

**Statement of the ECO Secretary General,
H.E. Mr. Khusrav Noziri at the International Seminar:
“Trade and Connectivity - Western Neighbourhood of Pakistan”
25 January 2023, JS Hall, ISSRA NDU, Islamabad –Pakistan**

**Major General Muhammad Raza Aizad, Director General of Institute for Strategic Studies, Research & Analysis of National Defence University of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Having the pleasure and privilege to attend virtually this very important Seminar on trade and connectivity, I am sincerely grateful to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for inviting and giving me the opportunity to speak on the important topic of the Seminar. I wish I could participate in-person and visit the beautiful city of Islamabad.

As rightly understood, connectivity is central not only for trade and economic growth but also for sustainable development of the countries and in particular our region. Without proper connectivity and transport infrastructure, we could not expect neither trade promotion nor sustainable development within our region and beyond and ensure our welfare and prosperity. In this context, promotion of trade and connectivity have been prioritized within the ECO framework and the ECO Secretariat has been mandated to concentrate its efforts on developing these key sectors.

In doing so, the ECO has developed two important legal instruments, namely Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) and ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA) that formulate and regulate trade and transport cooperation of its membership.

The regional cooperation in the context of ECO has resulted in remarkable achievements and progress in establishment of connectivity and in particular for the Central Asian region. A considerable number of programs and projects have been implemented to enhance the trade and economic integration of its Member States in the areas of road, rail, maritime, civil aviation, customs and ICT in the last 30 years and in line with the policies and decisions of the leaders and ministers of the Member States.

The strategic approach of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in enhancing its trade and connectivity with its western neighbours and in particular Central Asia, Iran and Turkiye is embedded and reflected in the ECO Vision 2025 and the relevant policy guidelines of the Organization. In this connection, the Secretariat is mandated to assist in developing various areas of cooperation including the projects that involve Pakistan in many ways.

To be particular, the Secretariat in line with its mandates, has implemented very important connectivity projects to help connect Pakistan with the rest of the

region through rail and road networks. The construction of Kerman-Zahedan railway line in Iran as the major missing link in the ITI Corridor, assisting in accession of Pakistan to TIR and COTIF conventions, operationalization of ITI road and rail corridors, conducting studies, workshops, and provision of technical assistance on the ITI Corridor and many other targeted activities to connect Pakistan to the region have demonstrated the ECO's role in contributing to the development of regional connectivity and in particular for Pakistan.

Although, we have been able to tackle major bottlenecks in operationalization of ITI road and rail corridors, we are still facing sustainability challenges that need to be properly addressed. Major challenges can be outlined as following:

- 1) Reconstruction or rehabilitation of Quetta-Taftan railway and to the extent possible with the standard gauge;
- 2) Further development and extension of the services to Europe, China, Russia, CIS and Afghanistan;
- 3) Regularization of the train services to attract customers and build trust;
- 4) Containerized shipment needs to be promoted for safety, security and insurance and customs clearance reasons;
- 5) Formulating commercialization and marketing plan.

Dear participants,

I am confident that outcome of the deliberations in this Seminar will effectively contribute to better review the regional progress towards sustainable transport and connectivity and outline the pre-requisites for a sustainable and inclusive connectivity and trade for planning a better and prosperous future.

The ECO as in the past will continue its support to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in its efforts for regional integration and enhancement of sustainable development, trade and connectivity and in this connection will exert its full capacity to contribute to the prosperity of the people of the region and in particular the brotherly people of Pakistan.

Last but not least, I would like to, once more, express my gratitude and appreciation to the National Defense University of Pakistan for making necessary arrangements for successful organization of this important event.

I thank you all for your attention.