

**Statement by H.E. Ambassador Dr. Shamil Aleskerov, ECO Secretary General
at the 25th Meeting of the Regional Planning Council
(1-5 March, 2015 - ECO Secretariat)**

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is my great pleasure and honor to address you in this 25th Regional Planning Council Meeting. I would like to extend my warm welcome to the esteemed delegates, particularly those who have come all the way from their respective countries to participate and enrich our discussions during the several sessions of this meeting.

Your presence here, in this important meeting, is a strong sign of the commitment of the member states to the goals and the objectives of our organization. I also would like to thank the Missions of the Member States in Tehran for their contribution to convening this meeting here in Tehran and for all assistance extended to the delegates participating in the RPC.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Regional Planning Council (RPC) is one of the most important forums of our organization. This body has the duty to discuss and recommend all the future activities of ECO. It has the duty and the capacity to review the previous works of the organization and make decisions about new projects and programmes to move forward for a more effective and efficient organization. Basically this forum shapes the future of the organization.

This year marks an important milestone in the history of ECO. We are approaching to the end of the time period specified in the ECO Vision 2015. We will have extensive deliberations with regard of drafting a new vision for the next decade of ECO. Another important issue which will also be discussed is the current reform process that we have to undertake in line with the EPG recommendations. We will need to clarify some important issues in this regard, which will have critical influence on the future of the organization.

There is a profound desire among the member states about the orientation of the organization toward a more project based one. For the moment this goal might be a little away from us to be realized. But, at least we can improve implementation of the activities in our work programme. The current implementation rate is well below fifty percent. We need urgently solve this problem since it has a serious negative effect on the effectiveness and the image of the organization.

With regard of the implementation rate of our activities; this body, RPC, can play an important role. I call on all delegates participating in different sectoral sessions of this meeting, make sure about the venue, date and hosting facilities, before proposing a specific activity to be included into the next programme of the work. Please avoid proposing uncertain or pending activities which are remaining in our programmes of work without any tangible action for several years. Achieving a higher implementation rate through the careful

consideration by this body, would be an important contribution to restore the image and the future of this organization.

Once more, I would like to thank all of you for the participation and the insight that you brought with yourself to enrich this meeting. Now let me very briefly inform the house on the sectoral activities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

(First about Trade) Trade cooperation leading to economic integration of the region is always high on the ECO's agenda. Trade is an engine for developing cooperation in other sectors and therefore it is vital for sustained socio-economic development of the region. In terms of increasing inter-regional and intra-regional trade ECO has achieved visible progress. Several arrangements for a more meaningful trade relationship at the regional level have been put in place in the recent past. In 2013, the cumulative world trade of the ten ECO countries reached US\$ 827 billion. This included exports of US\$ 371 billion and imports of US\$ 456 billion. At the same time the intra-ECO trade still accounts only for 10% of the total trade of its Members. In the same year, ECO countries in total received about US\$35 billion as foreign direct investment (FDI), which cannot be recognized as a satisfactory level.

One crucial step however is yet to be taken. It is the implementation of ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA), the flagship preferential trading arrangement of the region. ECOTA implementation would help enhance intra regional trade, reach the economies of scale and improve competition in the region and will also constitute a major step towards establishing a Free Trade Area in the region. In order to have such an arrangement, we need to transcend narrow, short-term gains and instead aim for collective and long-term interests. Some of the ECOTA Contracting Parties have not yet completed the relevant requirements for the Agreement's implementation at the top of which is the failure to submit their Lists of tariff concessions. In order to register a forward movement on exchange of ECOTA Lists and implementation of tariff concession, the 6th Meeting of the ECOTA Cooperation Council is expected be held in the 2nd quarter of 2015 in Ankara. We earnestly request these Member States to expedite provision of lists preferably before the 6th Meeting of the Cooperation Council to enable the exporters in the region to benefit from preferential market access. Likewise, the non signatory Member States are encouraged to join ECOTA.

The 3rd Phase of the ECO-UNIDO Trade capacity Building Project in standardization and Quality is in progress. The Project Document was signed between ECO and UNIDO in March 2014. The relevant Ministries and Departments of Member States are requested to give their full support to the implementation of the project. The Project will constitute a major step towards elimination of non tariff barriers in the region and shoring up export competitiveness of Member States.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Now about (transport) The previous RPC meeting was informed of the successful completion of the corridor studies under ECO/IDB Joint Project on implementation of TTFA culminating in preparation of two comprehensive development plans, notably, ECO Road Network Development Plan and ECO Railway Network Development Plan.

To follow the RPC's recommendations we are interacting with ECO-TDB to organize the ECO Regional Partnership Forum where financial institutions, multilateral donors and other interested parties to be invited in order to enable the member states to present their major corridor efficient projects for potential financiers.

