

Statement

**by H.E. Elmar Mammadyarov,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan,
at the Extraordinary Session of Council of Ministers of the
ECO Member States**

23 September 2016, New York

Distinguished Ministers and Heads of Delegations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to express my greetings to all participants of the extraordinary meeting of the Council and express my gratitude to the ECO Secretariat for organization of this event.

Today's meeting is a good opportunity for exchange of views on recent activities within our Organization and outlining its prospects in the rapidly changing environment for the last period of time.

Therefore, we have to use this opportunity for useful and practical discussions and taking decisions which will make our organization really efficient and influential.

Today, when we still experience the impacts of global economic slowdown, energy, transportation and other interrelated components of connectivity are becoming more promising for economic and trade growth of our countries. Therefore, it is important to highlight the development of transport and connectivity issues in general among priority areas, as an essential prerequisite for the regional trade development.

Azerbaijan in collaboration with regional and international partners has contributed to regional cooperation by initiating and implementing energy and transportation projects. We are actively participating in realization of International North-South and East-West Transport Corridors.

Establishment of Trans-Caspian International Route and construction of Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway project, expected to be operational next year, are among the important projects.

We are convinced that an early completion of the Gazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran) - Astara (Azerbaijan) railway project which is a part of North-South Transport Corridor, will give new impetus to economic growth, expand transport opportunities for involved countries as well as the whole region.

Another promising sphere of common interest is enhancing synergy in sustainable development, including in the area of sustainable energy resources in line with new "Agenda 2030" and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). We are closely observing the recent trends and developments for establishment of ECO regional electricity market. Azerbaijan also initiated establishment of Data Information Network (DIN) on Renewables in Baku.

Azerbaijan through its practical activities continues to contribute to the goals and objectives of ECO. This year we will host 4th ECO Business Forum that will contribute to enhance intra-regional trade and investment, as well as economic growth and development in ECO region.

Among priority areas of cooperation within ECO is development of regional activities to tackle environmental challenges. As a part of this agenda Azerbaijan has joined to global efforts on combating climate change towards global climate resilience via submission of its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) and signing of Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Current fruitful cooperation in science and research increase the capacity of ECO in identification and preparation of ECO projects. In this connection, we believe that the early establishment of the ECO Research Centre in Baku will give its contribution to ECO's future development via elaborating efficient economic projects, research programs as well as economic patterns for the regional states.

Also we deem it expedient to promote implementation of regionally beneficial projects and closer cooperation with UN specialized agencies and international financial institutions to successfully implement economic projects of regional character.

All in all, instead of spreading activities we should focus on core priorities common for the Member States and whole region, inter alia, transport, alternative energy, trade and investments, agriculture, information technology and tourism.

Dear Colleagues,

At previous Council Meetings we stressed the necessity to find creative ways and means to improve the existing mechanism of cooperation within organization.

The new ECO Vision 2016-2025 which is currently under elaboration needs to reflect the interests of all Member States. This reforming process should aim to enhance efficiency of current institutions and activities within ECO.

Azerbaijan supports the reforming process that through joint efforts can provide a possibility for elaboration of actions for further development of the ECO.

Dear Colleagues,

Without resolution of protracted conflicts and ensuring security and stability in the region, ECO will fail to reap the benefits from comprehensive regional cooperation. Ongoing military occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan by Armenia still remains a major source of instability and impediment to the economic development.

Withdrawal of Armenian military forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and ensuring the return of the refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes will not only contribute to peace and security in the South Caucasus but also enhance full-fledged intra-regional cooperation.

Thank you for your attention.