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IRAN-PAKISTAN-TURKEY: Courting CIS Muslim States

Leaders of Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey will meet this weekend in Tehran for the first summit of the largely dormant Economic Cooperation Organization. They have already agreed to admit as new members Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—which have been invited to send observers—and Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan have also applied to join, according to press reports. Previous ECO agreements called for joint development projects, an investment and development bank, and insurance and shipping companies. The leaders also plan to lay groundwork for an Islamic common market.

Comment: Renewed interest in the ECO is being driven in large part by the breakup of the USSR and the three original members' competition for political influence and economic advantage in the CIS Muslim states. Tehran, which has already sponsored some of the states for membership in such bodies as the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Nonaligned Movement, may try to upstage its ECO partners. Turkey sees Iran as a major competitor and consequently gives more priority to brokering links between the CIS Muslim states and the West than to the ECO. Pakistan wants stronger ties to Iran and Turkey as well as links to the CIS Muslims to bolster its regional support against India.



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