The study under ECO Regular Monitoring of Trucks (ECO-RMT) showed that all elements, including physical infrastructure and cross-border cooperation, exist among the Member States to increase transit operations in the region, and at the same time the study identified the main physical and non-physical obstacles, notably, at border points impeding the full realization of the transit potential of the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Another important direction of work: (EME) Enhancement of energy synergy and coherence among key stakeholders still stands high on our agenda. Third ECO Ministerial Meeting on Energy/Petroleum proclaimed 2013-2022 as "ECO Decade for Enhanced Energy Cooperation". We remain hopeful that projected extension/revision of ECO Plan of Action for Energy/petroleum Cooperation (2011-2015) will capture priority areas for reinvigoration of potential partnership frameworks and key action points for engagement of regional and global energy players.

On energy trade some notable achievements reached since the 1st Experts Group Meeting on "Establishment of ECO Regional Electricity Market (REM)" in 2013. ECO Secretariat were engaged in intensive bilateral consultations with Iran and Turkey and elaborated draft Terms of Reference (TOR) for a feasibility study on establishment of ECO REM. The 1st Trilateral Meeting between Iran, Turkey and ECO Secretariat on "ECO Regional Electricity Market" held in Ankara on 25-26 September 2014, was an important follow-up event to implement the key action points decided before and paved the way for further dialogue to create synergies and benefit from the complementarities.

Growing interest of ECO Member States in renewable energy matters is in line with special and important complementary role of the renewable energy in ECO's overall energy mandate. ECO-IRENA interaction has been reinvigorated during reported period.

2014 was a milestone year for Secretariat's environmental dimension, as we succeeded in stimulating policy debates for development of appropriate frameworks for regional and global partnerships. The "ECO Consultative Ministerial Meeting on Environment" was held on 25 June 2014 in Nairobi,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

About (*agriculture*) Agricultural development with the focus on food security is one of the main axis of sectoral activities of ECO Secretariat. Presently, agriculture constitutes more than one tenth of the overall regional output, and provides income for about one-third of the total regional population

Given the population growth and demand for more and secure food in the region, there is a genuine need to intensify cooperation among the Member States. In cooperation with international organizations such as FAO, ECO is trying to establish an institutional basis for long term cooperation for the purpose of achieving sustainable agricultural development and food security.

In cooperation with FAO, the ECO Secretariat has pursued an integrated and comprehensive program for food security (RPFS) which focuses on enhancing agricultural production and trade capabilities in our region.

Within the context of the implementation of the ECO-RPFS, the joint ECO/FAO-SEC Project on Seed Sector Development in the region mainly financed by Turkey is one of the fruitful example of this. Its implementation started in May 2013 and hopefully will be completed by the end of next month, this year. The project will contribute to develop a mechanism/protocol and policy framework essential to addressing sustainable, environmentally friendly seed production, supply and trade system.

Recently, a Project Proposal on Technical Assistance for the Formulation of Strategies for the Control of Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR) at Global and Regional Levels, prepared by the technical services of FAO, has been signed between ECO and FAO. The main objective of the said project is to update existed strategies and prepare a Global Strategy and Programme for the eradication of the PPR. FAO and ECO would like to further cooperation on the issue of trans-boundary animal and livestock diseases and water. We urge the Member States to participate in the implementation of this very important project.

Being one of the key economic sectors of each Member State and the region, industry requires a due strategic attention by all the Member States. Diverse industrialization level of the ECO Member States suggests different opportunities and challenges for the Region. Development of infrastructural framework as envisaged in the ECO Plan of Action on Industry, including institutions and regulations, is the most important and immediate need for enhancing industrial cooperation.

In implementing the Industry objectives, the 6th High Level Working Group on Standardization, Conformity Assessment, Accreditation and Metrology and the Workshop on Conformity assessment were organized last month, in Iran to follow up and expedite establishment of the Regional Institute for Standardization, Conformity Assessment, Accreditation and Metrology.

The historical and cultural commonalities provide the ECO Region with tremendous potentials for tourism cooperation as an everlasting and sustainable asset for economic development. ECO Region is the inherent of the history, culture, architecture, art and traditions of the ancient Silk Road, promotion of which will help, among others, establish closer economic interconnections as well as cultural affinity. Relatively new sectors of tourism industry like ecotourism, health tourism and religious tourism are being developed in the world, which also needs due attention in the ECO Region. Different elements of sustainable development are key factors in promotion of tourism industry without which continuity and progress will not be achievable. Tourism employment capacity, with the moderate investment

requirements and least environmental implications, is one of the advantages of this industry over so many other businesses.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

(human recourses) Last year we have experienced several disasters throughout the ECO Region. The mudslide of Badakhshan District in Afghanistan killed around 2000 people and damaged a significant amount of other lives. The floods in Pakistan affected millions of people. Just looking to those and several other disasters, which have happened in the last two decades, we can easily conclude that the ECO Region is a disaster prone area. Accordingly, Member States should share experiences and exchange information to be able to cope with those kind of natural disasters.

