded separately and solely on a voluntary basis.

Azerbaijan voiced its concern that it would be difficult to organize the SOC meeting in August to finalize the draft RMT before the ministerial meeting in September. Azerbaijan supported all Chair's priorities including the RMT. It further stressed the need to adhere to the principles of consensus, inclusivity and transparency. Azerbaijan expressed its general support to all 7 elements of the RMT noting that the process should be planned and gradual. Azerbaijan suggested to hold more rounds of consultations on the issue.

Pakistan called the draft RMT a comprehensive document to implement the decisions of the Sixth CICA Summit. Pakistan noted that the vision was optimistic and proposals contained in the RMT were far-reaching, therefore, the document required more time for careful examination and consultations in order to arrive at consensus. Pakistan generally supported the creation of the Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) that would eventually substitute the SWG. As for the budgetary reform, Pakistan requested more clarity on the scale of assessment and what criteria would be used in the assessment. Pakistan stressed that the rule of consensus was of paramount importance, that it was not clear how the consensus would be strengthened with the introduction of interpretative statement.

Iran characterized the RMT as a sensitive document that should be thoroughly discussed at SWGs and Experts Meetings. Iran suggested that this particular issue should be discussed at offline meetings. Iran emphasized that the consensus rule was vital for all CICA mechanisms.

Israel noted that the CICA transformation was a complex issue. Israel agreed that mandatory funding of CICA is needed, therefore it would be useful to receive more details on the scale of assessment, on the expected budget calculations for the period of at least 5 years, including necessary manpower of the Secretariat. Israel stressed that the consensus was not to be diluted and that it would be difficult to strengthen it with any interpretations. Moreover, it would be hard to comprehend what CICA says and where it goes with different interpretations. Israel expressed doubt whether all Member States could sustain the Council of Permanent Representatives in Astana, suggesting to convene offline SWGs more regularly, including hosted by other Member States.

Türkiye supported a flexible approach towards the RMT, proposed to decide on the issues raised separately. It underlined that an Experts Meeting was needed before the next SOC meeting.

China said that it approached the development of CICA as a long-term process, supporting its evolution into an international organization. China said that it was studying the RMT very carefully and was ready for an in-depth discussion. China noted that it supported the optimization of the rule of consensus in principle, however it would be necessary to limit the use of interpretation on the most sensitive issues. China further proposed to consider Chinese as another working language of CICA. China noted that it was making significant financial contributions to the CICA budget and the budgetary reform needed thorough discussion.

Russia suggested to decide on the status of the RMT, noting the current version represented a mix of the road map itself and certain substantial political decisions that could be adopted later in the course of transformation. Russia suggested that these two parts could be separated and the foreign ministers would endorse only the road map, a compact and concise document, during their informal meeting in September 2023. Russia suggested that the RMT should be interpreted as a plan of action including necessary tasks and mechanisms to discuss them. Russia supported in principle seven elements included in the current version of the RMT and proposed to add another one – elaboration of a charter of the new organization that would define new and/or reconfirm the existing principles of the new organization. Russia noted that it was also necessary to discuss the whole complex of the rules of procedure, define the functional and administrative features of the future organization, functions of the Secretariat and the Secretary General. As far as external relations go, Russia considered to reevaluate the role of observers and think about the dialogue partner mechanism, mentioning IORA as an example where dialogue partners bear financial responsibility, though less than the Member States. Concerning the budgetary reform, Russia acknowledged that it was interconnected with all other aspects of transformation, thus a separate expert meeting on budget and financing was needed. Russia suggested to discuss all the thematic areas of transformation separately.

Jordan expressed its support to the Chair's vision of the transformation process which should be gradual and based on consensus. Jordan voiced its concern that the suggested timeframe was rather limited, especially regarding budgetary issues. Jordan proposed to discuss each thematic direction on expert level.

Palestine noted that it was looking forward for the CICA transformation. Palestine suggested to study the good examples of the SCO and ASEAN for rules

of procedure and other issues, including the criteria for the appointment of the Secretary General and his role. Palestine positively reacted to the idea of creating a CPR. Palestine emphasized that the implementation of confidence building measures should be continued strictly in line with international law. Palestine noted that the idea of interpretative statement was rather vague. It further suggested to utilize offline SWG meetings for future discussions of the RMT.

