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THE STATISTICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH AND  
TRAINING CENTRE FOR ISLAMIC COUNTRIES (SESRIC)



# OIC OUTLOOK REPORTS



## 50 Years of OIC Cooperation: Taking a Future Perspective by Learning from the Past

OIC Outlook Report

No: 2019/2





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# **50 Years of OIC Cooperation: Taking a Future Perspective by Learning from the Past**

*Dr. Erhan Türbedar, SESRIC*

**OIC Outlook Report**

**No: 2019/2**

The Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training  
Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC)

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# CONTENTS

- 1 About OIC .....1
- 2 Historical Development of OIC Cooperation .....3
- 3 Major Achievements and Remaining Challenges for the OIC .....12
- 4 Concluding Remarks and Policy Recommendations .....17
- References .....21

## **ABSTRACT / ملخص / Résumé**

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is marking a big milestone with a pretty strong record of achievements. It has demonstrated the capacity to successfully fulfil its mission, which was given to it fifty years ago in Rabat, Morocco. Five decades have seen much progress in OIC cooperation. Today the underlying architecture of OIC cooperation is visible and the OIC Member States are becoming increasingly involved in seeking common interests and supporting cooperation as one of the ways for coping with many challenges. Nevertheless, the OIC remains to be in need of a good deal of patient work, in order to help the Muslim world to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



The year 2019 is a golden jubilee of the OIC cooperation and a historic opportunity to advance it. Throughout the 50 years of its existence, OIC has proved to be a credible and sustainable framework for cooperation, constructive dialogue and solidarity among its member states. While commemorating its fiftieth anniversary under the motto “United for peace and development”, formerly known as the Organisation of Islamic Conference, the OIC intends to reflect on its past achievements, identify remaining challenges and keep the positive momentum that has been built over the years.

This report offers a short analysis of the evolution and main mechanisms of OIC cooperation. It takes a stock of the Organisation’s past achievement, reviews its capabilities to meet the existing challenges and highlights some issues that may influence the OIC’s ability to enhance its effectiveness in the future.

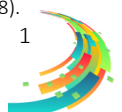
## 1 About OIC

The OIC is an intergovernmental organisation bringing together 57 Member States with significant Muslim populations (most but not all members are Muslim majority states). It is the second largest organisation of its kind after the United Nations. The overall mission of the OIC is to promote peace and stability, facilitate cooperation, support economic, social and institutional reforms of its member states, and thus contribute in building a better world. Over the years, the OIC has evolved into an organisation whose agenda is increasingly shaped by global development efforts and the actual needs of its member states. As such, in 2018 the OIC was working for stability and socio-economic development of around 1.84 billion people spread over four continents.<sup>1</sup>

Since its establishment in 1969, the OIC worked to maintain a climate of dialogue among its member states and sought to promote their interests in international affairs (Ihsanoglu, 2010: 1). For that reason, it has a growing status in international fora as symbol of the solidarity of Muslims and a framework of understanding and rapprochement among them. There are different high level forums available through which the OIC brings its member states together for policy

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<sup>1</sup> The share of the population living in the OIC Member States rose from 1.57 billion in 2010 to around 1.84 billion in 2018 - corresponding to around 24% of the global population. Within the OIC Member States Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria and Bangladesh are in the group of world’s most crowded countries with populations exceeding 150 million (SESRI, 2018).



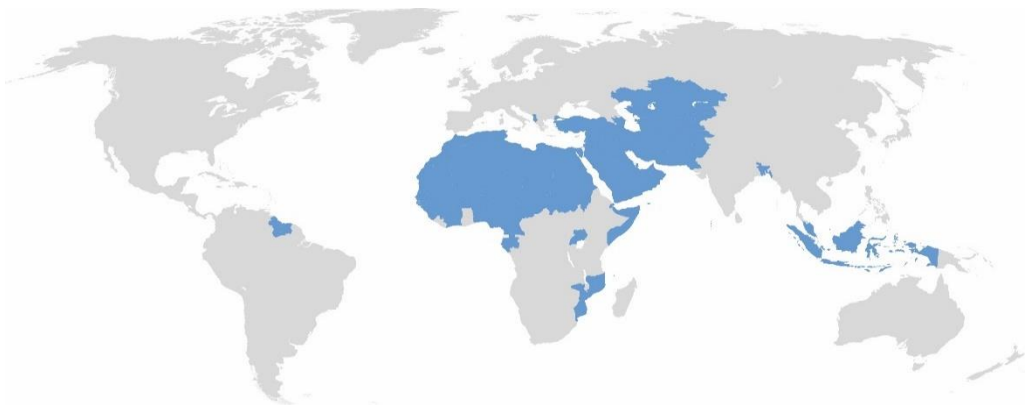


dialogue, technical cooperation and joint action, for example in the Islamic Summit, the Council of Foreign Ministers, four Standing Committees, and the number of sectoral ministerial conferences.

According to a widespread belief, multilateral cooperation is important for achieving political and economic stabilization. It paves the way for intergovernmental dialogue, and increased political dialogue leads to greater economic cooperation. Particularly under the conditions of accelerated globalisation and growing global challenges - such as security issues, environmental threats or financial and economic issues, multilateral cooperation based on common interests gains more and more importance. In this context, it is possible to witness that the OIC Member States are becoming increasingly involved in seeking common interests and supporting cooperation as one of the ways for coping with many challenges. Expectations of almost all OIC Member States is to benefit politically from stronger partnerships, economically from the expanded economic opportunities and improved connectivity, and geopolitically from greater stability and security.

It could be argued that primary expectations from OIC depend on the level of economic development of a particular member state. As of December 2018, 21 OIC Member States, particularly those from Sub-Saharan Africa, are in the UN list of Least Developed Countries (UN, 2018). For them, economic programmes of OIC may be the highest motivation for engagement in the OIC cooperation. Although primary expectations differ from one member state to another (Ihsanoglu, 2010: 6-7), the benefits of belonging to OIC are seen as being greater than not belonging.

### Map 1: OIC Member States



Source: SESRIC.

Notes: Accession years of OIC Member States are as follows:

1969 - Afghanistan, Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Guinea, Indonesia, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Turkey, Yemen.

1972 - Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Syria (suspended in 2012), United Arab Emirates.

1974 - Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Palestine, Uganda.

