

Press Conference
of the ECO Secretary General, Ambassador Khusrav Noziri,
for the 27th Council of Ministers Meeting
Shusha, 10 October 2023

**Distinguished Press Representatives,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Welcome to our Press Conference.

It has been an honor for the ECO family to gather for the 27th Council of Ministers Meeting of the Economic Cooperation Organization in this beautiful city of Shusha. We are very glad that the Council has successfully concluded this year's meeting a moment ago.

I thank all the honourable Foreign Ministers and the Heads of Delegations for their kind participation in this important meeting under the chairmanship of His Excellency Foreign Minister of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mr. Jeyhun Bayramov.

I also extend my deep gratitude and appreciation to the Government of Azerbaijan for the excellent organization of the event and their warm hospitality to the delegations of Member States.

As you know, the year 2023 was declared by Azerbaijan as the “Year of Green Transition and Interconnectivity” in the ECO Region. In this regard, ECO has remained engaged with our Member States, as well as regional and global partners, for the promotion of green and digital connectivity in our region.

Under the astute chairmanship of Azerbaijan, ECO's other important initiatives to enhance regional cooperation in tourism, food security and environment continued with commendable progress in 2023 as well.

In today's meeting, the Council of Ministers of the ECO Member States evaluated the activities of ECO, and discussing important agenda items, guided the Organization with its recommendations towards further strengthening the framework of regional economic cooperation.

In particular, through adoption of the Shusha Declaration as the important outcome document of this meeting, the ECO Council of Ministers unanimously agreed on:

- Commitment to enhance multifaceted cooperation for sustainable progress and development in the region;
- Pursuing trade liberalization through setting up a framework under the ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA);
- Active implementation of the Digital Silk Way Project, which aims to create a new telecommunications backbone route between Europe and Asia;

- Full implementation of the ECO Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA);
- Regional and global expansion of the ECO corridors for greater intra-and-inter-regional connectivity;
- Concerted efforts for increasing energy security;
- Supporting the operationalization of the ECO Clean Energy Center in Baku;
- Strengthening cooperation on environment and climate issues with increased investment to develop strong and sustainable mechanisms;
- Increased agricultural cooperation focusing on regional food security; and
- Calling the High-Level Committee of ECO Deputies Foreign Minister for meeting in 2024 to finalize the review process of ECO Vision 2025.

Dear Participants,

Let me recall that, ECO is an intergovernmental economic forum of ten South, Central and Western Asian nations, determined to transform the region into a block of well-connected and sustainable economies through good governance, as well as acceleration of trade activities. In that sense, fostering economic cooperation among its Member States is an integral part of ECO's agenda.

Last year, we celebrated the 30th Anniversary of the ECO Enlargement, which took place in 1992. I am very happy to note, in this respect, that over decades, ECO has proven itself as a very relevant and useful regional forum and a catalyst for regional cooperation.

Today, ECO is a big family and stands as a full-fledged organization with various regional institutions, affiliated bodies and three specialized agencies, including the ECO Cultural Institute, ECO Educational Institute and ECO Science Foundation. Also, the ECO Trade and Development Bank established in 2005 as the financial arm of the Organization plays a major role for supporting trade and investment activities in the region.

To secure our regional development objectives, significant progress has been achieved towards the implementation of different ECO projects and mutually agreed legal frameworks. In particular, our flagship initiatives include, the ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA), ECO Agreement on Protection and Promotion of Investment (APPI), ECO Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA), ECO Regional Electricity Market and ECO Clean Energy Center, as well as a number of others to address challenges in agriculture, food security and building resilience against natural disasters.

Further, ECO recognizes transition towards sustainable and efficient energy resources as an imperative for the region. In this context, I may highlight that the establishment of ECO Clean Energy Center in Baku will be a significant step.

In addition, and given the fact that our region has a huge but untapped tourism potential in terms of historic and natural landmarks and many UNESCO heritage sites, some important programs and projects to boost the quality and infrastructure of regional tourism have been developed. In this regard, I am glad to refer to the recent decision made by the 5th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism held in the Ardabil city of Iran last week which selected Shusha city of the Republic of Azerbaijan as ECO Tourism Capital for 2026.

Dear Participants,

This year's ECO Council of Ministers Meeting has been successfully organized and excellently hosted by Azerbaijan amid critical global and regional developments. We have received high-level attention from our Member States. The Council has evaluated the activities of the Organization and provided valuable guidance to support our ambitions. In addition, on the sidelines, very productive bilateral meetings and discussions were held, validating the role of ECO as an important forum for regional cooperation.

We are confident that with the continued support of Member States, the ECO will continue with its steady progress towards sustainable development of our economies and prosperity of our peoples.

I thank you for your kind attention.