

**Statement of ECO Secretary General Mr. Khusrav Noziri
at the 11th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport
2 February 2022 (virtual mode)**

**Your Excellency Mr. Karaismailoğlu,
Minister of Transport and Infrastructure of the Republic of Turkey,
Honorable Transport Ministers of ECO Member States,
Heads and Representatives of International Organizations,
Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am very much privileged to welcome all of you to the 11th Ministerial Meeting on Transport and thank the Republic of Turkey for hosting this important event.

I also highly appreciate the honorable Ministers and Heads of Delegations that have energized the ECO by joining this virtual room. I am confident that the outcome of deliberations will further lead the connectivity in our region towards a better future.

Despite our expectations for organizing our meeting in physical format, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has forced us to think otherwise. However, the recent challenges not only haven't discouraged us from pursuing our noble goals, but also have empowered us to find solutions and different ways of doing our job.

Distinguished Ministers,

The Covid-19 pandemic in the past two years has become a new normal to our personal and professional lives and profoundly impacted the business functions and standards, particularly in the transport sector. As you are well aware, the transport sector was among the hardly hit industries during the pandemic and the sector is yet to revive itself.

The restrictions on transit at some of the borders in our region are still in place and have severely limited transit capacities and ultimately endangered supply chain of the Member States, particularly the landlocked countries. Imposition of the restrictive measures in transshipment at borders have clearly proved their irrelevance in controlling the pandemic rather causing unnecessary and costly transit transport that negatively impacts the lives of the ordinary people of the Member States.

Regrettably, it appears that the pandemic is going to stay with us for the years to come and we need to further adapt ourselves to this reality by finding and applying functional facilitative solutions rather than resorting to costly, time-consuming and restrictive measures.

The noble initiative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan announced at the recent 15th ECO Summit in Ashgabat on proclaiming the year 2022 as a Year

of Strengthening Connectivity timely and rightly highlights the crucial and increasing role of transport and connectivity, particularly in our region.

Honorable Ministers and Heads of Delegations,

During the last year, the Secretariat, although being affected by the pandemic, has never stopped its pursuit of the projects and policies of the Organization and fortunately demonstrated visible achievements in materializing the targets set forth by the Member States.

The ITI Road and Rail Corridors, as the longest aspirations of our region, are operationalized after continuous follow-ups and several meetings during the last year and I am happy to inform you that the 3rd ITI Train is now on the move and transporting the cargo from Pakistan to Turkey. With rehabilitation of the Quetta-Taftan Segment of the ITI Railway or extension of standard railway from Zahedan to Quetta the Corridor will considerably enhance the trade capacity of the region and will become a bridge from China to Europe as well. I avail this opportunity to appreciate the railways of Pakistan, Iran and Turkey for their role in operation of the ITI Train. The ITI Road Corridor would not have become a reality without the wonderful engagement of the road transport organizations and technical contribution of the International Road Union.

Finalization of the project on commercialization of KTI Railway and signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between Railway Administrations (railways) of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran on the Implementation of KTI Railway Freight Corridor on 26 November 2021 on the sidelines of the 15th ECO Summit in Ashgabat was another major milestone in development of connectivity in the region that was implemented by a very cordial cooperation of the en-route countries along with ECO, Islamic Development Bank and UNESCAP. This strategic railway will provide for the Member States an easy access to the CIS and Russia on one side and for the latter to Persian Gulf, Turkey and Pakistan on the other end.

As the Covid-19 pandemic rages on, the Secretariat has embarked on a joint project with UN Economic Commission for Europe and Islamic Development Bank to promote digitalization of transit procedures and in this connection 3 workshops on e-CMR and e-TIR were conducted in 2021. The workshops were highly welcomed by the Member States and the Secretariat was requested to continue such workshops with the partner organizations.

Promotion of Public Private Partnership has also been seriously promoted by the Secretariat and has resulted in establishment of the ECO Consultative Group of ECO TIR Issuing and Guaranteeing Associations that will contribute to development of transit in the region, particularly through participation in Transit Transport Cooperation Council meetings.

The maritime cooperation is another area of connectivity occupying a very strategic stance in regional cooperation and in this connection the 6th Meeting of ECO Heads of Maritime Organizations was organized in April 2021 through which a number of initiatives were approved for development of maritime cooperation, including establishment of ECO Maritime Consultative Network, establishment of Committee on Ro-Ro cooperation in the Caspian Sea, provision of facilities for the LLCs in the coastal countries and so on.

Let me also inform you that the Islamic Development Bank as our important long-time partner has been generous to provide us with a valuable amount to co-finance the ECO Gate project that is aiming at linking the existing regional sea ports in the ECO region with ECO's landlocked and transit countries' dry ports.

The 7th Meeting of Customs Committee of Transit Transport Cooperation Council in August 2021 reviewed the progress and recommended measures to further facilitate border crossing procedures and facilities for development of uninterrupted connectivity in the region.

The civil aviation is another area of connectivity that needs to be paid due attention. The Secretariat conducted the first virtual Meeting of Working Group on Civil Aviation on 23 November 2020 during which various areas were discussed for regional cooperation. It seems that the air connectivity in our region is yet to develop to meet the targets. Our region is vitally in need of an efficient and low cost connectivity to help trade and tourism promotion and in this connection the Member States are highly encouraged to enhance the number of flights and destinations and particularly to focus on establishment of a regional air hub in Central Asia and its vicinity.

These achievements and activities have not been possible without the support of the Member States and our international partner organizations, particularly Islamic Development Bank, UNECE, UNESCAP, IRU and others. I take this opportunity to highly appreciate all of them for extending their assistance towards us in different ways.

Distinguished delegates,

Although we have invested huge resources for development of connectivity infrastructure in our region, we are still far from realizing a well-connected transport network due to various reasons, particularly lack of investment and financial obstacles. Most of the infrastructure development of regional importance has been financed through national resources and there are still ample capacities for international financial institutes to use in financing the connectivity projects. It is presumed that with the current pace of investment, the regional connectivity targets will not be achieved as per our wishes, unless the regional and international financial institutes and agencies play a more concentrated role in this important sector.

For this purpose, the role and functions of the ECO Trade and Development Bank need to be enhanced to meet the development agenda of our Organization as per the mandates given by our esteemed Heads of State/Government during the 15th ECO Summit in Ashgabat.

The Fund Raising Forum that is mandated to ECO Secretariat and ECO Trade and Development Bank is a highly valuable moment for attracting the international investors to our region. The Fund Raising Forum would also help the Bank to enhance its standing as development partner of the Organization.

The private sector transit operators have fundamentally and specially contributed at the hard times of the pandemic to the promotion of transit and trade and our region owes a lot to them. It is a right expectation to recognize and appreciate their contribution to our well-being and welfare. In this connection I would like to propose ECO Transport Excellence Award to recognize and appreciate the best transport companies, associations and other stakeholders in road, railway, maritime and civil aviation.

I also would like to underline that the new developments in transport and connectivity in our region and beyond necessitate for our Organization to adapt itself to new trends and changes in order to be able to tackle the increasing challenges. In this regard, the ECO may review and possibly update its strategies.

Excellencies,

The outcome of this Meeting is expected to be the adoption of the Ankara Declaration as well as its Report finalized by the High-Level Expert Group Meeting on Transport held on 31 January 2022.

I am confident that with joint work and close collaboration we will be able to ensure timely implementation of the Declaration and the decisions of the Member States.

In conclusion, I would like to highly appreciate the Republic of Turkey for hosting such important meeting at the right time and also thank all the distinguished Ministers, Heads of Delegations and Representatives of International Organizations for their participation in this Meeting.

Thank you.