1975 - Iraq, Maldives; 1976 - Comoros; 1978 - Djibouti; 1983 - Benin; 1984 - Brunei; 1986 - Nigeria.

1991 - Azerbaijan; 1992 - Albania, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan; 1994 - Mozambique; 1995 - Kazakhstan.

1996 - Suriname, Uzbekistan; 1997 - Togo, 1998 - Guyana; 2001 - Cote d'Ivoire.







## 2 Historical Development of OIC Cooperation

The OIC traces its origins to 1969, to the 1<sup>st</sup> Session of the Islamic Summit Conference which was held in Rabat, Morocco, in the wake of the criminal attack on the Al-Aqsa Mosque, at which date the OIC was established. This was the date when Muslim nations committed to strive for the restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people, which turn to be one of the central purposes of the OIC and permanent item of Islamic summits and conferences. Islamic solidarity based on the sovereignty of member states, and non-interference in one another's internal affairs was another key motivation for the establishment of OIC cooperation. Moreover, historic Rabat Conference provided the floor for a pledge of the member states to strengthen their close cooperation and the mutual assistance in the economic, scientific, cultural and spiritual fields (Figure 1).

**Image 1:** Saudi Arabia's Late King Faisal bin Abdul Aziz Attending the First Session of the Islamic Summit Conference, Rabat, Morocco (September 1969)



Source: SESRIC library.

Later evolution of OIC cooperation was closely linked to global political and economic developments. One of the factors that enabled the deepening of OIC cooperation in the 1970s





was increased trend of cooperation among developing countries. Particularly the Buenos Aires Conference (1978), at which the grounds of South-South cooperation were laid, became a symbol of the determination of nations of the South to be actors of their own development. Institutionalization of South-South cooperation represented an opportunity for many OIC Member States to join the calls for new international order which is more equitable, and to achieve higher levels of development through the technical cooperation with non-OIC developing countries. In this regard, solidarity with the countries of the Third World, regulating the terms of trade between developed and developing countries, sovereignty of the developing countries over their natural resources and economic assistance to least developed Islamic countries, became an essential part of 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> sessions of the Islamic Summit Conference, held in 1974 (Lahore), 1981 (Makkah) and 2003 (Putrajaya) respectively (see Figure 1). Even today, the OIC provides an important platform to reinforce the South-South cooperation, especially through linking countries that have development needs with those that have solutions, and through enabling sharing of technical or economic knowledge and skills necessary to facilitate the development.

The Cold War or superpower rivalry of the second half of the twentieth century, had also its impacts on the OIC agenda. For example, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Islamic Summit Conference witnesses to calls for rejecting alignment to either Western or Communist power blocs, to support for the struggle of OIC Member States against foreign military interventions, while respecting international law, the UN Charter and other resolutions. Thus, instead of competition, the OIC opted for cooperation and clearly refused to accept the dominance of a hegemonic power.

As an intergovernmental organisation designed to advance the interests of all Muslims worldwide, protection of human rights of Muslim minorities and communities living in the non-OIC countries was from the beginning an integral element of the OIC agenda. On the other hand, the OIC performed actively in the global cultural scene in terms of enhancement and promotion of Islamic culture and values, and preservation of the common Islamic heritage (Figure 1). Later, through cultural activities and interfaith dialogue, the OIC had to invest its efforts in presenting the true face of Islam, in order to combat Islamophobia - whose scope and depth has increased after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In order to monitor Islamophobia and take necessary counter-measures, the OIC Islamophobia Observatory was established in 2007, under the auspices of the OIC General Secretariat.

Taking common positions and acting collectively at the international scene was from very beginning high on the OIC agenda. In this regard, the OIC became successful in articulating an Islamic position in the international public sphere. However, Member States' conflicting interests in regional and global politics and the lack of political will in some cases, limited the role of OIC in influencing politics at the international level, except in the UN on certain issues (Kayaoglu, 2015, 1-4).



The 3<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Islamic Summit Conference was important for establishing three OIC standing committees, namely the Standing Committee for Information and Cultural Affairs (COMIAC), the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMCEC), and the Standing Committee for Scientific and Technological Cooperation (COMSTECH). This enabled for more concrete economic cooperation among the OIC Member States. Still, it took some time before sectoral cooperation was understood as something valuable in itself - as instrumental in providing the requisites for socio-economic development and competitiveness.

It should be noted that many new threats to humanity have emerged in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and became part of the OIC agenda: scarcity of essential resources like food and water, non-state actors like terrorism, migration, ethnic conflict and drug peddling. These topics dominated the 5<sup>th</sup> Session of the Islamic Summit Conference (Kuwait, 1987). Later, non-proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction have also become concern of Islamic summits.

