

Statement of the President Ilham Aliyev at the 10th ECO Summit
(Teheran, 11th March, 2009)

Distinguished Chairman,
Dear friends!

Once again, I would like to warmly greet you all and note that during last three years Azerbaijan has made efforts in the development of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). We give special attention to our activities in the organization. We consider that enhancement of the organization, regional and global strengthening of its positions can bring additional advantage to each member-state.

In the recent years, we attached much importance to the issues of regional cooperation. The countries represented in the ECO are united by common history and culture. Traditionally, we had solid ties and at a present stage, particularly today when the world is stricken with economic and financial crisis, regional cooperation, economic initiatives, integration issues are of great importance. From our part, we are ready to continue steps in this direction and especially interested in enhancing cooperation in political and economic fields. Political ties between countries represented in the ECO are at a very high level, and we should do our best so that member states could use our economic potential as much as possible. From its part, Azerbaijan undertakes important steps in this regard. During last three years of our chairmanship in the ECO, various initiatives have been put forward. At the same time, Azerbaijan initiated very important steps in energy, transport and other sectors in the region. Azerbaijan continues to contribute into strengthening of energy security.

A new energy infrastructure created in the region on our initiative serves for energy security, strengthening of bilateral and multilateral relations. In this context, we can list oil and gas pipelines, and also mention successful implementation of mutually beneficial projects with neighboring countries in the field of the electric power. Energy issues are on the top in today's global agenda. Big energy resources, which our countries possess, should serve national interests of our states. They should protect national interests of our countries, which should certainly have much influence on issues of regional cooperation. We need to continue efforts in this direction in a coordinated manner.

A very important railway project is being implemented in the transport sector on the initiative of Azerbaijan and neighboring countries. This railway under construction will connect Europe with Asia. Currently, this project is being implemented jointly by Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan, but I have no doubt that after the operationalization of Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway other countries of the region will also take advantage from these facilities as it is economically very beneficial and at the same time it will more strengthen friendly and brotherly relations between us.

We should effectively use economic potential of member-states to the highest possible extent. We should encourage mutual trade. We should perform trade operations with more member-states. Azerbaijan makes efforts in this regard.

I can tell that for the last five years our country has achieved great success from the point of view of its economic development. During this period GDP in Azerbaijan increased in 2,6 times, and industrial production – in 2,5 times. These achievements allowed us to sharply lower the poverty level. For five years poverty level was lowered since 49 to 13 percents. We will further be eager to continue our active role within the ECO framework and I am sure in the future we will see the excellent results.

In order to solve all the important issues of investments, integration, economic and regional cooperation in the region more successfully, there should be a peace and tranquility. Unfortunately, we do not see it so far. There are various threats, risks, challenges that in some cases do not decrease but even increase. A big problem Azerbaijan has been facing for the last twenty years is Armenian-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, expansionist policy of Armenia against Azerbaijan. As a result of this policy and Armenian policy of ethnic cleansing with regard to Azerbaijanis, more than one million Azerbaijanis has been deported from native lands and became refugees and migrants. 20 percents of our territories turned out to be under occupation that is still going on. It is a big problem for Azerbaijan, which causes big obstacles to strengthening security measures in the region. At the same time, it is a flagrant injustice. The position of Azerbaijan is supported by all international organizations; the UN Security Council adopted four resolutions on unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops from the Azerbaijan territories. However, Armenia ignores it. A year ago the UNGA adopted Resolution on status of occupied lands of Azerbaijan. Within the framework of the OIC, very important and fair decisions have been made. The same may be noted with regard to other organizations. But, unfortunately, these diplomatic efforts wouldn't lead to any results so far. We cannot accept this injustice. I especially would like to express my deep gratitude to all countries, which in all votes supported the position of Azerbaijan, true and justice. I'm confident that after the settlement of this conflict in the region absolutely new situation will be established, new possibilities for cooperation and collaboration be created.

At the same time, we should express very active attitude to problems that other ECO member-states are facing. In international forums, Azerbaijan always raised its voice in protection of national interests of member-states, demonstrated solidarity during voting, sensitively addressed the issues of solidarity within either ECO framework or the OIC. Azerbaijan is and will always be ready to provide political support to friendly and brotherly countries.

Using this possibility, I would like to express once again my respect and consideration to the Heads of States and Governments, delegations of all member-states. I wish my dear friend and brother, the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, H.E. Mr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad successes in chairing the organization during forthcoming years. I am sure that the next years the Economic Cooperation Organization will more strengthen its positions, which directly meets national interests of all member-states.

Thank you!