

Annex-II

In the Name of God

*Honourable Presidents,
Respected Members of the ECO Delegations,
Distinguished Guests,*

On behalf of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and our resolute and freedom-loving people, I take this opportunity to offer my congratulations on the opening of the Sixth Session of the Summit Conference of the Economic Cooperation Organisation as being the first ECO Summit in the new century. Further, I would like to welcome you and express my sincere appreciation of your presence in Tehran.

I have full confidence that with the help of God and in the light of active participation by all member countries, this Summit will succeed in adopting the necessary measures to expand regional cooperation, promote common understanding and assume a more active international role – these being among the basic objectives of this organisation. No doubt, success depends on our taking a fresh look at the opportunities and challenges before us, and our determination to achieve comprehensive development and foster greater regional collaboration. We have entered the new millennium not only with new perspectives and hopes, but also with growing anxiety about political, economic and cultural trends across the world.

At the outset of this millennium, some of the humanity's most pressing concerns are the attainment of ever-higher levels of affluence, cultural creativity and innovation while reaping the fruits of peaceful coexistence and global political cooperation. A part of our response to these concerns is to be found in expansion and intensification of regional cooperation. Indeed, the attainment of a just and free society, immune to oppression, is more readily accessible through regional homogeneity, solidarity and unity. In this regard, ECO is suitably placed to open up such a perspective, paving the way for greater cooperation and better understanding among the member countries.

Surely, among the most essential prerequisites to realize the objectives of enduring stability and a lasting peace are sustainable development, respect for the fundamental beliefs and further cultivating the cultural affinity of our peoples backed by efficient utilisation of our economic opportunities and comparative advantages. Those regional unions which are the products of cultural similarities, political trust and economic complementarity of the member states are of great significance in arriving at these objectives. For this reason, the concept of regional cooperation must be given a greater weight than ever in national, regional and global plans of action.

*Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

We should redefine the place of ECO against new national and international challenges. As members of a body of developing nations, we ought to move in the direction of achieving our goal of comprehensive, balanced and harmonious development. However, we cannot afford to remain heedless of the political, economic and cultural origins, impacts and mechanisms of the consequential phenomenon of globalization. Against this background, do

we have any option but to look for new prospects, relying on our collective will and capabilities, and making an intelligent and timely utilisation of our historical opportunities?

The concept and experience of “progress” is the product of the collective efforts of mankind, of different communities and civilizations. Thus, instead speak of the dialogue among cultures and civilizations and advocate an equitable share in human progress and prosperity in order to provide for all round access to freedom, social justice, individual rights, national sovereignty, civil society, enduring security and lasting peace in the world. It is in this way that we shall be able to counter the credo of domination and imposition of uniformity on a world devoid of spirituality, morality and faith.

The geographical area of ECO has the potential of taking a more active part in today’s global events, being endowed with the gift of Islamic thought, culture and civilization as well as a rich historical background, considerable natural and human resources and steadfast peoples. No doubt, the most important contribution to furthering our solidarity and unity within ECO originates from a common culture and civilization, which prevailed in many parts of the world for several centuries, leaving permanent marks in various areas. The organisation’s current projects and plans backed by the members’ capacity for cooperation prove that ECO can be the most potent instrument in the creation and promotion of convergence among the Central Asian, Caucasian and other regional countries, which can revive the historical function of the Silk Road.

Nonetheless, we have to admit that, at present, the organisation has a long way to go before the optimal level of cooperation and coordination is achieved. At the same time, the experience gained in implementing a number of ECO projects raises fresh hopes. To that end, it is possible to encourage greater cooperation among members of choosing those projects which require the participation of the largest number of members, giving precedence to collective efforts in the areas of commerce, transport and energy, bearing in mind the principles of partnership and economic complementarity.

At this juncture, the main responsibility of ECO is to focus the members’ attention, capabilities and resources on the application of those projects and plans justified on the basis of economic priority for the region. To this effect, once every member is convinced of the importance of the projects in hand, it will do its utmost to carry them out.

Commerce, a top priority in the organizational charter, is certainly one of the most important areas of cooperation among ECO members. Growth of commercial activities can definitely encourage further cooperation in other areas and accelerate the pace of economic integration in the region. From its earliest years, ECO has tried to apply numerous measures to expand commercial contacts among members. Unfortunately, these efforts have fallen short of our expectations due to the swift changes in the patterns of world economy and the incompatibility of members’ economies on the one hand, and the failure to carry out the relevant agreements, on the other. I hope that in view of the advantageous international position of ECO and the organisation’s internal capabilities, commercial exchanges will enjoy greater impetus in future. Bearing in mind the place of the World Trade Organisation, which has emerged as a new reality, greater steps will hopefully be taken to promote economic activities with the review of commercial relations, full implementation of existing regional agreements and adoption of new strategies and approaches aimed at more extensive regional transactions.

Fortunately, the first meeting of the ECO commerce ministers, held in Tehran, adopted a number of significant and effective measures for the expansion of commercial cooperation among members by ratifying an agreement in the framework of economic cooperation. It is necessary that this document be transformed into a memorandum of understanding in the area of reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers by setting a specific timetable for progress toward the establishment of the ECO free trade zones.

Recourse to modern information techniques and the creation of a trade and investment information network, as well as gradual application of electronic business technology are expected to further expand the existing scope of such cooperations. Greater cooperation in other areas, such as the development of transport and road grids as well as greater collaboration in the energy sector and environmental protection and campaign against the evils of drug trafficking, which have plagued all member countries for many years, are among other topics for regional cooperation in which ECO can provide an effective lead for others.