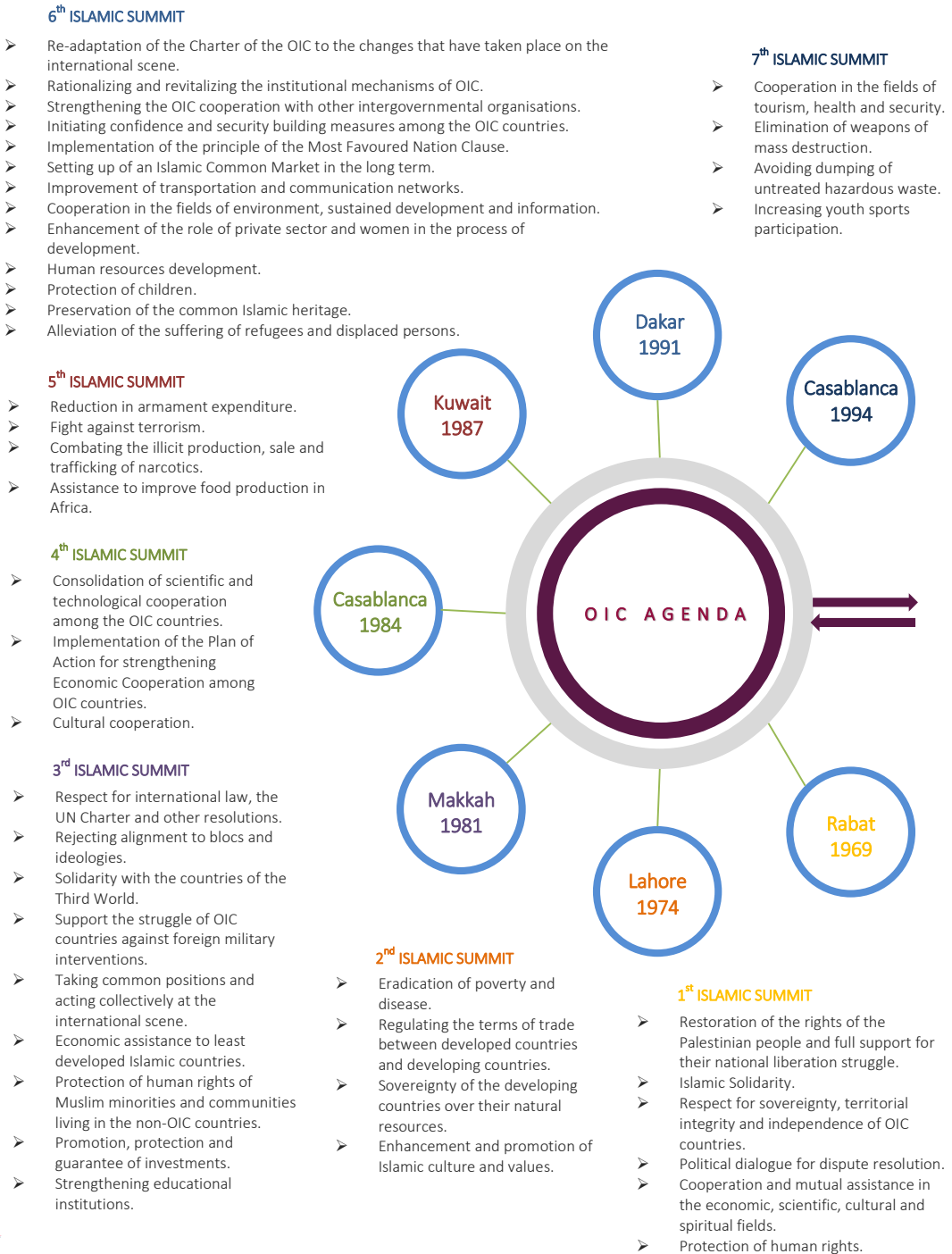
Evidently there was, already in the second half of the 1980s, an emerging political will in OIC for cooperation in vital areas such as transport, energy, trade and infrastructure, where the interdependence is obvious and unavoidable. For example, the OIC have managed to organize the first ministerial meetings on transport (1987), energy (1989) and infrastructure and public works (1991). Moreover, 6<sup>th</sup> Session of the Islamic Summit Conference (Dakar, 1991) made a call for improvement of transportation and communication networks. However, the mentioned ministerial meetings did not convene anymore (Figure 2). The 6<sup>th</sup> Session of the Islamic Summit Conference is also remembered by the clearly stated need for OIC reform, to adopt the new political and economic realities emerged after the Cold War. Re-adaptation of the Charter of the OIC to the changes that have taken place on the international scene and rationalization and revitalization of OIC institutional mechanisms were at the center of the debate. Actually, discussions for reforming the OIC have started in 1982 (Ihsanoglu, 2010). However, concrete steps in this regard could only be taken during the 2000s. Another important side of the 6<sup>th</sup> Session of the Islamic Summit Conference was its call for setting up of an Islamic Common Market in the long term, a target that still does not have a serious prospect for realization. Even the OIC Framework Agreement on Trade Preference System (TPS-OIC), which has been adopted in 1990 with the intention to foster intra-OIC trade, could enter into force only in 2002. Moreover, as of February 2019, it has been signed by 42 and ratified by only 32 OIC Member States (COMCEC, 2019).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The lowest level of economic integration is the Preferential Trade Agreement, in which member countries apply to each other lower tariffs for certain products, while the third countries that are not party to the agreement face high tariffs. Slightly intensified economic integration comes with setting up of the Free Trade Zone, where tariffs are abolished between member countries, but each of them applies its own independent tariffs against third countries. In the Customs Union, which is the next step in economic integration, the customs tariffs applied by the members to third countries are harmonized and a common tariff is determined. In the Common Market, which is a further economic integration than the Customs Union, the integration of product markets among member countries is followed by the free movement of production factors such as labour and capital (Hitiris, 1991).





Figure 1: Evolution of the OIC Agenda as Reflected in the Islamic Summits



Source: Prepared by the author based on documents adopted at the Islamic Summits.

Notes: The figure lists only new topics discussed at the Islamic Summits. Each Islamic Summit covers almost all topics covered by the previous Summits.





**8<sup>th</sup> ISLAMIC SUMMIT**

- Elimination of anti-personnel mines.
- Reform of the UN Security Council for more equitable representation of OIC countries.
- Support dialogue and understanding among cultures and religions.
- Fighting epidemics, particularly AIDS.
- Insurance of investments and export credits.

**9<sup>th</sup> ISLAMIC SUMMIT**

- Setting up of the free trade zone.
- Improving the international competitiveness of OIC countries.
- Developing Islamic financial instruments.
- Strengthening of economic policy co-ordination among the OIC countries.
- Correction of the imbalances in the various WTO Agreements to enable a fair multilateral trading environment.

**10<sup>th</sup> ISLAMIC SUMMIT**

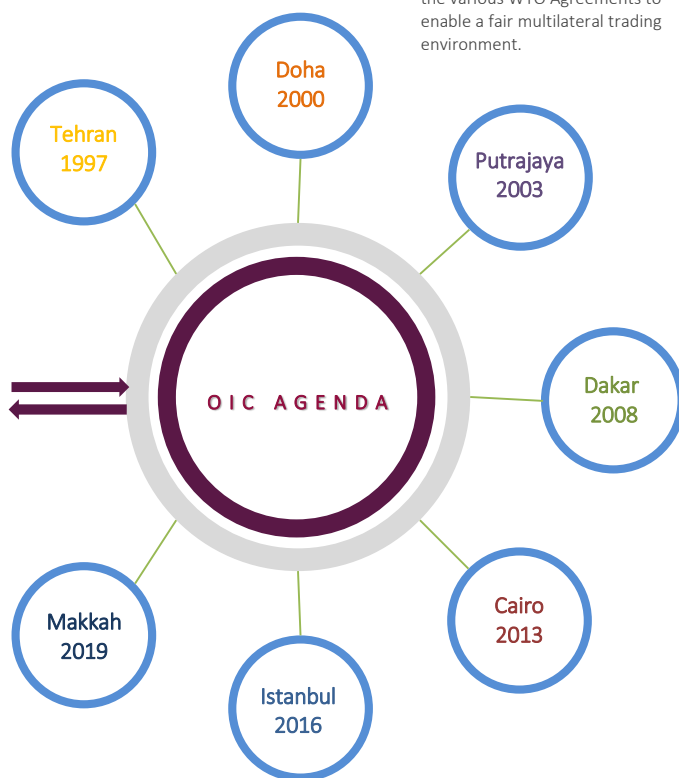
- Call upon developed countries to ease the access to their markets for the products and services of developing countries.
- Call to the international community to reduce the indebtedness of the African countries.
- Developing connectivity in financial services, shipping and aviation among the OIC countries.
- Promoting digitalization.
- Increasing cultural activities for young people.