Cambodia called the RMT a complex sensitive document, expressing similar concerns with all previous delegations. Cambodia noted that the consensus rule should be sustained, while the idea of CPR needed further thorough discussion. Cambodia supported transformation in principle.

The Secretary General emphasized that the RMT was a menu that set directions for further discussion and work. The Secretary General noted that all issues mentioned in the RMT would be considered separately. The Secretary General mentioned that by endorsing the RMT the Member States would only agree on areas and directions of transformation. As for interpretative statement, the Secretary General noted that it was a practice used in other regional organizations, while confirming that consensus remained the golden rule of CICA. The Secretary General noted that the CPR mechanism was needed for maintaining constant dialogue among Member States. The Secretary General acknowledged that external relations should be carefully analyzed considering current trends, while preserving the CICA identity at the same time. The Secretary General informed the meeting that the Secretariat would take note of all the discussions and prepare food-for-thought papers on each cluster and element of the RMT.

The Chair thanked all delegations for active deliberations, positive feedback and constructive proposals. The Chair proposed that the SOC welcomed the initial draft of the RMT as a good basis for further work and would engage in more detailed discussion of all its elements, including at the working and expert level, with a view to finalizing the RMT at the next meeting of the SOC and its endorsement by the Ministerial Council.

The SOC decision: The SOC discussed the draft Road Map for CICA Transformation (RMT) submitted by the Chairmanship in document SOC/2023-1/CHAIR/2 of 7 April 2023 pursuant to paragraph 6 of the Astana Statement on CICA Transformation. The SOC generally welcomed the draft RMT as a basis for further work and will engage in a more detailed discussion of all its elements, including at the working and expert level.

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

The Chair invited the attention of the SOC to the draft annual action plan of the CICA Think Tank Forum for 2023. He informed about the adoption of the Regulations of the CICA Think Tank Forum by the SOC on 7 October 2021. He noted that “the CICA Think Tank Forum (TTF) as an advisory body offers information and analytical support for CICA activities and facilitates interaction among think tanks and research institutions of the CICA Member States”. He mentioned that according to paragraph 4.6 of the Regulations, activities of the Think Tank Forum are carried out on the basis of an annual action plan. The action plan was developed by the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS), the current TTF Chair, and need to be agreed upon by the TTF Members and approved by the SOC. The Action Plan should be approved annually and accordingly interaction and cooperation between research institutes and think tanks of Member States are carried out. He reported that the draft annual action plan, which was circulated by the Secretariat on 1 March 2023 received no objections from the Member States.

Russia expressed its support for the draft annual action plan and stressed that the discussion mechanism should be practically oriented, it must not be only theoretical. The forum should produce recommendations in the sphere of cooperation for the track-one activities.

The SOC approved the Annual Action Plan of the CICA Think Tank Forum for 2023, as contained in document SOC/2023-I/DRAFT/1 dated 7 April 2023. The Chair expressed gratitude to the People’s Republic of China and the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies for able leadership in the Think Tank Forum and passed the floor to the Secretary General for comments.

The Secretary General updated the SOC about his visit to the People's Republic of China and his meeting with Mr Chen Dongxiao, President of the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS) on 13 April 2023. Mr Chen Dongxiao requested to share with the senior officials the plan for the 11th meeting of the CICA Think Tank Forum planned to be held in the Qinghai Province on 27-29 August 2023. The title of the TTF meeting would be "Building a Civilized, Inclusive and Open Asia: The Role and Mission of CICA". There would be three working sessions, namely, Mutual Learning among Civilizations and the Path to Coexistence among Asian Countries; Security Governance and Cooperation Agenda for Asian Countries; and CICA Towards International Organizations: Mechanism Construction and Concept Innovation. The event would be conducted in person with simultaneous interpretation in Chinese-English and Chinese-Russian. The Zoom platform would also be made available for online participation. Representatives from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and

relevant departments, authorities of the Qinghai Province, Chinese scholars, the CICA Secretary General, the SCO Secretary General, ambassadors and representatives of CICA Member States based in China would attend the meeting in person. Representatives of the TTF from Member States would participate online. It is expected to have 30-40 representatives for participation in-person and 20-30 representatives for online participation. Ambassador Sarybay further informed that the SIIS would soon notify about the 11th Think Tank Forum meeting through the Secretariat for the active participation of the Member States.

China highlighted the importance of the CICA Think Tank Forum and its association since the first meeting of the TTF and expected to see overwhelming participation from Member States at this year's event.

