

## Intercultural Cooperation of National Libraries: A Case Study of ECO National Libraries

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### Abstract:

*ECO countries are considerably close in geographical and cultural terms. This significant relationship originates from religious beliefs although there are different nationalities and racial groups in this region. The historical and cultural ties originate from the last centuries of Muslim rule in Central Asia and Caucasus. That is why Eco countries have cultural and literal works in common like old Qur'ans, Divan Hafez, Golestan Sa'di, rare copies of Shahnameh and other historical resources. In addition there are some commonalities in art, handcrafts, language, literature, poetry and prose. These common backgrounds in the region indicate living symbols and evidence of a similar history and life. National libraries are responsible for preservation of documentary heritage of the country. If we provide an effective way of cooperation of national libraries then we will gather the resources together and a wealth of valuable historical and cultural collections will be revived. This paper methodology is library research. Findings showed Eco countries have necessary requirements for an intercultural relationship. They have similarity with speaking and writing, religion, works and common resources. Results showed that eco countries have a population of 460 million people of which 90% are Muslim and Islam as the dominant religion in the countries is accepted. For better cooperation among the national libraries a union called EFLA has been established consisting of heads of ECO National Libraries and Archives. In this paper some suggestions presented so as to further cooperation of Eco national libraries. E.g. designing multilingual databases with cooperation of special work groups with presence of experts of members, multilingual catalogues and bibliographies, standard abstracts, exchanging experiences about preservation and maintenance of resources, holding courses about restoration of old*

*manuscripts by countries which have better equipments in this field, provision of digital copies of manuscripts and storing them in a database etc.*

**Keywords:** Eco National libraries, Cooperation, National libraries, intercultural cooperation, Eco countries, cooperation drivers

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## **Introduction**

ECO countries<sup>1</sup> regardless of geographical boundaries, political, economic and administrative systems have common culture that is heritage of thousands of years of their history. The culture which progress of humanity in different fields of science and technology today is indebted to. This common culture can be profound deep bond between nations and a new opportunity for development of ECO region and recreation of their civilization-building role on the world stage (Statue of EFLA<sup>2</sup>, 2009).

Eco countries were in principle a single entity that was gradually separated. According to Mostowfi (2001, p. 184-186) in all these regions there is unity in the fields of myths and fictional-historical heroes. Features of pre-history era, discovered civilizations in Central Asia during the Neolithic indicate many similarities with some areas in the territory of today's geopolitics of Iran. Looking at the results of the discoveries of the establishment of the first communities in the villages and agriculture and also during the Copper and Bronze Age in the region and comparing them with known effects of cultures and civilizations in Afghanistan and Iran present a lot of information on the long bonds in the region.

Cultural ties in the region after Islam due to the great amount of works left as historical sites, categories, single buildings and objects and the existence of numerous books and inscriptions, and many others is clear that does not need to be proved. According to Hasankhany (2000) joint customs, traditions, history and religion in the region has made it emanate as a cultural integration unity regarding racial, ethnic and linguistic differences and this is why there are strong social correlation among the countries of the region. Common works and resources which various symbols and evidences have endorsed and are called written heritage, originated from this common culture and similar backgrounds which can help further integration.

