



# **Report of The 4th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism**

**(Virtual Mode)  
13 December 2022**

## **REPORT**

1. The Fourth ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism was held virtually on 13 December 2022. It was hosted by the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The meeting was attended by the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Türkiye and Turkmenistan. It was also attended by the ECO Secretariat, ECO Cultural Institute (ECI) and the Turkish Cypriot State (as an observer). The list of participants is enclosed as **Annex-I**.

### **Agenda Item No. 1**

#### **Inauguration of the Meeting and Welcome Remarks**

2. While inaugurating the meeting, H.E. Mr. Aziz Abdukhakimov, Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of Tourism and Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Uzbekistan cordially welcomed the participants. In his inaugural statement, the Minister highlighted the potentials and progress of the Republic of Uzbekistan in tourism sector under the leadership of H.E. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the President of Uzbekistan. He informed the meeting regarding the decisions of the 6th HLEG Meeting preceded by the Ministerial Meeting.

3. The honorable Minister stated that tourism serves as one of the main growth-catalyzer and the strongest bridge that unites people through complementing culture, traditional and heritage. The Government of Uzbekistan continued measures to turn the tourism industry into a powerful tool for sustainable economic growth. He further stated that instead of general approach, they are now focusing on improving the tourism infrastructure, service quality and its diversity in each region, city and district of Uzbekistan.

4. He highlighted the necessity of increasing direct flights among the Member States and increasing collaboration among the regional tourism stakeholders to boost tourism in the region. He emphasized the significance of training the workforce in tourism sector and informed that 25 students from the ECO Member States received scholarship for studying at «Silk Road» International University of Tourism in Samarkand. The Minister also informed the delegates about the 25<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) that will be held in Samarkand and invited all the ECO Member States to attend this important event. His statement is enclosed as **Annex-II**.

5. In his opening statement ECO Secretary General, H.E. Ambassador Khusrav Noziri stated that holding the current chairmanship of the ECO, H.E. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan declared 2022 as the “Year of Strengthening Connectivity” in the ECO region and during the year, Uzbekistan hosted several major events, including today’s important meeting. He highlighted that the tourism sector was placed among one of the ECO’s important areas of interest, prioritized for development under the ECO Vision-2025.

6. ECO Secretary General stressed the importance of embarking on a joint tourism programme to provide the ECO region a more attractive, competitive and

powerful product image as a tourism destination and to highlight the attractiveness and variety of the ECO tourism experience. ECO Secretary General highlighted that the simplification of border crossing procedures for foreign tourists, easing and liberalization of visa regimes will support development of the tourism industry throughout the region. He stated that today's meeting provides an excellent platform to lead for enhancing cooperation and creating synergies among the tourism authorities of the Member States, as well as renewing their commitment on their mutual tourism objectives.

7. ECO Secretary General emphasized that the Road Map on Facilitating Accelerated Recovery, Safe and Sustainable Development of Tourism after COVID-19 in the ECO region as a post-COVID general framework for cooperation among the Member States will ensure steady recovery and progress in regional tourism. He also apprised about current activities of the Secretariat in tourism sector to achieve the tourism mandate of the ECO Vision 2025. His statement is enclosed as **Annex-III**.

### **Agenda Item No.2**

#### **Election of the Chairman**

8. The Meeting unanimously elected H.E. Mr. Aziz Abdukhakimov, Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of Tourism and Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Uzbekistan to chair the meeting.

### **Agenda Item No. 3**

#### **Adoption of the Agenda**

9. The Meeting adopted its agenda which is enclosed as **Annex-IV**.

### **Agenda Item No. 4**

#### **Appointment of the Drafting Committee for preparing the Report**

10. The Meeting decided that the Secretariat would prepare the draft report with the contributions of the Member States.

### **Agenda Item No. 5**

#### **Statements by the Ministers/Heads of Delegation of Member States and Statement by President of the ECO Cultural Institute**

11. Under this agenda item, the Ministers/Heads of delegations of Member States delivered their statements to update the current developments, policies and activities towards tourism sector in their respective countries and ECO cooperation in the field of tourism. The President of ECI also delivered his statement. The available statements are enclosed as **Annex-V**.

12. In his opening statement, H.E. Mr. Ali Asghar Shalbafan, Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts of the Islamic Republic of Iran stated that Ardabil Province which has been elected as Tourism Capital of ECO in 2023 has a great potential, diversified natural and cultural potent and a sample of the ECO countries great variety. He apprised the delegates about holding of International

Tourism Exhibition (7-10 February 2023) as well as ECO-Silk Road Food festival in Zanjan in May 2023.

13. H.E. Mr. Awn Chaudhry, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Tourism & Sports of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan highlighted that facilitating the citizens of the ECO Member States in shape of better road, rail & air connectivity and through joint economical air fares will encourage them to visit each other countries and further promote regional tourism among the ECO Member States.

14. In his opening statement, H.E. Mr. Tojiddin Jurazoda, Chairman of the Committee for Tourism Development of the Republic of Tajikistan apprised the delegates about the International Tourism Fair which will be held on 21-23 March 2023 in Dushanbe and invited ECO Member States to actively participate in the event.

15. H.E. Dr. Serdar Çam, Deputy Minister for Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye believed that the Samarkand Declaration will be an important reference document towards achievement of concrete projects. He stated that at present world travel and tourism sector not talking only recovery but rather discussing transformation to a more sustainable, resilient and inclusive sector for people, planet and welfare. In this regard, he assured their full cooperation not only through the core units of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, but also with Türkiye's affiliated institutions and organizations operating in various fields all over the world like TİKA and Yunus Emre Institutes.

