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24TH MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF HEADS OF STATE OF THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION

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The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) held its 24th summit of heads of state on 4 July 2024 in Astana, Kazakhstan. For the first time, the summit was organised as a SCO Heads of State Council Meeting and SCO Plus format meeting.

At the previous year's summit of heads of state, Iran's membership to the SCO was accepted, and a memorandum of obligations was signed for the membership of Belarus. At this year's summit, the membership of Belarus, which had observer state status, was approved and the number of members of the organisation increased to 10. At the summit, various issues, particularly security and economy, were discussed and 25 documents, including the Astana Declaration, were signed.

Faced with international sanctions, Russia prioritised its economic agenda at the summit. In his speech at the summit, President of Russia Vladimir Putin emphasised the increasing use of national currencies in mutual agreements and reiterated his proposal for the SCO to create its own payment mechanisms. He also noted that the SCO Business Council is working on various projects - financed by the SCO Interbank Consortium.[1]

In the Astana Declaration, in the field of economy, the member states stressed the importance of developing the action plan for the implementation of the SCO Economic Development Strategy until 2030 and the SCO New Economic Dialogue Programme. They supported the meeting of the heads of administrations of special zones of the SCO member states planned to be held in Samarkand this year. Kazakhstan's proposal on the establishment of the SCO Investment Fund was noted, and the Regulations for the SCO Association of Investors were approved. The member states emphasised the need for continuing consultations on the establishment of the SCO Development Bank and the SCO Development Fund to tap the Organisation's investment potential and stressed the importance of providing financial support for project activities.[2]

In the area of security, a programme of cooperation against terrorism, separatism and extremism for 2025-2027 was adopted. A strategy for 2024-2029 to combat drug

trafficking and transnational organised crime was approved. Intentions were expressed to deepen cooperation in the field of biological and chemical non-proliferation, information security, and cyber security. Efforts to build a terrorism and drug-free state in Afghanistan were supported and it was stated that an inclusive government is the only path to lasting peace and stability for the country. They also committed to increased cooperation on disarmament and non-proliferation and to the demilitarisation of outer space. In the declaration, member states condemned the civilian casualties in Gaza and stated that peace and stability can only be achieved through an overarching and fair settlement of the Palestinian issue.[3]

Other issues addressed in the Astana Declaration include energy cooperation, tourism, environment, cultural cooperation, education, science and technology, digital economy, and health. The 24th summit of the SCO Council of Heads of State was instrumental in taking steps towards coordination among the member states on important issues of the global and regional agenda.

The SCO Plus meeting with the theme *Strengthening Multilateral Dialogue - Striving for Sustainable Peace and Development* was attended by the leaders of SCO member states, the heads of delegations from SCO observer countries and dialogue partners, the heads of international organizations (UN, EAEU, the Islamic Organization for Food Security, CSTO, OECD, CICA, and CIS). Among the heads of delegations of the invited states were President of the Republic of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, Emir of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, United Arab Emirates Supreme Council Member Saud bin Saqr Al-Qasimi, and the Chairman of People's Council of the National Assembly of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. During the meeting, it was noted that the SCO has many practices that can be shared with all countries interested in cooperation, and it was stated that any constructive contribution to its activities and any valuable proposal would be welcomed.

At the end of the summit, it was announced that the SCO Chairmanship will be passed to China for the forthcoming period. This handover will shape the future activities of the organisation and allow for the development of new strategic approaches under China's leadership, aiming to further enhance the SCO's influence in the international arena.

[1] Заседание Совета глав государств членов ШОС*Президент России,*4 июля 2024, http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/74464

[2] Astana Declaration of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, *Ministry of External Affairs Government of India*, July 10, 2024, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/37942/Astana+Declaration+of+the+Council+of+Heads+of+State+of+the+Shanghai+Cooperation+Organization

[3] Ibid.

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