

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Khusrav Noziri, ECO Secretary General
at the 25th Meeting of the Council of Ministers**

(Ashgabat, November 27, 2021)

His Excellency Mr. Rashid Meredov, the honourable Chairman,
Respectable Ministers and Heads of Delegation,

It is, indeed, a matter of great honour and pleasure for me to join this august forum and brief you, Excellencies, on some engagements, activities and the achievements that the Organization has been able to make and pursue in the post-24th COM period. I further avail this opportunity to sincerely thank the Government of Turkmenistan and especially H.E. Mr. Rashid Meredov, the honourable Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, for inviting the distinguished delegates and for the warm hospitality extended to the participants in this magnificent city of Ashgabat. I would also like to extend my deep appreciation and gratitude to the esteemed Foreign Ministers as well as the Heads of Delegations for their kind participation in this important meeting.

I would like to deeply acknowledge that under the ECO's chairmanship of Turkmenistan during 2021 led by H.E. Mr. Rashid Meredov and patronized by honourable President H.E. Mr. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, the ECO successfully maintained its momentum and activities to pursue the aims and objectives of ECO Vision 2025 for greater regional integration.

Allow me to also thank H.E. Mr. Mevlut Cavusoglu, the honourable Foreign Minister of the Republic of Turkey and the former Chairman of the Organization. Under his excellent chairmanship, as well as under the kind patronage of H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the honourable President of the Republic of Turkey, the ECO experienced a notable progress in the pursuit of its noble goals for the collective socioeconomic development of the Member States.

I would further like to congratulate the Republic of Uzbekistan which is going to assume the Chairmanship of the Organization in January 2022, especially H.E. Abdulazizi Kamilov, the honourable Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan as the next ECO Chairman. I assure them of our full support and cooperation and believe that under Uzbekistan's chairmanship the Organization would plow ahead with further advancement to achieve enhanced cooperation in the region.

Excellencies,

We are transiting through a difficult time of modern history due to the hard working conditions emerged in the aftermath of COVID-19. The regional and global economies have witnessed substantial nose-dives, following such an unpredicted situation. However, for the continuity of work and resumption of normal socioeconomic activities in the region, the Organization took some most immediate steps that I would like to briefly highlight.

In the changed regional and global remote working environment, the Organization immediately resorted to the virtual working modes in a bid to maintain its drive for accomplishing the assigned tasks and meeting the given responsibilities. Most of ECO's meetings in 2020 and 2021 were organized virtually that prominently include the 31st and midterm meetings of the RPC, ministerial meetings on Transport, Health, Finance/Economy, Energy and a Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction as well as the 14th ECO Summit.

Moreover, the Secretariat released a concise Preliminary Assessment concerning the potential impact of the pandemic on the ECO Region's Economy. This assessment briefly reviews the possible repercussions of the pandemic on the main development sectors of the region for future planning, including the areas of trade & investment, transport & communication, human resource & sustainable development, energy, tourism, agriculture and industry. In addition, the Secretariat prepared and issued among the Member States some practical ECO Guidelines on Cross Border Facilitation Measures under conditions of COVID-19 to facilitate an unhindered passage of essential goods across the ECO border points. The Organization also finalized a declaration on health and addressed some other health-oriented issues during the relevant ministerial meeting.

I consider it also relevant to recall that soon after the outbreak of Coronavirus, the former ECO Secretary General, H.E. Dr. Hadi Soleimanpour approached some prominent regional and international monetary institutions to seek their collaborative engagements with ECO Trade and Development Bank for supporting the region in the time of crisis. Most of them welcomed the approach and introduced their focal points to have a better coordination with ECO bank for joint operation in the region. Here, I would like to acknowledge and appreciate the excellent role and contribution of my predecessor who dedicatedly managed to help facilitate and implement the agenda of the Organization throughout such a difficult period.

Excellencies,

The Secretariat has remained persistent and dedicated to pursue the Organization's objectives in line with the decisions of 24th COM. Relevantly and as mandated by COM, the ECO has been able to successfully implement the COM's decisions on reform process, including the restructuring of the Secretariat and the finalization of revised/new staff strength and new Scale of Assessments. As a result, the sense of ownership is now increased amongst all Member States and the Organization has become a real partnership forum.

I may further recall that to transform the ECO into a more project-based organization, the 24th COM also mandated the Secretary General to hire specialists/consultants for 10 small sized bankable projects annually with the utilization of US \$ 10,000/- for each project from the ECO's General Reserve Fund. I am glad to state that a significant progress has been made to this end. The projects' execution rate remained positive as 7 out of 10 mandated projects were implemented during 2020-21. Projects' completion rate has increased by 42.9% and projects' progress ratio by 42.3% by the mid-year 2020-2021. Projects' progress and implementation rate appears to gear up reaching 26% whereas it was 4% three years ago. The ECO is expected to secure more efficient and effective results in this direction.