**11<sup>th</sup> ISLAMIC SUMMIT**

- Support for the first Ten-Year Programme of Action issued by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Extraordinary Islamic Summit.
- Combating islamophobia.
- Promote Islamic - Christian dialogue.

**12<sup>th</sup> ISLAMIC SUMMIT**

- Cooperation in areas of renewable energy and green technology.
- Prioritizing job-generating growth, particularly for youth.
- Youth cooperation.
- Preserving the values of marriage and family institution.
- Support for educational exchange programmes.
- Ensuring access to fresh water.
- Better coordination of humanitarian affairs.



**14<sup>th</sup> ISLAMIC SUMMIT**

- Contributing to the peace building in OIC countries coming out of conflict.
- Mainstreaming of the OIC programmes and activities in the national priorities.
- Improving institutional capacities and legal framework for economic development.
- Promoting ease of doing business among the OIC countries.
- Enhancing competitiveness by linking to the global value chains.
- Election observation.

**13<sup>th</sup> ISLAMIC SUMMIT**

- Adoption of the OIC-2025: Program of Action.
- Support for the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Paris Agreement.
- Promotion of good governance, rule of law and inclusive economic growth.
- Developing multi-modal connectivity in transport.
- Implementing Trade Preferential System.
- Promoting integrated water resources management.
- Ensuring the welfare and social security of the elderly and persons with special needs.
- Development of media.
- Strengthening of the OIC public diplomacy.
- Support to cinematography, including through holding the OIC film festival.
- Launching the process of Islamic rapprochement for strengthening unity of the Islamic Ummah.
- Police Cooperation.





Since the beginning of 1990s, the awareness in the OIC was growing about the importance of sustainable development, human resources development, improving international competitiveness and developing alternative financial instruments. However, as shown in Figure 2, the OIC sectoral cooperation has flourished only after 2000, when cooperation really picked up speed with several ministerial meetings being launched. These meetings have resulted in a strong commitment to work towards intensifying the project-based sectoral cooperation, spanning from tourism, education and environment to health and labour issues.

**Figure 2: OIC Sectoral Ministerial Meetings**



Source: Prepared by the author based on information available at OIC web page, [www.oic-oci.org](http://www.oic-oci.org), as of July 2019.

Notes: Blue - Irregular ministerial meetings; Green – Recently launched ministerial meetings.



Last 20 years were also the decades of reform for the OIC, which includes the revision of the OIC Charter,<sup>3</sup> renaming of the organisation in 2011 (the Organisation of the Islamic Conference became the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation), increasing its budget and voting democratically for the OIC Secretary General. The Ten-Year Programme of Action that was adopted in 2005 was also a part of the OIC reform. The aim of this document was to strengthen the Islamic solidarity and introduce more targeted and result-oriented cooperation, thus help the Muslim world to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The OIC - 2025 Programme of Action marks the second phase in the OIC efforts to function with ten year programmes. It reflects the determination of all the governments of OIC Member States to embrace the policy approaches required to attain the levels of development necessary to improve the prosperity of all citizens. The OIC - 2025 Programme of Action seeks to, inter alia, stimulate the key long-term drivers of growth, such as innovation, skills and the integration of trade, accompanied by improvements in infrastructure, education, health and good governance. The OIC - 2025 Programme of Action also stresses out the shared vision of the OIC Member States to ensure peace and security by developing a culture of dialogue among nations and civilization.

As can be followed from Figure 1, today the OIC engages with a wider range of issues, which include women's and youth's empowerment, advancing children's rights, ensuring the welfare and social security of the elderly and persons with special needs, preserving the values of family, security cooperation, contributing to peace building and conflict resolution, promotion of good governance and rule of law, and many other issues.

The OIC has played the role of an incubator for new organisations in areas in which needs were identified but mechanisms of cooperation had not existed. Thus, over the years, the OIC has grown into a complex institution with several organs that are working towards achieving the OIC objectives in various areas. Depending on their degree of autonomy, in mid-2019 there were 37 OIC institutions,<sup>4</sup> which are classified as subsidiary, specialized or affiliated organs and institutions (Figure 3). 19 of them work in the domain of economic development, 12 are dealing with human and social development, while 3 institutions are engaged in media and information, and 3 in culture and arts.<sup>5</sup> Here it is interesting to mention that OIC does not possess an institution which is specifically involved in the fields such as energy, transport, home affairs and security.

<sup>3</sup> The OIC's current charter was adopted by the 11<sup>th</sup> Session of the Islamic Summit Conference, held in Dakar in 2008. The charter established the objectives and principles of the organisation, with the fundamental aim of strengthening solidarity and cooperation among the Member States (OIC, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> With the Resolution No. 9/46 – LO of the 46<sup>th</sup> Session of Council of Foreign Ministers (March 2019), the Islamic Cement Association is dissolved and its legal status ceased to exist.