*Dear Guests,
Distinguished Participants,*

The history of this region testifies to the fact that in the course of many centuries, the solid imprints of a common culture and civilization, accompanied by a sense of solidarity and unity among different peoples in this region and their common endeavour at utilizing its extensive economic resources have been the main pivots of stability and convergence among these peoples and a source of their economic, scientific and cultural development. But one political rivalries and considerations came to impede the course of economic contacts, the region was plunged into tension and insecurity, which gave way to alien powers to freely forage and plunder it. The realities of our present world, too, bear witness to the fact that it is through economic and cultural cooperation that political and social stability can be maintained in the region. Today, the perils of ever-spreading drug trafficking, social crises and internal conflicts in some of the regional countries, in particular Afghanistan, which pose a threat to the security of all countries of the region mainly stem from poverty and cultural, social and political underdevelopment. Therefore, the only way to establish peace and security in this region can be achieved through cooperation, mutual understanding, reliance on common cultural inclinations, and political confidence building in meeting each other's needs.

Here, I find it necessary to reemphasize the position of the Islamic Republic of Iran in respecting the inviolability of international borders, promotion of the culture of dialogue, thorough elimination of regional and global tensions, peaceful settlement of disputes, prevention of injustice and oppression as well as the expansion of economic cooperation on the basis of interests of all parties. We support any attempt at swifter reconstruction of countries and better quality of life and welfare for people through joint efforts with other countries, specially the members of this organisation. We are sure that the active participation of all member countries and their determination in implementation their organizational commitments, will set an appropriate tone for the resolution of existing problems and expansion of regional cooperation, ultimately raising ECO to a higher scale of regional and international power in the spirit of peace and stability.

The Islamic Republic of Iran enjoys a unique geopolitical position to provide the ECO members with special facilities in the areas of transit of cargo and passengers as well as supply of energy to consumer markets. For this reason, and in view of ECO's plan of action for

the development of the transport sector and the emphasis placed by previous summits on the need to complete the missing links in the road transport network, conditions are now ripe for each and every member to act upon its commitments and, through completion of a network of regional roads linking the east-west and north-south routes, revive the ancient and civilization-building Silk Road.

*Excellencies,
Esteemed delegates,*

In fact, an important aspect of regional relations which can complement the course of cooperation within ECO relates to the subject of the Caspian Sea. Because of its rich resources and the need for the construction of fuel pipelines, the Caspian Sea is receiving growing regional and international attention. Among the subjects concerning economic cooperation among the littoral states is the exploitation of rich and diverse potentials of the Caspian Sea. And to give effect to cooperation, the legal regime of the sea should be decided in advance.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has repeatedly affirmed in the international forums that the Caspian legal regime ought to be determined according to the existing historical records (including the extent treaties), principle of good-neighborliness and respect for the economic and security interests of the littoral states. In this direction, a regime of joint ownership will certainly meet the interests of all five littoral states. However, should these littoral states support a sharing scheme of the Sea, the Islamic Republic of Iran, to prove its good intention and to strengthen convergence among littoral states, is ready to support the idea of the division of the Sea based on just and equal shares.

We believe that the only way out of the present deadlock is activating the Caspian Cooperation Council. Such a measure could prove effective in the consolidation of the foundations of regional peace and security, institutionalization of regional integration upon the foundations of peace, understanding and expansion of economic cooperation among littoral states. Accordingly, I hope that the next meeting of the deputy foreign ministers of the littoral states planned to be held in Tehran, will lead to satisfactory progress on these issues and discussions and, in view of the political volition of the regional countries for the settlement of the problem, arrive at a final resolution as regards the principle and framework of the Caspian legal regime.

*Your Excellencies,
Esteemed Colleagues,*

The Islamic Republic of Iran, certain of its good intention and inclination and efforts by the leaders of the member countries to promote regional cooperation, expresses its keen interest in regional development and construction. Iran expects ECO to provide the most appropriate framework for the realization of the ideals of the peoples of the region. In this regard, we are ready to exert every effort to support the process of effective implementation of the agreed framework. We believe that the time is ripe now to guarantee the development and security of our region which will not be possible unless we pay earnest and collective attention to the implementation of the projects and resolutions approved by ECO.

At this point, we are duty-bound to prepare the grounds for the technological

advancement of the region through strengthening our collaboration and taking an active part in the development and cultural reconstruction of the region and paying attention to our common heritage and interests. All of us should meet the challenges and try to resolve the questions before us with greater determination and wisdom, giving intellectual, cultural, political and practical support to the organisation in realization of its goals and materialization of its plans.

Finally, I should thank and commend the ECO Secretariat and in particular its Secretary General, Onder Ozar, for their devotion and unfailing effort in promotion of the aims of ECO and intra-organizational cooperations. I would also like to congratulate Dr. Govahi on his appointment as the new Secretary General and wish him success in accomplishing the tasks lying ahead. I hope that this Summit will arrive at useful and practical results based on our agenda, opening up new horizons for more extensive cooperation.

At the end, I express my sincere thanks to the honored presidents, vice presidents, esteemed ministers and all our distinguished guests of this summit and I pray to Almighty God to help them all in carrying out the great responsibilities that they now have before them.

Thank you