## **Intercultural relationship of ECO member countries**

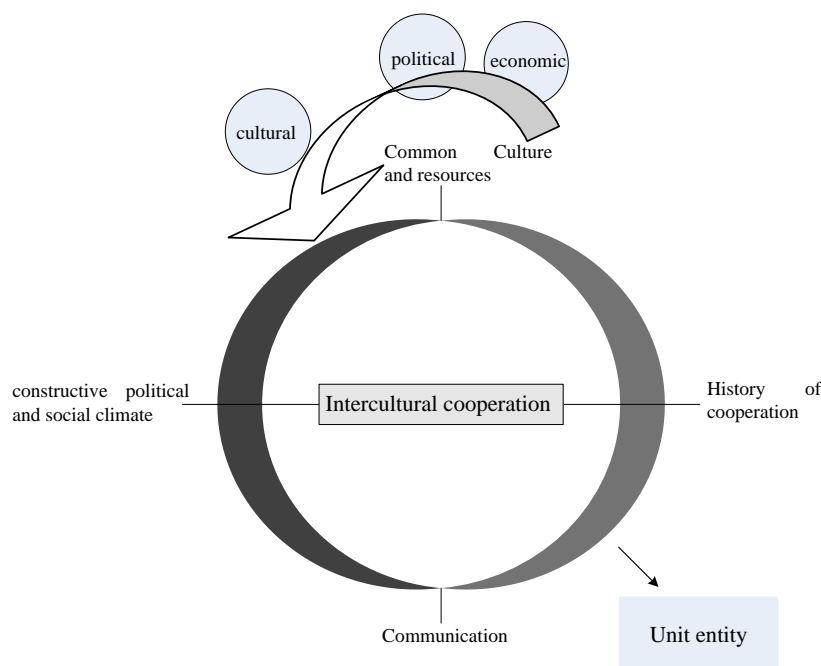
Social and cultural integration is related to common educational and cultural approaches and development of social relations and expansion of exchanges. This form of integration is considered for accepting and facilitating political and economic convergence. The factors that strengthen the social aspect of convergence are shared values and common norms, common political culture, history, language and culture (Hasankhani, 2000).

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<sup>1</sup> [Islamic Republic of Afghanistan](#), [Republic of Azerbaijan](#), [Islamic Republic of Iran](#), [Republic of Kazakhstan](#), [Kyrgyz Republic](#), [Islamic Republic of Pakistan](#), [Republic of Tajikistan](#), [Republic of Turkey](#), [Turkmenistan](#), [Republic of Uzbekistan](#)

<sup>2</sup> . ECO Federation of Libraries and Archives

Based on previous studies and current requirements, we can depict inter-cultural communications amongst ECO countries as below (Figure 1).



**Figure1: Inter-cultural communication in ECO member countries**

According to this model, regional integration at first was in economic and business fields and emerged after World War II. Regional integration can be assumed as a multi-dimensional process that includes political, diplomatic, security and finally cultural dimensions in addition to economic aspects (Rafie and Mazlumi, 2012). ECO countries have essentials of an inter-cultural communication. Common culture and resources, history of interaction and cooperation within ECO (Economic Cooperation) and the political convergences such as the holding of the Parliamentary Assembly of the ECO region confirm this. This cooperation, in the light of communication, can obtain unit entity for the purpose of competing against the important world powers.

### **The role of National Libraries in effective convergence**

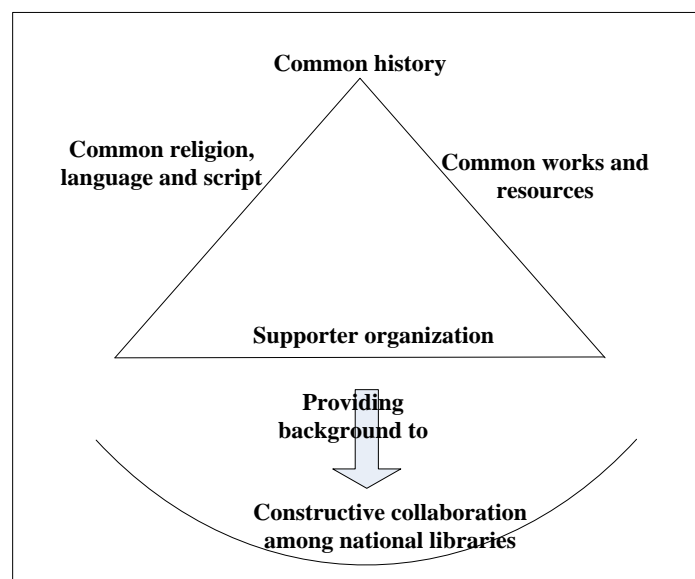
Traditionally, national libraries are as the most democratic and accessible social institutions and library service providers (Fedorov, 2011). In the UNESCO Guidelines for legislation for national library services, a national library is defined as an institution, primarily funded (directly or indirectly) by the state, which is responsible for comprehensively collecting, bibliographically recording, preserving and making available the documentary heritage (primarily published materials of all types) emanating from or relating to its country; and which furthers the effective and efficient functioning of the country's libraries through the management of nationally significant collections, the provision of an infrastructure, the coordination of activities in the country's library and information system, international liaison, and the exercise of leadership (Lor, 2003, p. 1).