<sup>5</sup> According to the OIC Charter, the key organs of the OIC involves Islamic Summit, Council of Foreign Ministers, four Standing Committees, Executive Committee, International Islamic Court of Justice (still waiting for entry into force of its Statute), Independent Permanent Commission of Human Rights, Committee of Permanent Representatives, General Secretariat, subsidiary organs, specialized and affiliated institutions. **Subsidiary organs** are established within the framework of the OIC, in accordance with the decisions taken by the Islamic Summit or Council of Foreign Ministers. The OIC Member States automatically become members of these organs and their budget is approved by the Council of Foreign Ministers. **Affiliated institutions** are entities or bodies whose objectives are in line with the objectives of the OIC







The OIC has supported the creation of some other institutions, such as the Islamic Food Security Organisation, the OIC Labour Centre, the OIC Police Cooperation and Coordination Centre and the OIC Media Forum, however some OIC Member States still have not signed or ratified their statutes. It should be noted that all institutions listed in Figure 3 have their headquarters. In addition to these institutions, it should be noted that there are a number of OIC forums such as the Parliamentary Union of the OIC Member States (PUIC), the Forum for the Capital Markets Regulatory Authorities, OIC Broadcasting Regulatory Authorities Forum and the OIC Member States' Stock Exchanges Forum, which meet on regular basis and contribute to OIC cooperation in specific topics.

Basic recognized achievements of OIC cooperation structures are that they stimulate cooperation, facilitate communication and eliminate some invisible barriers among member states, influence public opinion, and the like. On the other hand, two basic criticism towards OIC cooperation structures are that messages of cooperation are not been supported enough with appropriate policies, and that sometimes member states behave opposite to the OIC solidarity. Next part of the report will elaborate in more detail on achievements and the challenges of OIC cooperation.

**Image 2:** 13<sup>th</sup> Session of the Islamic Summit Conference, Istanbul, Turkey (April 2016)



Source: SESRIC library.

Charter, and are recognized as affiliated institutions by the Council of Foreign Ministers. Membership to these institutions is optional and open to organs and institutions of the OIC Member States. Budgets of affiliated institutions are independent. **Specialized institutions** are established within the framework of the OIC, in accordance with the decisions taken by the Islamic Summit or Council of Foreign Ministers. Membership to these institutions is optional and open to OIC Member States. Their budgets are independent and are approved by their respective legislative bodies stipulated in their Statute (OIC Charter, Chapter III - XIII).





**Figure 3: OIC Organs and Institutions**



Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

**1980** Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA), [www.ircica.org](http://www.ircica.org)

**1980** Organization of Islamic Capitals and Cities (OICC), [www.oicc.org](http://www.oicc.org)

**1981** Islamic University of Technology (IUT), [www.iutoic-dhaka.edu](http://www.iutoic-dhaka.edu)

**1981** Islamic Centre for the Development of Trade (ICDT), [icdt-oic.org](http://icdt-oic.org)

**1981** Islamic Research and Training Institute (IRTI - member of the IsDB), [www.irti.org](http://www.irti.org)

**1981** Organization of the Islamic Shipowners Association (OISA), [www.oisaonline.com](http://www.oisaonline.com)

**1982** Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), [www.isesco.org.ma](http://www.isesco.org.ma)

**1983** International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA), [www.iifaifi.org](http://www.iifaifi.org)

**1983** International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), [www.iium.edu.my](http://www.iium.edu.my)

**1984** Islamic Cement Association (ICA - dissolved in March 2019)

**1985** Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation (ISSF), [issf.sa](http://issf.sa)

**1986** Federation of Consultants from Islamic Countries (FCIC – sponsored by IsDB), [thefcic.org](http://thefcic.org)

**1986** Islamic World Academy of Sciences (IAS), [www.iasworld.org](http://www.iasworld.org)

**1986** Islamic University of Niger (IUN), [universite-say.com](http://universite-say.com)

**1988** Islamic University of Uganda (IUIU), [www.iuiu.ac.ug](http://www.iuiu.ac.ug)

**1972** Union of OIC News Agencies (UNA), [iinanews.org](http://iinanews.org)

**1974** Islamic Solidarity Fund and its Waqf (ISF), [www.isf-fsi.org](http://www.isf-fsi.org)

**1975** Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), [www.isdb.org](http://www.isdb.org)

**1976** World Federation of Arabo-Islamic International Schools (WFAIIS), [www.wfais.org](http://www.wfais.org)

**1977** Islamic Broadcasting Union (IBU), [ibu.org](http://ibu.org)

**1978** Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRTC), [www.sesric.org](http://www.sesric.org)

**1979** Islamic Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (ICCIA), [www.iccia.com](http://www.iccia.com)

**1970** OIC General Secretariat, [www.oic-oci.org](http://www.oic-oci.org)

(Headquarters: Jeddah; Offices: New York, Geneva, Brussels, Iraq, Kabul, Indonesia)

**Standing Committees:**

**1975** Al Quds Committee

- **1998** Bayt Mal Al Quds Agency (Affiliate of the Al-Quds Committee)

**1981** Standing Committee for Information and Cultural Affairs (COMIAC)

**1981** Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMCEC), [www.comcec.org](http://www.comcec.org)

**1981** Standing Committee for Scientific and Technological Cooperation (COMSTECH), [www.comstech.org](http://www.comstech.org)

**2011** The OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) [www.oic-iphr.org](http://www.oic-iphr.org)

**2001** General Council for Islamic Banks and Financial Institutions (CIBAFI), [cibafi.org](http://cibafi.org)

**2006** Computer Emergency Response Team (OIC-CERT), [www.oic-cert.org](http://www.oic-cert.org)

**2008** International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC - member of the IsDB), [www.itfc-idb.org](http://www.itfc-idb.org)

**2008** Islamic Committee of the International Crescent (ICIC), [icic-oic.org](http://icic-oic.org)

**2009** Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation (ICYF), [www.icyf-dc.org](http://www.icyf-dc.org)

**2009** Association of Tax Authorities of Islamic Countries (ATAIC), [ataic28.org](http://ataic28.org)

**1991** Federation of Contractors from Islamic Countries (FOCIC), [www.al-ittihad.ma](http://www.al-ittihad.ma)

**1992** International Union of Muslim Scouts (IUMS)

**1994** Islamic Corporation for the Insurance of Investment and Export Credit (ICIEC - member of the IsDB), [iciec.isdb.org](http://iciec.isdb.org)

**1999** Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector (ICD - member of the IsDB), [icd-ps.org](http://icd-ps.org)

**2010** Science, Technology and Innovation Organization (STIO), [www.stio.comstech.org](http://www.stio.comstech.org)

**2010** Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC), [www.smiic.org](http://www.smiic.org)

**2010** Women Development Organisation

**2011** Organization of Islamic Cooperation Broadcasting Regulatory Authorities Forum (IBRAF), [www.oic-ibraf.org](http://www.oic-ibraf.org)

**2013** Real Estate Union in Islamic States (REUOS) [www.reuos.org](http://www.reuos.org)

**2018** Islamic Organization for Food Security (IOFS) [www.oic-iofs.org](http://www.oic-iofs.org)

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

2010s

**Green:** Subsidiary Organs  
**Blue:** Specialized Institutions  
**Gray:** Affiliated Institutions

Source: Prepared by the author based on information available at web pages of OIC and its institutions as of July 2019.  
Notes: Dates indicate the start of activities of relevant institutions.