To make the ECO more project and result oriented Organization, the 31st RPC based on the Secretariat's recommendation, endorsed the proposal for the expansion of scope and number of small sized projects to feasibility study projects by authorizing the Secretary General to execute 10 more projects annually, utilizing US\$ 10,000/- for each project from General Reserve Fund. I request the Council to favorably consider the proposed expansion of scope and number of small sized projects, making them total 20 to be implemented annually.

Excellencies,

I would also like to precisely share some sector-wise important information of our activities. **In trade**, the Organization has remained focused on trade expansion through tariff reduction, trade facilitation, financial sector reforms and investment promotion by developing some important projects like ECO Clearing Union and Regional Payment System, network of Specialized Economic/Free Trade Zones, Tariff Reduction under ECOTA/FTA and removal of non-tariff barriers. **In transport and connectivity**, some important developments are (i) the finalization of commercialization of KTI corridor (ii) operationalization of ITI Cargo Train (iii) implementation of some parts of

KTAI corridors and (iii) operationalization of the long awaited ECO-ITI Road Corridor in October 2021 with movement of 2 loaded trucks from Karachi Port of Pakistan of about 11000 KM, passing through Iran toward Istanbul and vice versa. **In energy**, focusing on development of two important projects that are (i) ECO Clean Energy Center and (ii) ECO Regional Electricity Market. **In tourism**, efforts are being made to finalize ECO Tourism Action Plan. **In human resources and sustainable development**, working on the establishment of Regional Consultation Mechanism for technical cooperation on communicable diseases specially COVID-19, and Regional Capacity on Intra-Trade of Pharmaceuticals as well as “Enhancing capacity in member countries to scale up disaster management framework for cascading risks”. **In agriculture and industry**, focusing on ECO Regional Program for Food Security (ECO-RPFS) aimed at enhancing regional standardization cooperation.

I may also highlight the significance of the ECO Parliamentary Assembly as an important pillar of the Organization to push the regional developmental process; and in this regard, reiterate the need, importance and utility of the parliamentary diplomacy. It is encouraging that parliamentary interaction and the scope of relevant cooperative activities within our region are expanding. I congratulate and thank the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for initiating the idea of establishing the ECO Parliamentary Assembly and the country’s commendable efforts to materialize the goal. The second General Conference of Parliamentary Assembly of ECO Member States, held at Islamabad in June this year, remained quite successful and constructive. The Charter of the Parliamentary Assembly of ECO has been ratified by Pakistan, Iran, Azerbaijan and Afghanistan, making the forum legally operational. Other Member countries would also be appreciated for their kind consideration to accede to the PAECO’s Charter, shouldering the ECO’s efforts for magnifying the parliamentary cooperation in the region.

The Organization further considers the advancement of goals and objectives specified in the ECO Advocacy Programme for Afghanistan (EAPA) as one of its prime tasks. I believe that ECO Fund for Afghanistan will help contribute in the process of reconstruction and revival of economic growth in Afghanistan. The ECO is pursuing to encourage the Member States to come up with fresh ideas and suggestions as regards the expansion of ECO projects related activities in Afghanistan.

I would further like to inform you, Excellencies, that a High Level Committee (HLC) was established by 252nd Meeting of the ECO Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) for the midterm review of ECO Vision 2025. The HLC was also mandated to develop its proposals based on the fresh ideas and

guidelines put forward by the ECO Leaders during 14th Summit on March 4, 2021. I am happy to inform that the HLC has effectively met the assigned task and developed a comprehensive report, along with some recommendations for consideration and appropriate decision by the COM.

Moreover, in order to support the ECO activities, the Organization is striving to further strengthen its existing cooperation with the UN and ECO Specialized Agencies. We further intend to enhance our partnerships with other UN bodies and, to this end, we have started comprehensive dialogue with UNOSSC in order to implement an MoU that already exist between the two sides.

Considering the post-COVID regional and global working conditions and environment, I believe that the role of ECO is increased manifolds. However, I am confident our joint efforts and engagements would certainly enable us to counter any such challenges inflicted by the ongoing pandemic. To this end, I assure that the ECO Secretariat would remain active, enthusiastic and more than determined to secure the aims and objectives of the Organization enshrined in the Izmir Treaty and the ECO Vision 2025.

Allow me to also take this opportunity to extend my deepest gratitude to all the Member States especially the honourable Ministers of Foreign Affairs for their kind support regarding my election and appointment as ECO Secretary General. It is a great task and I assure you, Excellencies, of my best to meet the given responsibility with your continued support and kind patronage.

Concluding my statement, I once again thank the Government of Turkmenistan for providing such a receptive environment and hospitality, as well as making excellent arrangements to facilitate the participating delegations. I also reiterate my gratitude for the esteemed Ministers and Heads of Delegations who kindly made it convenient to participate in this high level ECO meeting. I am sure that this high-level interaction would help push the process of development and accelerate the pace of progress for the overall socioeconomic wellbeing in our entire region.

Thank you