The SOC Decision: The SOC adopted the decision on the annual action plan of the CICA Think Tank Forum for 2023 as submitted in document SOC/2023-I/DRAFT/1 of 7 April 2023.

6. Presentation by the Secretary General of the annual financial report for 2022

Regarding the annual financial report 2022, the Chair noted that the total expenditure of the Secretariat amounted to 43% of the approved budget, despite implementation of high-valued projects related 30th Anniversary of CICA and additional expenditure related to the Sixth CICA Summit. The Secretariat was able to cover all expenses and save some funds for the current financial year due to effective financial management. He passed on the floor to the Secretary General to present his remarks on the annual financial report.

The Secretary General reported that the annual financial report for 2022 was issued by the Secretariat on 14 March 2023. In accordance with Article 8 of the Financial Regulations of the CICA Secretariat, the annual financial report along with an explanatory note, statement of income and statement of expenditure were submitted to the SOC before 31 March 2023. The approved budget for the Secretariat for the financial year 2022 was USD 4 460 000. The total amount of voluntary contributions to the Secretariat was USD 2,048,450. After taking into account exchange rate differences, the total expenditure of the Secretariat amounted to USD 1,894,200 which was around 43.0% of the approved budget. The total amount saved from the voluntary contributions of Member States was USD 154,250. The year 2022 was packed with many significant activities with large amounts of expenditure related to CICA's 30th anniversary and the Sixth CICA Summit. Savings in the budget were generated owing to the Secretariat's effective financial management and cost-saving measures. He expressed gratitude to those Member States which provided voluntary contributions to

the Secretariat budget regularly. He informed that China, Israel, Kazakhstan, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Tajikistan, Türkiye, and Viet Nam made voluntary contributions in 2022. This year the Secretariat received contributions from Kazakhstan and the United Arab Emirates and a pledge from China. The Secretary General earnestly requested the Member States to demonstrate goodwill and kind support to the CICA Secretariat in the form of voluntary contributions, including those Member States who had never contributed to the CICA budget. He also kindly informed about the signing of a trilateral Memorandum with the Astana City Administration and the Constructing Company, for the construction of the CICA Headquarters building. He called on the Member States for generous contributions for the beautification of premises in the styles of Asian cultures, to reflect the richness and diversity of the CICA region.

China remarked positively on the financial management of the Secretariat and informed that the contribution made by China was effectively used and mentioned in detail in the financial statement.

The SOC decision: The SOC took note of the Financial Report of the CICA Secretariat for 2022 as circulated via Secretariat Note BDG/269 of 14 March 2023 and expressed appreciation to the Secretary General for its timely submission.

7. Auditor's report on the external audit of the financial activities of the CICA Secretariat for the period 1 October 2020 - 31 December 2022

The Chairperson informed that according to the decision of the SOC meeting held on 14 December, the Secretariat carried out an external audit of the financial activities of the CICA Secretariat for the period from 1 September 2020 to 31 December 2022 by an authorized independent company Asia Astana Audit. The external audit was conducted at the beginning of 2023, and its report was submitted to the Member States on 14 March 2023. He noted that the Chair was satisfied with the audit report and underlined the effective financial management and optimal use of funds to achieve the goals of the Secretariat. There were no violations, irregularities or other discrepancies in the financial and economic activities of the CICA Secretariat.

The Chair appreciated the Secretary General for the effective and efficient administrative, operational and financial management of the CICA Secretariat and passed on the floor to Ambassador Sarybay, for brief remarks on the audit report.

The Secretary General invited the attention of the senior officials to the earlier SOC meeting on 14 December 2022, which directed the Secretariat to carry out

an external audit of the financial activities of the CICA Secretariat covering the period from 1 October 2020 to 31 December 2022. He informed that the external audit report was circulated by the Secretariat on 14 March 2023 according to Article 8 of the Financial Rules of the CICA Secretariat. He noted that auditors were provided with all necessary documents and financial rules and regulations for the smooth conduct of the audit. The audit covered all financial activities, financial statements, assets and liabilities, bank transactions, inventory, settlements with accountable persons and expenses related to employee compensation. He emphasized the external auditor's report and said that there were no violations or irregularities in the financial and economic activities of the Secretariat. He also thanked the Member States for having confidence in the Secretariat officials for their effective financial management and cost-saving measures.