The ECO Secretariat organized the 7th International Conference on Disaster Risk Management on 4-5 June 2014 in Gabala, Azerbaijan and it was one of the biggest steps to enhance the cooperation among Member States in this field. While keeping the memories of the victims of the Bam earthquake in Iran; Kocaeli earthquake in Turkey and Kashmir earthquake in Pakistan and as well as other disasters in the Region; we the ECO Member States must cooperate more in the field of disasters.

On the other hand, Ebola crisis which occurred in the Africa Region happily did not affect our Region. But this case shows us that we must also increase the cooperation among Member States in the field of Health services . Millennium Development Goals are to be converted to the Post 2015 Millennium Development Goals by the end of this year, but up until now only 3 Member States could achieve to reach those health related Millennium Goals. The Post MDGs era is about to start and Member States should increase their capacities to fill the gaps and to get ready for this era.

Sustainable and healthy societies can only be build upon healthy individuals. While human mobility in the region is increasing the Communicable Diseases risks are also increasing through this mobility. Non-communicable diseases which are mostly seen in developed countries are also increasing risk for the aging population of the Region. Combat against HIV is another important issue that Member States must tackle with and make one of the priority of the Region. Member States should also enhance cooperation in the health related fields. I find this RPC an opportunity for ECO Region and invite Member States to enhance cooperation in the field of Health and disaster risk management by offering and hosting new activities and events.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

(Doccu) Economic prosperity cannot be achieved without political stability, peace and societal health. Therefore, ECO is implementing the joint regional strategy on 'drugs, terrorism and transnational organized crime. ECO-DOCCU in collaboration with EU has established secured system of communication for sharing of drugs related information. Moreover, ECO-DOCCU is providing valuable support as a centre of coordination to member states for strengthening the cooperation in their counter narcotics efforts. Drugs problem being a collective responsibility, I would like to encourage the member states to continue sharing information in this regard.

ECO being a region of huge diversity necessitates a diverse and dynamic approach to counter the societal problems. Illegal migration is another big problem of the region which is likely to confound with the passage of time. Assessing the need, ECO-DOCCU in collaboration with ICMPD organized a regional training on illegal migration previous year and is planning to organize more so that the maximum benefits of migration could be reaped.

I would also like to urge the respected participants to expedite the national procedures for establishment of Regional Centre for Cooperation of Anti Corruption Organizations and Ombudsmen (RCCACO) and ECO Police which will serve as channel of communication and cooperation for the member states.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

(International Relations) Development and promotion of mutually beneficial relations with the UN system and other organizations play a vital role in supporting ECO's programmes as well as enhancing its stature among the regional and international peers.

Efforts have been made to consolidate and improve the cooperative relations with the UN system and other regional and international organizations for securing support for ECO's activities and programmes in a number of important areas. The United Nations General Assembly at its 69th session adopted a biennial resolution highlighting the various facets of the cooperation between ECO and the UN system. The collaborative relationships with UNIDO, UNODC, ESCAP, UNECE, FAO and UN-OHRLS (UN Office for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States) have been maintained. Growing cooperation with UNIDO and FAO for supporting regional efforts for sustainable industrial and agricultural development respectively, is producing positive results. Collaboration with the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) has also been reactivated to secure necessary support for ECO's activities in the environment sector.

Due importance has also been attached to ECO's relations with other regional and international organizations. Joint initiatives by ECO and ASEAN are being planned to promote practical cooperation in the tourism and investment sectors. Possible areas for cooperation are also being explored for joint action in collaboration with CICA and Developing-8 Organization.

Steps have also been taken to promote ECO's cooperation with its Observer Members. A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed with the Turkic Council for furthering the existing cooperation in achieving the common goals.

The core specialized agencies in the fields of culture, science & technology and education are conducting their activities to promote cooperation in their respective areas within the broader ECO framework. The meetings of the Board of Trustees (BOT) of these institutions are planned to be held this year to reach key decisions and to review the ongoing progress. Lack of sufficient funds for these core agencies, however, remains a major problem which is adversely affecting their activities. It is hoped that in the coming period, the Member States would support these institutions in pursuing their objectives and would also actively participate in the activities of these specialized agencies.

Concluding my statement I would like to once more thank all of you for your participation and wish you successful meetings and a nice stay in Tehran.

Thank you.