### 3 Major Achievements and Remaining Challenges for the OIC

Intergovernmental organisations tend to speak about their achievements in a narrative way, by focusing on their major initiatives, projects and activities that are essential in fulfilling the strategy and work programme of an organisation. In this regard, five decades have seen much progress and many significant achievements in the OIC cooperation. Even the narrative review of the last few years witness the fact that the intensity of activities conducted by OIC organs and institutions became impressive and that billions of dollars have been spent in support to different projects (look for example OIC, 2013 and OIC, 2018).

To better understand the achievements of decades old multilateral platforms like OIC, instead of listing most important projects and activities that took place in the past, providing an understanding of the outcomes of the entire process of the OIC cooperation becomes more reasonable.

For decades, the OIC is serving its member states like the ‘Muslim United Nations’. It provides the opportunity to discuss at the highest political level the emerging challenges and exchange views on possible solutions. The number of sectoral ministerial conferences and other institutions working toward the achievement of the OIC objectives has been steadily increasing over the years. Continuous consultations in the context of OIC cooperation have become an instrument in reaching consensus and finding the common denominator among the member states, whose political systems, economic development levels and cultural values differ significantly. In this context, the mere existence of the OIC should be considered a remarkable achievement.

A common objective of all organs and institutions of OIC is further development of multilateral cooperation as the basis for political, social and economic progress, and the consolidation of good neighbourly relations. At the same time, continuous support and engagement of member states in the activities of OIC institutions, their commitment to cooperation and to the sustainable development goals have to be understood as an asset for international relations, global order and prosperity.

Although the internal or regional political difficulties hinder the development path of some OIC Member States, it is encouraging to see that today all of them benefit from and contribute to the



OIC cooperation process. In general, OIC cooperation has contributed to establishing new patterns of behaviour and reducing the thinking that states are solely self-sufficient.

As an intergovernmental organisation which initially relied more on political issues, especially the Palestinian issue, the OIC is increasingly becoming a forum for socio-economic development. Today, the OIC cooperation is on the rise in scale and scope and socio-economic cooperation is in the mainstream of the OIC agenda. The OIC has managed to boost the cooperation among its members by regular high level political statements, through many technical meetings with representatives of the member states and by launching and supporting numerous OIC institutions. Thanks to the efforts of these institutions, concrete actions and significant results have been achieved in many cooperation areas. Accordingly, among the main achievements of OIC Member States in their mutual relations in recent years is the continual strengthening of functional and sectoral cooperation.

Recently, the OIC started to develop its 'connectivity agenda' aiming to interconnect the Member States' infrastructure in the field of transport and energy and accelerate reforms in these sectors to ensure harmonization of relevant regulations. In the long term, it is expected from the connectivity agenda to provide the foundations for easier movement of people, goods, services and investments, making markets of the member states more attractive for business.

Over the past decades the OIC and its institutions proved capable in guiding policy making process, as a response to the evolving needs of countries covered by the Organisation. In general, the OIC cooperation is playing the bridge building role in the discussions on the socio-economic development of the OIC Member States, and offering a long-term context for more growth, employment and competitiveness. By providing strategic direction for addressing the various developmental challenges, encouraging knowledge sharing and mutual learning, providing financial assistance, and supporting the reforms related to global development agenda, the OIC also helps its members to improve economic governance and the efficiency of state institutions, what is recognized as an important prerequisite for a faster economic growth. Several policies and measures adopted by the governments of OIC Member States were part of the OIC agenda. It should be underlined that with active producing of policies, the OIC has become a strong promoter of reforms, led from the very beginning by the member states themselves.

Obviously, considerable progress was shown in the augmenting of the OIC Member States' ability to display a common stance on formulating joint attainable goals. In this regard, the development of ten-year programmes of action - anchored in the provisions of the revised OIC Charter - with a clear definition of priorities, provides a more target oriented and coordinated approach in OIC cooperation. Ten-year programmes of action also enable addressing the entire complexity of cooperation challenges in an interconnected manner, including in priority areas of poverty alleviation, food security, science and technology, investment and finance, climate change, empowerment of women, humanitarian action, human rights and good governance, among others.





On the other hand, with development of their own strategies and working programmes, different OIC organs and institutions have improved annual planning of their activities, while adoption of many strategic documents on joint sectoral action - such as the OIC Labour Market Strategy 2025, the OIC Strategic Health Programme of Action 2014-2023, the Strategic Roadmap or Development of Islamic Tourism, the Joint OIC Youth Strategy, the OIC Water Vision and the OIC Plan of Action for Advancement of Women, have brought a significant potential to the further progress of OIC cooperation. The process of developing OIC cooperation through above mentioned strategic documents and programmes of action has already contributed to a new phase in consolidating OIC cooperation and making it more effective.

The OIC is also recognized by its efforts in supporting the South-South development. Many OIC countries are benefiting from the sound expertise of experienced OIC Member States. Moreover, the OIC plays a role in utilizing triangular cooperation as a complement to South-South cooperation. The partnerships of OIC with countries and organisations from the North facilitates efforts in addressing the knowledge gap that many OIC Member States face when confronting their socio-economic challenges.

Maintaining close links with other multilateral organisations like the UN institutions, the League of Arab States, the African Union and ASEAN where membership overlaps with that of the OIC, have also encouraged deeper cooperation and enhanced implementation of different OIC programmes and projects. This issue is especially important because of two reasons. First, strengthened partnerships with other stakeholders, particularly with those which are funding the OIC projects in many areas, has proved to be important for achieving a better alignment of national governments' development priorities with the donors' sectoral priorities. Second, the OIC has been able through the expansion of cooperation with other international bodies, to boost its visibility and influence in the world, and improve its overall image. This conviction is strengthened by the list of non-OIC countries who sees the OIC as a venue for collaboration with Muslims globally. Many of these countries have officially expressed their intentions to establish formal relations with the OIC either through obtaining full membership, observer status or having special envoys to the OIC (OIC, 2013). In this context, it should also be noted that with the merits of OIC, the voice of Muslim world is today more appropriately represented in different international and regional forums.