The SOC decision: the SOC took note of the report of the external auditor on the financial and economic activities of the CICA Secretariat for the period from 1 October 2020 to 31 December 2022 as circulated via Secretariat Note BDG/270 of 14 March 2023 and commended the Secretariat for the effective financial management and optimal use of funds to achieve CICA goals and objectives.

8. Activities to raise CICA visibility: CICA Alley

Regarding activities to raise CICA visibility, the Chair mentioned that the Chairmanship and the Secretariat had been continuously initiating and implementing projects aimed at increasing CICA's visibility. He recalled the CICA Bicycle Tour organized by the Secretariat in 2022, which was highly appreciated by the diplomatic corps and international organizations. He informed about the upcoming CICA Bicycle Tour planned to be held on 3 June 2023 in the Burabay National Park. Similarly, the CICA Football Tournament in 2022 and the CICA Ski Tour in 2023 were successful endeavours in terms of informal dialogue among Member States and raising the visibility of CICA. On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of Yuri Gagarin's flight into space, the CICA flag was hoisted into the Earth's orbit by the crew of the Yuri Gagarin spacecraft from the Baikonur Cosmodrome, on 9 April 2021, with the support of the Russian Federation. In 2022, the Secretariat carried out a broad range of CICA anniversary projects, such as the CICA Chronicle, Tales of Asia, Ecotourism Guidebook of the CICA Region, CICA Anniversary Coin and CICA Postal Stamp etc.

The Chairperson happily remembered the beginning of the CICA Alley at President Park, Astana, on 1 June 2021. It was initiated by the CICA Secretariat and the Sustainable Development Earth Foundation, with the participation of heads of diplomatic missions of the CICA Member States and Observer States. Organizers and guests planted 30 red rowan seedlings in the Presidential Park,

symbolizing peace, fertility and prosperity. In 2022, the CICA Alley was expanded with new varieties of sivers apple and sakura trees. He informed that the CICA Secretariat together with the Sustainable Development Earth Foundation would hold an event to beautify the CICA Alley in the Astana Presidential Park in May 2023. He invited heads of diplomatic missions to take part in the event. He further stated that planting seedlings would contribute to raising public awareness of the importance of trees and plants in the global ecosystem. It would protect the environment from global warming and the negative impact of climate change. Essentially, the CICA Alley project is a step toward a greener planet. He mentioned that President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev set forth an initiative in 2020, to plant 2 billion trees in forests and 15 million trees in populated centres of the country within 5 years. The President of Mongolia also initiated a national movement “Billion Trees” to plant, grow and protect forests. At the Sixth CICA Summit, President of Uzbekistan H.E. Shavkat Mirziyoyev proposed to launch regular expert consultations under the conceptual programme “Green Asia” for the intensive greening of Kazakhstan and to support vulnerable ecosystems. The Chair requested the Member States to develop a CICA Alley in the respective capitals of the CICA Member States. He said that the concept paper of the proposal was circulated to the Member States via document SOC/2023-I/CHAIR/3 dated 12 April 2023. He remarked that by this initiative, the CICA Member States would not only popularize their capitals and CICA among all supporters of a green and healthy planet but also make a perceptible contribution in uniting the peoples of Asia and other continents in their efforts to protect the global environment. He requested all Member States to support the proposal and take necessary measures to plant the CICA Alley in their capitals during 2023-2024.

Palestine stated that the CICA Alley was a great initiative, however, Palestinians could not have access to Jerusalem, because of Israeli occupation. Palestine further said that Jerusalem was illegally annexed and occupied in 1967, in violation of international law and the UN resolution on the status of Jerusalem. Palestine urged the Chair to refrain from conducting any events in Jerusalem within the CICA framework.

Russia proposed that the CICA Alley project should not be binding, it is to be carried out on the basis of voluntary participation. Referring to the purpose of organizing the CICA Alley activity as an initiative for increasing visibility, Russia apprehended the status of the CICA Alley after the transformation of CICA into a new organization.

The SOC decision: the SOC generally welcomed the initiative of the Chairmanship of Kazakhstan to plant a CICA Alley in the capitals of the Member States on a voluntary basis, as proposed in Chair’s document SOC/2023-I/CHAIR/3 of 12 April 2023.

9. Any other business

9(a). Initiative by the Russian Federation on a statement of the CICA Ministerial Council on promoting volunteerism for sustainable development.

