

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Bunyad Huseinov, Ambassador Extraordinary and
Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Islamic Republic of Iran
at the Opening of 29th Meeting of ECO Regional Planning Council
December 17, 2018, Tehran**

**Dear Mr. Secretary General, H.E Dr. Hadi Soleimanpur,
Your Excellencies,
Esteemed delegations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would also like to welcome all of you and wish success to the Council's meeting and productive outcome.

Azerbaijan attaches a special importance to cooperation within ECO. As well all know, the ECO Vision 2025 was adopted by the Heads of the Member States at their last ECO Summit, which aims to double inter-regional trade, increase a share of ECO in global trade, and further unlock a full potential of regional trade. Thus, our meeting is an important opportunity to review the results achieved and objectives identified so far in a follow up to the adoption of ECO Vision 2025, elaborate on the issues of common interest, and provide guidelines for the future work of the Organization.

As we are well aware, transport and transportation pillars of our cooperation plays a crucial role in expanding trade volumes across the region and beyond. Establishing safe, reliable, commercially solid, and bankable transport and infrastructure projects is our common goal. With that purpose in mind, Azerbaijan helps to expand regional and even inter-regional trade through construction of a web of infrastructure projects such as East-West, South-West, and North-South transportation corridors. Taking into account a crucial role of such infrastructure projects for stimulating economic growth and trade potential of land-locked countries, I believe Azerbaijan is doing its utmost possible to build and share opportunities with its partners in the ECO region. With this in mind, pursuing the policy of development of transit potential, Azerbaijan strives to diversify and modernize its transport infrastructure, which will serve the purpose of strengthening the interconnections between Trans-European and Trans-Asian infrastructure networks.

The inauguration of Baku-Tbilisi-Kars new railway into operations last year marked another major milestone in regional connectivity and in contribution by

Azerbaijan to the strengthening of inter-regional connectivity. This strategic backbone railway will facilitate the transportation of goods from China and Persian Gulf, including ECO member countries and from Europe via Azerbaijan.

Special attention is also paid for the development of port infrastructure. A new international port in Alat, located 65 km south of Baku, will play an important role in linking the South Caucasus with Central Asian countries. The new port provides services for general cargo as well as passenger terminals. It is able to receive both oil and non-oil freight, obtain cargo handling and Ro/Ro facilities, and include a rail ferry terminal connecting the ports of Aktau and Atyrau (Kazakhstan) and Turkmenbashi (Turkmenistan), as well as an International Logistics Centre. In its first stage, overall annual capacity of the project is expected to be 15 million tons of cargo, up to 20 million tons of cargo and 150 thousand containers at the second stage and up to 25 million tons of cargo, 1 million containers at the third stage of the project implementation.

Besides, we are convinced that an earliest possible completion of the Rasht-Astara rail link in Iran will help to realize North-South Transport Corridor across Azerbaijan in the near future, thus giving a new impetus to trade opportunities for involved countries, as well as the whole region. Realization of the North-South Transport Corridor has always been in the agenda of the Heads of States of both Azerbaijan and Iran.

We are also working with our partners in Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Georgia and Turkey to build a solid logistics between Europe and Central Asia through the Lapis Lazuli transport route. The inauguration ceremony of the pilot shipment through this route, which took place few days ago, is a result of the close and effective collaboration between the States involved in the project.

We believe that a high degree of contribution and support is a clear indication of our plans to work more closely with ECO partners on transport and trade issues. ECO can and should benefit from this. Therefore, Azerbaijan invites its partners from ECO Member States to use those infrastructure links for expanding trade turnover among each other and other countries.

Dear participants,

I am pleased to inform you that Azerbaijan took the initiative to organize the 6th meeting of the Heads of the Privatization Organizations of the Member States of ECO in Baku this October. I would like to emphasize that as a result of successful meeting, we adopted the Baku Declaration, which highlights, the role of privatization to enhance economic growth and development in the ECO region and the importance of the joint cooperation and coordination among the Member States in the field of state property management and privatization.

There is enough potential for transforming ECO into more robust and efficient Organization, which, we believe, actually could be more focus-oriented and create a practical toolkit for project implementation.

At the same time to improve legal and functional mechanisms of multilateral cooperation within the Organization, it is necessary to carry out regular analysis of the activities of the Organization, prepare assessments, ensure a follow-up of reform process, mainstream the functions of the Secretariat, as well as improve the follow-up mechanism of the decisions of the high-level meetings and give priority to specific projects.

Distinguished delegates, Dear participants,

The case of ongoing occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan and unlawful exploitation of Azerbaijan's natural resources by Armenia creates serious concerns not only from the perspective of security and stability in the region, but also can undermine our efforts to build a common regional trade in full with respect to each other's sovereignty and in strict compliance with norms and principles of international law.

We call on all of you to demonstrate solidarity with Azerbaijan and to prevent the import, export, sale and realization of any goods and services in the ECO Member States' markets illegally produced in the occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan, including the Nagorno-Karabakh region. We will highly appreciate if all ECO Member States make their utmost efforts to prevent the involvement of their resources, services, investment, and capital in the economic, financial, and other activities in the occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Thank you