Another important achievement of OIC is its implementation mechanism, which is multi-stakeholder in nature and includes not only the policy dialogue among governments but also the private sector, civil society, academia, cultural institutions and a number of other stakeholders. Particularly in the last several years top-down course of action has been followed by another that was bottom-up, in particular by civil society organisations and local communities. All of them contribute to the progress of the OIC cooperation.

In identifying coherent solutions to emerging challenges of OIC Member States and promoting prosperity, stability and security, the OIC remains committed to foster an open, transparent, and





regular dialogue with non-governmental organisations, thus promote citizens' participation in public policy making and in generating social consensus for the reform and development of OIC societies.<sup>6</sup>

Building on the achievements of the previous gender mainstreaming activities executed under the auspices of OIC institutions, the OIC - 2025 Programme of Action remains dedicated to further develop and support effective and gender-sensitive policies and projects.

As for the media and communication activities, over the years the OIC has managed to develop a close relationship with the mainstream and specialized media outlets in the member states, aimed at raising the profile of the OIC and its activities, as well as contributing to enhanced visibility of the OIC and its strategic targets. This is particularly important development, since the public has to be adequately informed on the work of OIC and to understand the importance of it, in order to provide broader support to the OIC cooperation.

Progressive increase in intra-OIC trade from 11.8% in 1996 to 18.8% in 2018 deserves also to be mentioned among the achievements of OIC. The entry into force of the OIC Framework Agreement on Trade Preferential System (TPS-OIC), the Preferential Tariff Scheme (PRETAS) and TPS-OIC Rules of Origin will inevitably boost the intra-OIC trade, once the OIC Member States complete the necessary procedures to make this system operational.

Still, would the OIC be able to set up an Islamic Common Market in the long term and strengthen the economic policy coordination among its member states – which are clearly set goals at different Islamic Summits? Studies on the Islamic Common Market are scarce but mainly in favour of the idea of gradual economic integration of OIC Member States (Amin and Hamid, 2009). Nevertheless, the answer to this question is strongly dependent to numerous constraints and challenges that the OIC cooperation face.

Political commitment is a key factor for a successful development of multilateral cooperation, determining the level of engagement of national administrations. Without the support of governments and other national authorities, the chances are small for an initiative to be successfully implemented. Unfortunately, existing bilateral disputes within the OIC geography largely fall within the political sphere and are primarily related to differently perceived “truths” regarding specific historical events and the recent conflicts. Bilateral disputes encompass a vast range of issues - from unresolved borders or territorial disputes, to the status of refugees from the neighbouring countries. Sluggish addressing of open issues and their occasional deterioration hamper stabilization of political relations and smooth course of OIC cooperation.

At the same time, despite fifty years of OIC cooperation, national interests remain strong and tend to determine the success of certain OIC initiatives. The key question in this regard is whether the OIC Member States will develop enough political cohesion to act as one on a wide range of

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<sup>6</sup> With resolution NO.2/46-LO the Council of Foreign Ministers at its 46<sup>th</sup> Session held on March 2019 in Abu Dhabi adopted the rules governing cooperation between the OIC General Secretariat and non-governmental organisations.





international issues, or whether OIC will remain a grouping of countries with strongly different nationalisms and foreign policies.

Low resilience to external influences in some OIC Member States exposed to aspirations of different global and regional players is another factor that affects the political commitment for effective cooperation. These influences have often divisive impact on the countries aspiring to take full advantage of OIC cooperation. In recent few years, it is as if history was heading backward towards the era of great-power politics and interstate rivalries. If that is going to be the world of the upcoming period, there will be little room for hope.

The lack of appropriate institutional, human and financial capacities to support political willingness is also a barrier to more satisfactory results of OIC cooperation. This means that commitments of Member States are not always coupled with the tools needed to reach the objectives, or to put forward the appropriate mechanisms and incentives which are agreed at the political level. Moreover, although OIC cooperation structures are more or less known to the central authorities, not all of them actually know how to resort to the tools that are available. On the other hand, insufficient intra-governmental coordination is also a limiting factor for successful participation in OIC cooperation.

When talking about institutional capacities, one should not forget that limited institutional resources of OIC Member States must be distributed to a large number of other international and regional initiatives - out of the OIC cooperation structures. This present a real challenge for less developed OIC Member States in terms of being represented everywhere and at a satisfactory levels.

Against this background, the real problem of OIC is how to deal with such constraints and challenges. Nevertheless, one thing is for sure that the OIC Member States will have to trust more and increase support to each other in the future because, if they do not, their self-interest will be adversely affected.



## 4 Concluding Remarks and Policy Recommendations

The OIC is a five decades old broad multilateral platform which assumes different roles in the many areas of political, social and economic life. It struggles to achieve international goals through acting as a block, address the global challenges and improve the quality of life of citizens of OIC Member States through joint efforts and concrete projects and activities. It is encouraging to see that today OIC has an intensive agenda that will inevitably continue to generate positive outcomes for its member states.

As it is reflected in different resolutions and decisions, the governments of OIC Member States have realized that they have responsibilities towards each other and that they have many challenges in common. There are several reasons for this: First, interdependence in things both good and bad, is what governs international relations in today's globalized world. OIC Member States are inevitably tied together by investments, trade, transport and energy infrastructure, innovations and the like. On the other hand, resolution of the issues, whose nature and dimension exceed the national area such as migrations, organized crimes, terrorism and environmental threats, requires transnational cross-border cooperation. This modern interdependence calls for the corresponding modern approaches in foreign policy making of OIC Member States.

Second, globalization, in general, has greatly increased competition in world markets. For that reason, the OIC Member States are deepening their interaction with the global economy through unilateral reforms as well as multilateral approaches to deepening economic integration. In the era when developed economies are facing sluggish economic growth, the OIC Member States are compelled to rely more on domestic and regional growth rates.

