

**Inaugural Statement by H.E. Dr. Hassan Rouhani, the Honorable President of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the 21st Meeting of Council of Ministers
(Tehran, 26th November, 2013)**

**Honorable Chairman
Distinguished Secretary General
Honorable Ministers and Heads of Delegation
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen**

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to address this meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Economic Cooperation Organization. I would like to welcome the distinguished delegations to the Islamic Republic of Iran and wish you all a successful meeting and a pleasant stay in Tehran.

Dear Participants,

Three decades have passed since the establishment of the Economic Cooperation Organization by its three founding Member States. Acknowledging the benefits and advantages of the regional economic cooperation, another seven countries from within the Region managed to join the Organization in 1992, leading to more expanded cooperation. Two decades of expanded cooperation among most important countries of South Asia, Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus has developed a new pattern of regional cooperation which has yielded notable achievements in areas such as trade, energy, agriculture, industry, mine, environment, banking, science and technology, private sector partnership, education, culture as well as transport and transit, in particular. Notwithstanding these achievements, we are still unsatisfied with the current level of cooperation and have a long way ahead towards new horizons for cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are aware, ECO Member States enjoy huge potential for wider and deeper cooperation in different sectors. The brilliant history of the Silk Road provides convincing evidence in this regard. Given the circumstances surrounding the global economy and its related recent crises, regional cooperation frameworks can secure enhanced economic integration while minimizing the negative impacts of fluctuations in international economy.

A potentially dynamic regional organization, and with population of about 450 million and eight million square kilometers in area, huge mineral, oil and gas reserves, as well as the exquisite geo-strategic position along the North-South and East-West corridors, Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) is to turn into one of the most booming regions in the world.

Dear Participants,

In 2012, the total external trade of the ECO Member States exceeded 817 billion US\$ with the 10.3%, equivalent to 83 billion US\$, intra-regional trade record. Total Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) of ECO region in 2011 was amounted to 41 billion US\$, 2.7% of the total global FDI.

Two decades of regional cooperation and interaction is our roadmap for future. In its third decade, ECO shall realize its full potential for highest level regional cooperation. The current level of 10% intra-regional trade is neither acceptable nor defensible. It is encouraging that some necessary infrastructures have been developed in the first two decades in areas such as transport transit as well as regulatory frameworks. There is a similar need for developing necessary financial and banking mechanisms within the framework of the ECO Trade and Development Bank and other arrangements. There is no doubt that expansion of intra-regional trade will bring about promising prospects for further success in other areas with direct bearing on the economic development of individual Member States as well as the Region as a whole. Economic Cooperation Organization constitutes a unique and great opportunity for the whole Region and the Member States. However, ECO in the third decade of its expanded cooperation needs a series of reform measures.

I propose that the Honorable Ministers in their meeting today explore the possibility and scope of the required reforms and make necessary decisions accordingly. Any reform process shall be built on the experiences of the last two decades with a view to enabling ECO to respond to the needs and requirements of the Member States and Region as a whole. These reforms should address regulatory, structural, institutional, and other aspects of the Organization, elevating it to a more professional and efficient organization in the Region, and enabling it to deal with the needs and aspirations of the membership as well as making it more appealing to outside world.

**Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The Islamic Republic of Iran accords high priority to ECO and its enhancement, taking into account the principle of mutual respect and respect for rights and interests of the Member States and peoples of the Region. We do support further expansion of cooperation in the context of the Organization as the best regional arrangement for cooperation. I am very much hopeful that in the light of envisaged reforms and broadened horizons, ECO will foster more expanded and deeper cooperation across the Region thereby better ensuring the prosperity and higher standards of living for people of the Member States.

I thank you for your attention.
