

**Opening Speech by H.E. Ramazan GÜVEN,
Deputy Undersecretary, Ministry of Development
at the 27th Meeting of the Regional Planning Council (RPC)
5th December 2016**

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

His Excellency Mr. Chairman,,
His Excellency Halil İbrahim AKÇA, the Secretary General of ECO,
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 27th Meeting of the Regional Planning Council (RPC). I would like to convey my sincere gratitude to the Islamic Republic of Iran for the excellent hospitality in the beautiful city of Tehran and to the ECO Secretariat for excellent arrangements and intensive efforts for the success of this Meeting. Seizing this opportunity, I would like to express our wishes of success to the participant countries in discussions and deliberations during the meetings ahead.

Distinguished Delegates,

All of us around this table are cognizant of that the ECO region is located in a very strategic point on the Earth. This region is granted with not only valuable and vast natural resources, but also productive human capital, dynamic work force and huge economic opportunities. For utilizing these assets for the benefit of our people, we should work much harder to deepen our cooperation through strengthening our economic and commercial ties for sustained economic development.

Distinguished Participants,

ECO Region has a huge potential for trade due to its large and fertile geography and having members with varied competitive products. However, present figures show that we are far below our potential. The share of the ECO region in the world trade is almost 2 percent as against ECO region's population of 6.2 percent in the world population in 2015. We believe that we can realize our potential only by enhancing our trade, especially intra-regional trade. Within this perspective, our trade agreement ECOTA will have a crucial role when its implementation is assured by the contracting parties. However, we unfortunately see that as of November 2016 only Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey completed the necessary requirements for ECOTA and are ready for the implementation of the Agreement.

Esteemed Representatives,

Here, I would like to underline that as Turkey our total trade with the ECO Member Countries has more than tripled in the last decade from USD 7 billion to USD 18 billion. With the successful implementation of the flagship projects of the ECO like ECOTA and TTFA, we can further increase our trade with the ECO Member Countries.

Seizing this opportunity, I would like to invite all concerned member countries to complete the necessary requirements for making this flagship project operational and also encourage all the other brotherly countries to join ECOTA by fulfilling the necessary requirements at the earliest to ensure actual implementation of ECOTA.

Excellencies,

There has been a growing interest on developing transnational transport corridors globally. Considering the strategic location of the ECO region, having integrated transport systems and effective transport corridors is an urgent necessity. Transport systems and corridors in the ECO region not only link the neighbor countries but also connect the continents, Asia-Pacific, Middle East and Europe. In this respect, I believe that the effective implementation of the Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) would be instrumental in establishing viable region-wide transport corridors.

Distinguished Colleagues,

Well-functioning agricultural sector is essential for ensuring food security, and agricultural products are major source of income for many developing countries, including the ECO countries. Within this framework, 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. Let's support and strengthen these institutions.

Furthermore, I would like to bring to the attention of the house that we are organizing training programs in the field of calibration and metrology biennially. We invite all concerned member countries to take advantage of this facility.

Dear Colleagues,

Considering the rapid socio-economic and political developments in the world and the opportunities and challenges before our brotherly countries, having a vision document for our future cooperation endeavors is of critical importance. In this perspective, we attach utmost importance to the ECO Vision 2025. We believe it will effectively guide our cooperation efforts throughout the next decade. Based on the experiences from the implementation of the previous Vision Document as well as the findings and recommendations of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG), we are of the view that the ECO Vision 2025 will Inşallah bear more fruitful results for our cooperation.

Furthermore, we welcome and fully support the establishment of an “ECO Vision Implementation Fund”. Lack of resources and a dedicated fund was one of the crucial setbacks for efficient implementation of the previous Vision. As the proponent of the idea establishing a Fund for the Vision, we also believe that the Fund will be established immediately upon the approval of the Vision by COM and start functioning within a reasonable time after its endorsement.

I believe that with the implementation of new Vision 2025, we will be able to give a main thrust to major ECO projects including the realization of ECOTA, strengthening ECO-Bank and effective implementation of Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA).

Dear colleagues,

At this juncture, I would like to share with you a few ideas that I deem crucial for the future of ECO.

First and foremost, let's immediately stop proliferation and overcome the lack of focus problem in our cooperation efforts. While we appreciate the enthusiasm of some member countries in proposing new ideas for cooperation, we should be extremely careful in processing them. All of these ideas are valuable and pertinent in their own domain but some of them, sometimes most of them do not fit in the ECO cooperation system. I will not mention the name of the projects and committees for not causing resentment, but if some of the issues we tackle will have any effect on our economic cooperation that will be quite marginal and this may be at the cost of ignoring our main tasks.

Unfortunately, in the course of decades, we have filled our basket so heavily as if we have to handle all the issues under the sun. No, we have limited resources, we have our priorities, with these limited resources we cannot handle all those issues effectively. At a later stage of cooperation, we may tackle all these issues but now, for example, we have to concentrate more on enhancing trade and investments in the region and allocate more resources for that purpose.

Likewise, we have more than 20 ECO regional institutions already approved by COM. But we have more proposals in the pipeline. Let's functionalize what our Ministers have already agreed on rather than proposing new institutions for every area. This huge number of institutions is definitely unmanageable if we take into consideration our limited resources.

We may have various research projects and training activities in several areas but what I mean is that: for major ECO projects and ECO institutions that we have to allocate our years, we have to be very meticulous. Let's design regional programmes and successfully implement them, then we can establish and effectively operate regional institutions. Let's prepare the ground.

Otherwise, decades will pass but we will never be able to produce the required welfare effect for our peoples. Why are we travelling and spending the money of our people? Out of these efforts, we have to return something tangible and positive to them.

Dear Colleagues,

We have to produce success stories every year and we have to further strengthen our present achievements. For example, let's strengthen ECO Bank and diversify its activities. ECOBANK is an important body of our Organization in terms of project and trade financing. The total amount of loans disbursed by the Bank have exceeded USD 1 billion threshold last year. We, as the member countries, should further support the Bank for enhancing its institutional and financing capacity to meet the growing needs of the region. We are pleased to observe that the number of members to the Bank has already reached to six.

In this respect, we really appreciate the initiatives of H.E. Halil İbrahim Akça, ECO Secretary General and the esteemed Secretariat for further strengthening the ECO Bank and increasing its membership. Of course, these ideas will be duly considered and processed internally by the Governing Bodies of the Bank. In fact, the efforts of the Secretariat were quite instrumental in the past for increasing the number of membership to the Bank from three countries to six countries. This efficient cooperation should definitely continue.

Let's also strengthen ECO Culture Institute, ECO Science Foundation, ECO Educational Institute. These are already established Institutions functioning effectively with moderate resources. But there is also a great scope for further development.

In the next meeting, I hope we can talk about more on the development of new technologies, including industrial revolution 4.0, boosting our competitiveness, enhancing human and institutional capacity in the member countries, and production of high value-added products. We need to move towards that direction.

Before concluding my statement, I wish all success to this Council in its heavy work and I hope our deliberations throughout the following days will contribute to enhancing cooperation efforts among our brotherly countries.

Thank you.

Assalamualaikum ve Rahmetullahi ve Berakatuh