While National libraries can help information centers and libraries in the country, they can also consider as scientific and cultural focal point at international and regional levels. Planning about international and regional cooperation is a daunting task which makes the position of a country distinctive and dynamic among other countries. These policies are considered as a means to improve communication and increase understanding among policy

makers and recipients of these policies (people, organizations, libraries, etc.) (Prasad and Singh, 2002, p.1). Conference of Directors of National Libraries (CDNL) believes that the best way to support national libraries in developing countries is the idea of development of cooperating libraries (Anthoine, and Pilling, 1995, p. 215). Former head of National Library and Archives of Islamic Republic of Iran, Mr Ashari, mentioned that the relationship among the national libraries is as relationship among cultures and nations and added cultural communication is the basis of political relations and national archives and libraries as the memory of nations must always be pioneer in this field (the signing of a memorandum of cooperation among the national libraries of Iran and Zimbabwe, 2009).

If we can effectively provide the cooperation of ECO National Libraries and can make this collection together then we will revive an invaluable treasure of cultural and historical values. A statistical survey has shown that in 1983, while the number of all scholars in Islamic countries studying and searching in science and technology was 4500, the number of these professionals were reported 1.500.000 in the former Soviet (Abdolsalam, cited in: Razmara, 2008). However, detailed information on these data is not available. Since national libraries in each country are responsible for collecting the written heritage, if they can effectively provide cooperative fields and get together resources, a valuable collection of historical and cultural values will be acquired and restored. National libraries as the scientific and cultural memories of the nations and heirs of written heritage have been able to pass sweet and bitter events throughout history and preserved valuable scientific and cultural heritage for the future generations (Statute of EFLA, 2009).

According to the above-mentioned basic commonalities, one could argue that common works and resources originate from the common history, customs, religion, language and script. If supporter organizations have the same idea about this, then there will be an opportunity for cooperation among ECO national libraries which they themselves benefit from it at first stage. This cooperation will be continued if member countries plan to develop common works and resources and preserve the history of their civilization. By studying these components we can draw a framework for cooperation among the national libraries as below:



**Figure2. Framework of cooperation among National Libraries of ECO member countries**

## Drivers of cooperation of ECO National Libraries

Regional integration in the national libraries of ECO has several drivers that makes the cooperation possible and feasible and in some cases inevitable. Geographic Proximity is one of the factors contributing to the development of regional cooperation and one of these drivers. There are several fields which ECO national libraries could cooperate in. Some of these fields include holding workshops and short courses about Library and Information science, holding workshops on the restoration of the old manuscripts, exchange of qualified personnel in national libraries of member countries, holding joint book fairs of the ECO countries, organizing scientific lectures by inviting domestic and foreign experts, holding seminars and regional conferences etc. In all aspects of cooperation among the national libraries of the region, geographical proximity can accelerate the development of effective cooperation. The geographical proximity is visible in the map below:



