

**Opening Statement by H.E. Hayri MARAŞLIOĞLU,  
Vice President of the Strategy and Budget of the  
Presidency of the Republic of Turkey,  
29th Meeting of the ECO-Regional Planning Council (RPC)  
17th December 2018**

**Bismillahirrahmanirrahim**

**His Excellency Mr. Chairman, Nimetullah Imamzade  
H.E. Hadi Soleimanpour, ECO Secretary General  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Assalamualaikum ve Rahmetullahi ve Berakatuh**

**Excellencies,**

It is a great pleasure for me and my delegation to be with you here in this beautiful city of Tehran on the occasion of the 29<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Regional Planning Council (RPC).

This meeting has a special importance for my own self as well, as this is my first trip to Tehran after I have left this beautiful city spending three good years of my life as Deputy Secretary General of ECO.

I would like to convey my sincere gratitude to the Islamic Republic of Iran for meticulous arrangements and generous hospitality and to the ECO Secretariat for excellent preparations for the success of this Meeting. I hope discussions and deliberations during the meeting will further enhance our cooperation in the ECO region.

**Distinguished Delegates,**

The world is passing through hard times in recent years. We witness deep political instabilities in our neighborhood. Various political games have been played in the near geography.

As one of the Great Thinkers of our time Sezai Karakoç, an ECO award winner, has said several years ago: "If Islamic countries cannot unite and act in unison as one strong collective group, they would have to face enormous difficulties." Unfortunately this is happening now in our geography as well.

We have been compelled to follow external agendas contrary to our interests and expectations and as a result, our geography is suffering. There is only one remedy to

change this negative course: cooperation and stronger collaboration among ourselves. This is what ECO should be all about.

Our region has indeed enormous potential for cooperation in terms of natural resources, human capital, geographic location and religious and cultural affinities. Our work is to mobilize this potential with appropriate cooperation schemes and transform them into dynamic outcomes.

First and foremost, we should increase intra-ECO trade and as a critical step towards that end we should operationalize ECOTA at the earliest. As we are all aware, regional trade arrangements and free trade are indispensable components of regional cooperation and integration. But unfortunately, ECO is one of the few regional cooperation initiatives that could not yet operationalize its main and flagship trade agreement ECOTA.

We should also strengthen ECO Bank, as the financial arm of our cooperation in terms of its membership, resources and outreach. We are aware that ECO Bank is doing successful trade financing operations. But as envisaged by ECO Vision 2025, a robust trade finance programme under ECO Bank will contribute to enhancing our trade enormously.

**Dear Colleagues,**

ECO region is rich in terms of energy resources not only in oil and gas but also in renewable energy like wind and solar energy as well as in hydropower in some of our member countries. We all have considerable experiences in renewable energy resources. We have to share our experiences, conduct joint projects and joint investments.

**Esteemed Participants,**

ECO member countries are located between some of the economically most productive regions of the world South-East Asia and Europe. We can strengthen the role of our region as an indispensable transit route in the world through facilitating trade and investing in our infrastructure and modernizing our customs and simplifying procedures.

In this framework, effective implementation of the Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) and smooth and efficient functioning of the ECO road and railway projects especially ITI Road Corridor, ITI and Istanbul-Almaty Railway Projects are extremely crucial.

Under our transport cooperation, a special emphasis needs to be made on the One Belt, One Road Initiative led by China, to enhance the connectivity and cooperation

between Eurasian countries. Due to their strategic geography, all ECO members can be actively involved in this important Project.

As Turkey, together with Azerbaijan and Georgia, we have successfully realized Baku-Tbilisi and Kars (BTK) Railway Project, which is vital for complementing a missing link in the Historical Silk Way and envisaged One Belt, One Road Initiative.

Seizing this opportunity, as a development economist, I have to put also on record that we should not suffice with being an efficient transit corridor only. Furthermore, we have to take every precaution to transform ECO region to successful production hubs with an efficient network of producers, traders, service providers and distribution channels.

**Dear Colleagues,**

Aviation sector also plays an important role in transportation. I would like to inform you all that Istanbul Airport as a new aviation hub and megaproject that fulfil our nation's dream of making Turkey a global player in aviation has been opened to service recently. In ten years' time, Istanbul Airport which will also serve ECO region is expected to host 200 million travelers on six runways. That's almost double of the traffic at the world's currently busiest airport. We are ready to share our experiences with the member countries in the field of aviation cooperation.

**Distinguished Colleagues,**

Agricultural sector has a critical importance in our cooperation endeavors. ECO has a number of institutions in this critical sector including the ECO Regional Coordination Centre (ECO-RCC), ECO- VECO, ECOSA, ECO Center for Water Management to help Member States to improve their agriculture sector. We have to continuously support and strengthen these institutions.

In this regard, we call upon all Member States to develop project ideas and send them to ECO-RCC for their implementation. As you may kindly know, the national projects under 200 thousand USD budget and multicounty or regional projects under 1 million USD will be financed under the FAO-Turkey Partnership Programme (FTPP).

**Distinguished Delegates,**

In the last of part of my statement, I would like to touch a few issues which I deem critically important for the future of ECO.

ECO needs a sharper focus in its cooperation endeavors. As planners, we are the best suited people to give that sharper focus. Several incomplete half projects do not add up to the value of our Organization rather they deteriorate its image. We have to

boost the performance of our Organization through focusing on achieving our main objectives and flagship projects, strengthen our existing institutions and introduce new ideas only after thorough discussions and detailed studies.

There is a tendency towards inflation of the subjects and proliferation in the number of ECO institutions. We have to reduce the number of existing ECO institutions rather than establishing new ones. While the influx of new ideas is normal and preferable, there needs to be a mastermind process to evaluate the feasibility of the idea especially whether it suits or not the ECO's context and objectives.

Proliferation of agencies and issues does not mean we have enhanced our cooperation in these fields. We have to deliver real results to our people in every area we have tackled. Before establishing institutions in various areas without proper preparations and resources, if the idea is feasible and suit to the ECO's framework, we can think on, in the first instance, introducing programmes in these areas for preparing the ground for possible future ECO institutions successfully.

In this respect, ECO vision document is a well-studied document adopted at the level of ECO Summit. Our task is to pave the way for efficient implementation of ECO vision.

Here I would like to conclude my remarks. I wish all success for this round of RPC and hope our deliberations will enhance our cooperation efforts.

Thank you very much.

Assalamualaikum ve Rahmetullahi ve Berakatuh.