

**Statement of H.E Dr. Soleimanpour,
ECO Secretary General at the Council of Ministers in Antalya**

Excellencies,

I am highly honoured and extremely delighted to convey, Your Excellencies, the activities and achievements of the organization followed by 23rd Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers (COM). I am also privileged to extend my profound gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Turkey and H.E. Çavuşoğlu, the honorable Foreign Minister for extension of kind invitations and warm hospitality to the respected delegates in the beautiful city of Antalya. I also express my sincere appreciation to the esteemed Foreign Ministers as well as the Heads of delegations for their valued participation in this 24th Session of the COM.

Over a year and a half of the Republic of Tajikistan's chairmanship, the Economic Cooperation Organization, inspired by supreme leadership of the President of the Republic, H.E. Emamgoli Rahmon, went through a prominent period of productivity. During this time, H.E. Emamgoli Rahmon was pleased to receive the ECO Secretaries General twice, and followed-up the detailed progress of the organization in consideration of the assigned tasks under his seasoned guidance and kind patronage.

The Republic of Tajikistan, though hosted several important events during its ECO's chairmanship, the recent was 3rd ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism in the historical city of Khujand. In March 2020, Tajikistan would also be hosting an ECO Ministerial Meeting on Economy which is believed to be a landmark, conceptual and technical economic event, expecting concrete contribution to substantiate the agenda of next ECO Summit in Turkey.

I also deeply thank H.E. Mukhriddin, the honorable Foreign Minister of the Republic of Tajikistan for excellent and extensive cooperation and effective consultations as well as valued contribution to secure the ECO's aims and objectives.

Today, I am also privileged to cordially congratulate the Republic of Turkey and His Excellency, Minister Çavuşoğlu to assume the chairmanship of the ECO. I assure Your Excellency and the esteemed

Government of the Republic of Turkey that the ECO Secretariat would continue its best to secure all aims and objectives of the Organization enshrined in the Treaty of Izmir as well as the ECO Vision 2025 in close collaboration and consultation with the chair of the Organization. I am sure that the Turkey's leadership would certainly help and contribute to further flourishing the Organization as well as prosperity and development in the ECO Region.

Excellencies,

I would like to underline that the Secretariat has been pursuing the organization's objectives during the last year in line with the outcomes of the 23rd COM, focusing **firstly** on the implementation of ECO Vision 2025, **secondly** making the ECO a project-oriented organization, and **finally** fueling the spirit of ownership, partnership, and commitment to mutual obligations by implementing the organizational and institutional reforms.

As regards the implementation of ECO Vision 2025, approved during the 13th ECO Summit in Islamabad, the Secretariat, in collaboration with the ECO Regional Planning Council (**RPC**), has focused on the activities in six priority areas set out in the Vision (trade, transit transport, tourism, energy, economic growth and sustainable development and social welfare).

In 2018-19, the Organization has been making efforts to manage its activities within the available resources with a view to realizing the priority areas in a synchronized and integrated manner. The progress report on ECO Vision activities has been provided to your Excellencies in a document under the title of "ECO Vision 2025 Implementation: Progress and Assessment". **Recently**, two ministerial meetings on Transit-Transport and Tourism were convened, producing the Turkmenbashi declaration on Transport and Khujand declaration on sustainable tourism development. Our ministers in these two declarations mapped out concrete projects in line with policies and programs of the vision. Also in other high level technical meetings held in 2018-19, the same approach was followed. Having the same direction, the ECO would be holding three other ministerial meetings on agriculture and disaster risk reduction and Economy in the coming months.

Such approach provides the basis to Secretariat for adjusting its activities to make the ECO a more project-oriented organization. It is noteworthy that during the recent years, the Secretariat, in cooperation with RPC and by approval of the CPR, has been focusing primarily on

organizing priority meetings and events to achieve result in line with the decisions of the Ministers. The outcome of each meeting was believed to include project-oriented decisions so that the capacities of the organization could be utilized on projects, even small and medium. As you would kindly acknowledge, this year for the first time, the Agenda No. 7, entitled “ECO Regional Project”, has been included in the COM’s agenda to receive guidance as well as support of Your Excellencies. Thus, for the period of 2019-2020 some projects, approved by sectoral meetings are underway. In transit transport area, priority is given to three Corridors namely: Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan segment of (KTAI), Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran (KTI), Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) as well as establishing between dry ports in landlocked countries to the seaports in the ECO Region and initiating ECO Zones in these ports.

In the field of tourism, a number of projects have been defined such as the Project of ECO Unified Visa System for Foreign Tourists, ECO Tour Operators Network Project and the project of developing tourism routes among ECO tourist destinations.

In the field of agriculture, the creations of a Reference Laboratory Network in the area of food safety with the aim of facilitating the border crossing of animal products were finalized during the Meeting of ECO Heads of Veterinary Organizations. It would be finally approved together with new FAO-ECO partnership Program in next ECO Ministerial Meeting of Agriculture in Baku.

Excellencies,

This is the beginning of the way. Shifting to a project-oriented organization requires appropriate actions and a lot of efforts. I would like to call on the respected ministers to support the implementation of forgoing narration, which would help the organization to transform itself into a more result-oriented one. Nevertheless, some steps are needed to be taken to effect this transformation. Financial System in the region should be improved and to this end, ECO Trade and Development Bank (ECO-TDB) should be able to fulfill its core task of supporting the implementation of regional projects. Modalities need to be developed for this purpose. The bank's resources require to be increased. The Vision Fund is required to be established on the basis of the decisions of the ECO Heads of States to support the implementation of ECO projects in the region. Moreover, a proper mechanism should be set up to facilitate transactions in the Region.

Excellencies,

Now, I would like to turn to the issue of reform process under which more efficient and effective organization, equipped with required capabilities and resources along with the enhanced sense of ownership, has been envisaged. I am honored to inform that as per the mandate given by the Council at its 23rd Meeting, the Council of Permanent Representatives with the assistance of the Secretariat embarked on a thorough reform process aiming at reviewing all structures, systems, process and staffing arrangements. Under this process, the first stride addressing the status of non-represented Member States i.e. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan was taken successfully with the constructive approach adopted by the Member States.

Yesterday, the Senior Officials Meeting, chaired excellently by H.E. Ambassador Kaymakci, also reviewed the reform proposal (s) which have been worked out during the past year and effectively concluded the reform of the organizational structure of the Secretariat, addressing successfully the status of Kazakhstan and Afghanistan as well as Scale of Assessments for 2020-2025.

Under the reform process, ensuring of strengthened coordination among the Specialized Agencies and Regional Institutions of ECO for the fulfillment of the objectives enshrined in the treaty of Izmir has been envisaged. To this end, the Secretariat has already provided the Member States with the draft modalities.

Excellencies,

While concluding my statement, I would like to once again thank the Republic of Turkey and Minister Çavuşoğlu for offering warm hospitality and the excellent arrangements that they made to facilitate the participating dignitaries. I also reiterate my deep gratitude for esteemed Ministers and the Heads of Delegations who very kindly ensured their participation in this important event. I am confident that this event would prove to be another milestone, pushing the organization towards the accelerated pace of progress for overall development in the entire ECO Region.

Thank you.