**Figure3. Map of ECO member countries**

Another driver is the requirements of international system. Developing countries alone are without any facilities and do not have the possibility to own all the factors regarding restrictions of investment, human resources, management and technology. To this end, since a few decades ago they were trying to form unions among members. One of the unions is EFLA. ECO national libraries have established a union called EFLA in the first meeting of the heads of ECO national libraries. So far, three meetings with the heads of ECO national libraries have been hold in Iran in 2007, Azerbaijan in 2009 and Turkey in 2010. The statute of EFLA has been approved in 2009 in 13 articles and 2 notes. EFLA aims at promoting scientific- research, education and culture activities in 5 dimensions: the creation of a common information base, completing the acquisition and collection of resources, conservation, preservation and restoration of resources, setting standards, organizing resources, developing library education and research. This union founded and approved in 2007 which is going to act under dependent and supervision of the ECO Cultural Institute (Report on the first meeting of the Heads of ECO National libraries, 2007). The ultimate goal of all the unions in the world is rising regional power and increasing competition. Various meetings at the level of heads of state and directors of national libraries create appropriate opportunities for collaboration among members, which in turn can approach the political positions and adopt joint positions in international forums. Formation of three sessions of Heads of ECO National Libraries and approval of EFLA Union prove the fact. Common history is one of the other drivers. One of the most important factors affecting the integration of these countries is Islamic and cultural factors. According to some available statistics, about 90% of the population of about 460 million people living in ECO region is Muslim and Islam

is as the dominant accepted religion in these countries. The following table shows the population of the region and their religion:

**Table 1. Population and religion of ECO countries**

N	Country	Population	religion
1	Iran	79853900	%98Muslim
2	Turkey	80964485	%99Muslim
3	Afghanistan	31108077	%99Muslim
4	Uzbekistan	28661637	%88Muslim
5	Tajikistan	7910041	%90Muslim
6	Turkmenistan	5113040	%89Muslim
7	Kazakhstan	17736896	%47Muslim
8	Kyrgyz	5548042	%75Muslim
9	Pakistan	193238868	%96Muslim
10	Azerbaijan	9590159	%93Muslim

Source: Central Information Agency (CIA) and data.worldbank

According to the above table, Islam is the most common religion in countries of ECO member.

ECO countries have language and script in common. Most common language in these countries include: Russian, Persian, Turkish and Arabic. While ECO National Libraries have resources in their own official language they also preserve numerous books and manuscripts in languages of other member countries. Also in other Eco national libraries, there are invaluable resources especially precious manuscripts in various languages that are common to the Member States. In case of communication and collaboration among national libraries, access or digital acquisition of the resources will be possible. Cooperation at the level of national libraries can be set to identify a number of private collections and libraries in other Member States. When the resources of each member state are accessible for other members then we will reach the maximum joint cooperation. As examples:

- National Library of Uzbekistan preserves resources into Russian, Turkish, Arabic, Persian and European languages.(Alijani, 2002, p. 154). There are about 200,000 volumes of manuscripts and rare books [print] in this library which most of them are written in the Persian language (cultural characteristics of Uzbekistan, 2010). More than 40,000 manuscripts in Persian, Arabic, Turkish, Chagatai, Uzbek, etc. are available in 23 libraries of this country (the treasures of Islamic manuscripts in the world in 2008, 1: p. 137 to 155)
- Most of the resources available at National Library of Turkmenistan are in the Turkmen and Russian language. Among them most are in Russian language (Alijani 2002, p. 632). In department of foreign resources of this library, there are some books and journals in English, German, French, Turkish, Arabic, Persian, etc. (Alijani 2002, p. 633). Also there are 5434 manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Turkmen, and Uzbek in three libraries of this country. (The treasures of Islamic manuscripts in the world, 2009, 2: p. 933-940).
- Tajikistan and Azerbaijan National Libraries preserve books in Persian, Turkish and Russian. About 10,000 manuscripts in 8 Libraries of Tajikistan are in Arabic, Pashto, Persian, Tajik, Turkish, and Urdu and so on (treasure of Islamic manuscripts in the world, 2007, 2: p.

911-920). Nearly 16,000 manuscripts are in four libraries of Azerbaijan in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Chagatai, Ottoman Turkish, Uzbek and so on (treasure of Islamic manuscripts in the world in 2009, 1: p. 35-42).