The Chair brought the attention of the SOC to agenda item No. 9 (a) and invited Russia to introduce its initiative on promoting volunteerism for sustainable development.

Russia referred to the statement of President of Russian Federation H.E. Vladimir Putin at the Sixth CICA Summit on volunteerism and stressed the necessity to maintain dynamic momentum through the development of volunteerism, the volunteer movement and the use of social resources to solve the sustainable development problems by means of mutual assistance. Russia informed the SOC about the draft statement on promoting volunteerism for sustainable development, which had been submitted to the Chairmanship. The statement contains new practical measures of interactions and activities among volunteer organizations. Russia said that if there were no in principle objections to this statement all Member States could co-sponsor and adopt it at the Informal Ministerial Meeting on the sidelines of the 78th session of UNGA in New York. Russia further mentioned that it is necessary to actively develop interactions among existing volunteer associations, connect to the socially available resources of respective countries and share best practices with each other in order to reinforce the ministerial decision. This would address sustainable development issues and strengthen connectivity between countries. Russia invited the Member States to become cosponsors of the draft statement.

The Chair supported Russia for its initiative on the adoption of documents on information security last year and welcomed the proposed statement on promoting volunteerism.

The SOC welcomed Russia's proposal on the adoption of a statement of the CICA Ministerial Council on promoting volunteerism for sustainable development.

The Secretary General reported that this topic was discussed during his visit to Moscow. He remarked that volunteerism would be deliberated at the upcoming Youth Council in Samarkand. He said that the Chairmanship also approached the Secretariat to organize a CICA panel session on volunteerism during the Astana International Forum in June 2023. This topic would be discussed on two appropriate platforms. He indicated that President Putin mentioned volunteerism for sustainable development and President Tokayev also mentioned organizing the rally of volunteer organizations in 2024. There

would be a chain of events dedicated to volunteerism and sustainable development. A draft in this regard would be circulated after Chair's instruction.

The Chair hoped that a draft statement of the CICA Ministerial Council on promoting volunteerism for sustainable development would be welcomed by the SOC.

The SOC decision: the SOC welcomed the proposal by the Russian Federation to elaborate and adopt a statement of the CICA Ministerial Council on promoting volunteerism for sustainable development.

9(b). Update by the Secretary General on further activities to operationalize the CICA Fund

The Chair noted the adoption of the regulations of the CICA Fund by the Sixth CICA Summit and the establishment of a special mechanism for identification and implementation of CICA projects through mobilization of voluntary funding. Fund's objective is to facilitate the realization of CICA goals by financing project activities within the framework of CICA. He further explained broad areas of utilization of the CICA Fund, namely, (i) programmes and projects for realizing development goals of the Member States, (ii) projects carried out as part of practical implementation of CICA CBMs, (iii) research and development of scientific, analytical materials and its publications, (iv) humanitarian assistance to the Member States and (v) other projects approved by the Member States. He thanked the Secretariat for the Note by the Secretary General on the operationalization of the CICA Fund submitted in document SOC/2023-I/SEC/1 of 9 March 2023 and passed the floor to Ambassador Sarybay for further update.

The Secretary General drew the attention of the SOC to the Note by the Secretary General on the operationalization of the CICA Fund issued as document SOC/2023-I/SEC/1 on 9 March 2023. Referring to the Regulations of the CICA Fund, he underlined that "the CICA Fund is the first-ever framework and modalities for CICA project activities adopted at the Sixth CICA Summit". It is a good foundation for developing CICA's operational capacities and thereby intensifying CICA's practical impact by providing tangible benefits to the Member States. He urged the Member States to submit project proposals, prepare for the first meeting of the Project Review Committee (PRC), and initiate fundraising activities as a practical step towards the operationalization of the CICA Fund. He said that in accordance with the criteria established in the Regulations of the Fund, the Secretariat had shared a possible project proposal template and a possible reporting template to assist the Member States in the preparation and submission of proposals for approval by the PRC.

He referred to the need for developing uniform project templates as suggested by the Member States in last year's meeting. The Secretariat shared the templates which may further be improved based on the requirement of the actual project. He invited all Member States to nominate their authorized representatives with the relevant expertise to act as member(s) of the PRC. He informed that the Secretariat had, so far, received nominations from two Member States– Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan. The first PRC meeting would be convened as soon as the Secretariat receives project proposals from Member States. He requested the Member States to spread awareness about the CICA Fund and initiate fundraising activities with relevant national institutions providing international funding. A presentation was also shared with the Member States to facilitate awareness-raising efforts. It is also available on the CICA website. He welcomed information from the Member States about funding requirements and project eligibility requirements by the potential donors. He invited the Member States to actively engage in seeking projects for funds and seeking funds for projects, as the CICA Fund is a new mechanism.

