

Forging closer partnerships for sustainable development

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The heads of state or government of Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey proclaimed their decision to establish the D-8 organization in Istanbul on June 15, 1997.

The gradual but steady progress in the organizational development of the new grouping was reflected in the formal establishment of the D-8 Secretariat almost a decade after the organization came into existence.

Following the establishment of the D-8 Secretariat by the Bali Summit (2006) and the adoption of the Statutory Documents (Kuala Lumpur Summit, 2008) and the generous offer of the government of Turkey to host the premises for the Secretariat in Istanbul, the headquarters agreement was signed between the government of the Republic of Turkey and the Secretariat of the D-8 on Feb. 20, 2009 in Ankara. The agreement was fully implemented at the beginning of 2011.

The agreement conferred upon the Secretariat legal international status, including diplomatic status and relevant immunities for its directing staff. In addition, headquartered in Istanbul, the Secretariat serves as the central coordinating mechanism for all D-8 activities. It serves to coordinate and hold the meetings of the principal organs of the organization at the three levels of high-level experts (Commission), Council of Ministers and the Summit, as well as technical meetings in various sectors.

At the organizational level, I think it is extremely important that the D-8 has finally adopted a charter — after a four-year long process of its formulation — as the overarching legal instrument defining and regulating all activities through the eighth D-8 Summit in November 2012 in Islamabad.

Another area of the work of the organization concerns the development of the legal instruments needed to regulate activities and cooperation in areas and fields considered critical. The creation and entry into force of the Visa Agreement, Customs Agreement and Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) has served to facilitate, regulate and promote actual cooperation among the member countries.

Among these legal instruments, the Trade Agreement, which came into force almost a year ago, should be taken as an example. Its full implementation will epitomize the real success of the group, and increase the intra-D-8 trade volume from the current 2011 level of 7.5 percent of the total trade with the world, to 15-20 percent by 2018 — which is among the targets stipulated in the road map.

The successfully-held D-8 Summit in Islamabad last November is also another major milestone in the organizational growth of the D-8, not only because of the adoption of the charter, but also because of the other two important documents, namely the Islamabad Declaration and the D-8 Global Vision (2012-2030).

While the declaration stressed the importance of effectively harnessing sources of energy for economic growth and development and called for special emphasis on investment in the sector through a public-private partnership, the Global Vision was adopted to promote fruitful collaboration and close cooperation between and among the member states in the widest possible fields.

This new aligned vision underlined the commitment of the member countries to work toward broadening support for the organization at the national level within the member states and strengthened its weight and voice at regional and international levels. While in another practical compartment, the involvement of all D-8 governments/agencies/private sectors in international trade and travel supply chains have been proved essential.

The role of the Federation of the D-8 Chambers of Commerce and Industry is also vital in this regard to optimize these agreements and promote closer cooperation among the national chambers of commerce and industry of member countries, including through the dissemination of information, business forums, trade exhibitions and workshops in different member countries.

To stay the course and to make a difference, I believe we are in urgent need of real, hard work in a number of areas. Increasing public awareness of the organization and its activities, primarily within the D-8 community and subsequently on a larger scale, should certainly be one of our priorities looking ahead.

Moreover, while we should expand liaison and cooperation with other economic and regional groupings and multilateral arrangements, we really need to help the organization project itself effectively at the international level and play the bigger role it deserves.

The actual beginning of such a liaison was pursued following the establishment of the Secretariat by the conclusion of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in 2010 — and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in 2011, which represents the outcome of the activities undertaken since.

In addition, the D-8 and World Maritime University (WMU) signed a letter of intent (LoI) on July 13, 2012. The LoI intends to establish a strong relationship between the two institutions in the marine and maritime field, especially through the activities of the D-8 Working Group on Shipping and Logistics.

Given all these things, I look to the future of the D-8 with hopeful eyes. I am optimistic, but with my feet on the ground. The organization, in its entirety, enjoys tremendous potential in various fields and areas. Collectively, we should be able to devise ways and means to tap them effectively, actualize them toward advancing the state of our cooperation and make a meaningful contribution to the development of member countries through the likes of increasing the level of intra-trade between them.

Finally, to create a more favorable economic environment and increase the welfare of members as stipulated by the 2008-2018 road map, the organization's secretariat needs to be strengthened much more than its current compact size and strength. Moreover, the organization needs to develop a long-term mechanism for sustainable economic cooperation. I believe this is quite a big challenge for us. We all must address and deal with it as we continue on our common journey.

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