- In the exhibition of Persian manuscripts that was held at National Library of Turkey in Ankara over one hundred and fifty manuscripts Persian manuscripts selected from the collection of 1,500 manuscripts in National Library of Turkey were displayed for those who were interested in Persian manuscripts. They were invaluable examples of Islamic ethical and literature related to past centuries. 1500 Persian manuscript ... 2009). There are more than 300,000 manuscripts in more than a hundred libraries in this country in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish and so on (treasure of Islamic manuscripts in the world in 2009, 2: p. 955-1057). Based on the above collections which their amount is certainly more than mentioned, the necessity for cooperation of national libraries of the member states is high.

## **Conclusion**

Iran and ECO countries are able to mutually share their experiences with researchers and scientists of each other based on achievements in scientific and new technologies fields (Nowrouzi & Velayati, 2009, p. 165). For example these countries are able to share their experiences about preservation and maintenance of those invaluable manuscripts and rare books which are declining. However the areas of cooperation can be very diverse. One of the most important strategies to facilitate cooperation among member libraries is designing a centralized information center for countries in the ECO region. Such center will end in further cooperation of these countries in cultural issues. Now EFLA secretariat is located at National Library of Iran. So as to promote the affairs, an active center would be an appropriate option for coordination with the agreement of the directors of ECO national libraries.

There are numerous manuscripts in ECO member countries. If we prepare digital copies of them and establish an information network, then we will be able to use these rare and unique resources. Holding different conferences with the presence of directors of National Libraries of ECO member countries (3 conferences) from 2007 and approval of EFLA indicate willingness of these countries to cooperate and share resources.

It is noteworthy that cooperation of national libraries can have broader dimensions. If we establish integrated information centers then we will act in different fields. ECO union catalogue or bibliographic network is considered as the first requirements of such a center. ECO countries should prepare and publish union catalogue of books in the fields of culture, history and Islamic art, Islamic manuscripts, periodicals, cultural heritage, as well as a periodical index (Ehsanughlou, 1990, p. 34). In this regard two issues are emphasized: (1) minimum standards, preferably international standards should be applied. This is a decisive precondition for cooperation of various institutions and 2. Information sharing requires common principles for linking of the records (Hedegard, 2005, p. 263) that national libraries need to adhere to these principles.

The basic strategy of developing cooperation among the libraries is standardization (Bhaskara Rao, 1998, p. 213-214). In order to facilitate optimal collaboration and communication of information beyond the national and regional boundaries, it is necessary to provide common standards for the different aspects of professional activities and use of information, such as bibliographic and abstract and index services and a multilingual thesaurus for the region, designing database, standards for lending services between libraries, document delivery systems etc. to identify the required standard, international standards should be considered.

Working groups should be selected from experts of ECO countries to comment on providing standards (Abd al-Hamid, 1990, p. 14-15).

Sharing experiences about preservation and maintenance of resources, holding courses about restoration of old copies and manuscripts by countries which have more facilities in this field, provision of digital copy of manuscripts and displaying them in a joint database, holding workshops and short courses, seminars and regional conferences in the field of library and information science, organizing scientific lectures by inviting domestic and foreign experts, joint publication of books and magazines on topics of common, joint exhibition with the participation of the ECO countries etc. all are examples of activities which can be carried out only if an integrated information center and a central coordinating unit is designed.

Other areas of effective cooperation include:

- Cultural week of Eco in National Libraries of the region: it can be held periodically and once a year in each country with participation of directors of National Libraries. During this week meeting of directors, workshops, seminars can be planned.
- Holding meetings in honor of high-level personalities of the region
- Giving grants in the region for issues with an emphasis on common culture, art and architecture, and civilization.
- Holding periodic seminars about common issues and highlight researchers in the region
- Holding regional conferences on the topic of culture, art and architecture.

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