Today, when the OIC cooperation generates potentials more than ever, it is difficult to imagine its member states without acting and moving together. The OIC has to intensify reforms to strengthen member states' economies and act together to address challenges that concern all. The new vision of acting through ten-year working programmes - supported with different sectoral strategic plans, provides a good opportunity to ensure continuity in OIC work and advance in achievements.





In the next period, it will be of key importance to continue the vision-building process and to identify priorities of future OIC cooperation through comprehensive and transparent consultations with all relevant stakeholders – particularly national authorities and the OIC institutions. A clear vision for the future will, to a large extent, shape the strategic orientation of the OIC cooperation and of each individual member state for the period beyond 2025.

The OIC will have to continue with providing a favourable political climate and a high level political commitment to implement agreed strategic decisions and policy measures in different areas of cooperation. However, OIC cooperation should be all-inclusive - which can be achieved by engaging all member states on subjects which are important and of interest to the OIC, and by inspiring them to work and benefit together, thus drive the OIC cooperation to greater heights.

There is also necessity to address the OIC cooperation in a more strategic manner which requires:

- Following a more focused and result-oriented approach in the implementation of activities. The OIC should prioritize the needs that are of the most substantive importance and target outcomes where cooperation can generate the greatest impact.
- Ensuring the coherence of OIC approaches with the needs and priorities identified at the national level by establishing a link between the national needs and OIC solutions being proposed.
- Developing more effective working ties among the OIC organs and institutions, including between OIC and international organizations and other stakeholders, aimed at generating synergies, innovative ideas and new regional programmes in areas in which needs are identified.

The first step in providing more strategic orientation to OIC cooperation should start with developing third ten-year programme of action for the period after 2025, based on the achievements attained, and in-depth knowledge of the needs of OIC Member States. However, unlike the previous cases, third ten-year programme of action should be developed in a more decentralized way, which means that it should translate the will and the interests of member states, OIC organs and institutions and their external partners into a unique vision through an inclusive and transparent process. This approach requires a long and complex process of consultations, workshops, engaging considerable human and other resources and adjustments to numerous expectations and proposals. The process of identifying and prioritizing actions to be taken should include reviews of national strategies, global development goals and donor plans. Such an interactive process will lead to achieving a full ownership of member states in setting up mid-term strategic guidelines and help to attain full compliance of OIC cooperation with member states' agenda.

The third ten-year programme of action should be based on clearer and more specific headline targets, to be met by 2035, using 2025 as the base year. Moreover, in order to meet these targets, the OIC Member States have to agree on: 1) policy measures required at national and regional







level; 2) the development of a comprehensive set of indicators to measure progress in the attainment of targets; and 3) a governance process for the implementation of the third ten-year programme of action. In this regard, additional consultative and/or monitoring mechanisms have to be initiated in most of the priority areas of cooperation, to facilitate the tracking, recording, monitoring and managing of an increasing number of activities. This requires a stronger platform for reaching out to all stakeholders, involving increased communication as an integral part of all OIC activities.

For increasing the potentials of OIC cooperation, as the second step, the OIC General Secretariat should play a key coordinating and streamlining role in integrating strategies and working programmes of OIC organs and institutions into the context of a third ten-year programme of action, to ensure that they are working in line with its priorities. Moreover, together with the existing Annual Coordination Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the OIC Member States, the interaction between the OIC General Secretariat and the OIC organs and institutions should evolve into a substantive coordination process, which allows for harmonization of annual work plans, as well as increased coherence and complementarities, thus avoiding overlaps and contributing to effective use of existing resources and structures. The complementary strengths, synergy and coordination among the OIC organs and institutions are essential in ensuring effective implementation of the resolutions and decisions of the OIC bodies, as well as in promoting the successful policies and activities pertinent to the achievement of targeted goals.

The OIC Member States participate in numerous other regional initiatives and processes. Many of them are inherent and emerging from the need to establish and regulate cooperation in certain fields. The OIC should conduct a survey of regional initiatives operating within the OIC Member States, in order to provide an overview of the regional cooperation landscape and assess possible actions to make their already existing regional projects as a part of OIC cooperation. Establishing a data base and a single portal on all regional structures and mechanisms covering at least partially the OIC Member States, would be a good step for regular sharing of information on their activities, for facilitating their interconnections and networking towards achieving the OIC targets.

By enforcing the implementation mechanism of OIC cooperation in above mentioned way, the OIC General Secretariat will be in the position to have a stronger role in assisting interaction and coordination with different donors which are active in the OIC Member States. Having in mind that adequate financial resources are not often available, thus constraining effectiveness of OIC initiatives, coordination among various donors and harmonization of their approaches will enable the Member States better use of financial opportunities.

In order to point out the opportunities the OIC sub-regions offer and support the development of economic corridors and regional value chains in particular strategic sectors, the OIC has to introduce the concept of Macro-Regional Cooperation, as it is a case in European Union. Macro-regional programmes can bring added value to the OIC, both strategically and politically.





Strategically, because they can bring opportunities for different joint development projects, improving the access to additional financial sources and enabling better use of experience of more developed OIC Member States. From the political perspective, contribution to the improvement of bilateral and multilateral relations in the OIC geography may be expected.

Of course, improvement of bilateral and multilateral relations should remain among the top priorities of OIC. The OIC has always attempted to resolve disputes among its member states by peaceful means. Now, it should take a more proactive stance in dealing with peace and security issues faced by the Islamic world and become a more strategic partner to the UN and other international organisations in addressing the emerging security challenges as well as global threats.

In order to upgrade the OIC cooperation mechanism in the manner mentioned above, the OIC has to develop a rational recruitment policy based on merit and professionalism, thus recruit well-trained and qualified staff in sufficient numbers. Moreover, as proposed in the Ten-Year Programme of Action to Meet the Challenges Facing the Muslim Ummah in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (OIC, 2005), the OIC need to create an Executive Body, to ensure the follow-up of resolutions. A proposal to set up such an organ was addressed at different OIC high level meetings, but no solution is reached so far (Bacik, 2011).

As a way of concluding, it would be good to remind the OIC Member States that some nations succeed because they were destined to, but that most nations succeed because they were determined to. Considerable stabilization and economic progress can be achieved provided that these recommendations were implemented and the governments of the OIC Member States extended their full support.



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