The Chair encouraged the Member States to actively engage in the activities within the Fund by submitting project proposals, facilitating fundraising activities and nominating their representatives to the Project Review Committee. He remarked that productive cooperation of the Member States within the CICA Fund would contribute to the achievement of CICA goals and thanked the SOC for taking note of the Secretary General's remarks on the CICA Fund.

Russia raised concerns about illegitimate unilateral sanctions and the use of particular currencies as political instruments and said that this would affect making contributions to the CICA Fund, as it had already been the case with other multilateral funds with Russia's participation. Russia proposed to consider using currencies other than US dollar, which bears significant risks, to finance project activities.

The Chair noted that the issue raised by Russia needed further consultations with all Member States.

The SOC decision: the SOC took note of the proposals of the Secretary General on operationalization of the CICA Fund submitted in document SOC/2023-I/SEC/1 of 9 March 2023.

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

The Chairperson noted that the Convention is a fundamental document that facilitates the Secretariat and its personnel in the performance of CICA activities by granting immunities and privileges. It was approved and signed by Heads of State or Heads of Government at the Istanbul CICA Summit meeting in 2010. Subsequently, declarations of the Fourth CICA Summit, Fifth CICA Summit, Fourth CICA Ministerial Council and Fifth CICA Ministerial Council also called on the Member States to sign and ratify the Convention. The Chair invited Member States, which have not yet signed and ratified it, to expedite the process and passed the floor to the Secretary General for comments.

The Secretary General reported that the Secretariat encouraged the Member States to undertake necessary actions for the entry into force of the Convention. During 2022-2023, the Secretariat persistently circulated official letters requesting the signing and ratification of the Convention. Immunities and privileges granted by the Convention would facilitate and ensure smooth activities of the Secretariat, its personnel, and representatives of the Member States, who participate in CICA meetings. He thanked Azerbaijan, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Russia and Türkiye, for having already ratified the Convention and informed that 14 ratification instruments were needed for the Convention to enter into force. The Chairmanship and the Secretary General continuously raised and discussed this matter with their interlocutors during their visits to the capitals of the Member States. He informed the senior officials about the ratification process already initiated by Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Iran, Israel, Palestine, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. He emphasized that early ratification of the Convention would be particularly important in the context of the transformation of CICA into a full-fledged international organization and expressed a great deal of hope in receiving ratification instruments from Member States in the near future.

Russia supported the early ratification of the Convention and said that it was an important legal document that facilitates the smooth functioning of the Secretariat and its activities. The ratification should also be considered in the context of the transformation process. It is necessary to strengthen legal foundation of the new organization.

The Chairperson requested Member States to update the progress with respect to the signing and ratification of the Convention. He declared SOC's reiteration of the call by the Fourth and Fifth CICA Summits and Ministerial Meetings for signing and ratification of the CICA Convention on the Privileges and Immunities. The SOC also took note of the update by the Secretary General on the status of ratification.

The SOC decision: the SOC reiterated the call by the Fourth and Fifth CICA Summits and Ministerial Meetings for signing and ratification of the CICA Convention on the Privileges and Immunities and took note of the update by the Secretary General on the status of its ratification.

The floor was open for additional issues under agenda item 9 “Any other business”.

Russia expressed agreement with the idea raised by Türkiye regarding the preparation of concept papers. Russia highlighted the importance of having a common understanding of the concept document to facilitate work both at the preparation stage and the implementation stage. A template for the concept paper would be an important step for all.

Russia also suggested the Secretariat to prepare an updated list of senior officials and contact persons to facilitate direct communication between the Member States.

The Secretary General welcomed Russia’s proposal and assured the SOC to make available an updated list of senior officials and contact persons in the restricted part of the CICA website and it would be updated regularly. He also requested the Member States to update the new name and designation of officials, if any further changes happen in their organization.

The decisions of the SOC were adopted, contained in the document SOC/2023-1/DEC/1 of 19 April 2023 and available at the Secretariat’s website.

The meeting was closed.