16. In his opening statement, H.E. Mr. Murodjon Buriboev, the President of ECO Cultural Institute stated that they carried out valuable activities in the field of tourism based on its mission in preserving the history, identity, and culture of the people of the region. He further stated that they have prepared and published the book “ECO Tourist Guide” in English in cooperation with the ECO Secretariat as well as quarterly journal “ECO Heritage” which deals with cultural subjects and promotes the traditions of the people of the region.

17. The President of the ECI proposed that in order to improve the convergence and preserve the ancient rituals of the region, the Nowruz ceremony can be held every year in one of the ECO Member States in the presence of the Heads of Governments.

#### **Agenda Item No. 6**

#### **Consideration and endorsement of the 6<sup>th</sup> HLEG Meeting Report**

18. The Meeting considered the report of the 6<sup>th</sup> High Level Experts Group (HLEG) Meeting on Tourism and endorsed it. The Meeting appreciated the work done by HLEG Meeting under the competent chairmanship of Mr. Feruz Dodiev, Head of International Affairs Department, Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The report is attached as **Annex-VI**.

#### **Agenda Item No. 7**

#### **Adoption of the “Draft Road Map on Facilitating Accelerated Recovery, Safe and Sustainable Development of Tourism after Covid-19 in the ECO region”**

19. The Chairman gave a brief explanation to the Meeting about the result of deliberations of the 6<sup>th</sup> HLEG Meeting regarding the “Draft Road Map on Facilitating Accelerated Recovery, Safe and Sustainable Development of Tourism after Covid-19 in the ECO region”, which had been proposed by the senior officials to Ministers Meeting for their views and comments. Since no objection was raised, the Document was adopted as agreed by 6<sup>th</sup> HLEG Meeting. It is enclosed as **Annex VII**.

#### **Agenda Item No.8**

##### **Selection of the ECO Tourism Capital:**

20. The Chairman gave a brief explanation to the Meeting about the Member States’ proposals and the result of deliberations of the 6<sup>th</sup> HLEG Meeting regarding the Selection of the ECO Tourism Capital. The senior officials, based on the Selection Criteria for “ECO Tourism Capital”, proposed to the Ministers Meeting the city of **Shakhrisabz** in the Republic of Uzbekistan as the ECO Tourism Capital for the year 2024 and the city of **Erzurum** in Türkiye for the year 2025.

21. No objection was raised by the ECO Member States and the decision was approved by the 4<sup>th</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism. Therefore, **Shakhrisabz** and **Erzurum** were selected as the ECO Tourism Capitals for the years 2024 and 2025, respectively.

#### **Agenda Item No.9**

##### **Adoption of Samarkand Declaration:**

22. The Meeting adopted the Samarkand Declaration. It is attached as **Annex-VIII**.

#### **Agenda Item No. 10**

##### **Any other business**

23. While taking the floor, Mr. Mustafa Koprulu, Deputy Head of Tourism Promotion Department, Ministry of Tourism, Turkish Cypriot State, thanked the ECO Secretariat as well as the ECO Member States for accepting their request to participate in this Meeting as an observer. He spoke about the tourism industry of their State e.g. sunny beach bungalows and apartments, tourism products, features of 18 individual units with a central pool and a private stretch of beach, weekly rentals in a duplex bungalow and extremely comfortable beach-front accommodations. He requested the ECO Member States to motivate their people to visit this Island as well for promotion of tourism industry.

24. The representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran requested the Meeting that the following proposal/offer made by the Iranian Government during the 6th High Level Experts Group (HLEG) Meeting on Tourism may also be indicated in the 'Samarkand Declaration';

- i) to host the 5<sup>th</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism in May or June 2023 in Ardabil; and
- ii) the offer of free of charge allocation of booths and special discount for accommodation for the participants (public and private sector) of the

ECO Member States for the upcoming Tehran International Tourism Exhibition (7-10 February 2023).

25. In this regard, and since there was no objection and this issue was agreed during the Meeting by the Member States, the Chair mandated the Secretariat to reflect the 1<sup>st</sup> proposal in the Samarkand Declaration upon receiving the wording from the Iranian Side.

**Agenda Item No. 11**

**Date and venue of the 5<sup>th</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism**

26. The Islamic Republic of Iran proposed to host the 5<sup>th</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism in May or June 2023 in Ardabil.

**Agenda Item No. 12**

**Consideration and Adoption of the Report (*prepared by the 6th High Level Expert Group Meeting on Tourism*)**

27. The Meeting adopted its report.

**Agenda Item No. 13**

**Closing Remarks and Vote of Thanks**

28. The representatives of the ECO Member States expressed their gratitude to H.E. Mr. Aziz Abdulkhakov, Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of Tourism and Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Uzbekistan for conducting the meeting in an efficient and professional manner and his outstanding chairmanship of the Meeting. They also expressed their deep appreciation and gratitude to the host, the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan, in particular the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Uzbekistan for excellent arrangements and successful organization of the Meeting in virtual mode.

29. The delegates also appreciated the efforts of the ECO Secretariat for preparing the documents and assisting the host in organizing the 4th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism, preceded by 6th HLEG Meeting on Tourism.

30. In his closing remarks, the ECO Secretary General expressed his thanks to the Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of Tourism and Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Uzbekistan, honourable Ministers, Heads of Delegations, Ambassadors and other eminent delegates as well as the host authorities for successfully organizing this important ECO event, particularly the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Heritage of Uzbekistan.

31. The Chairman expressed its appreciation to all the representatives and the participants and declared closing of the Meeting.

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