

STATEMENT
by H.E. Ambassador Bunyad Huseynov
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the Economic
Cooperation Organization (ECO),
27th ECO Regional Planning Council meeting

Dear Mr. Chairman,

Dear Mr. Secretary General,

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

Let me on behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan to express my greetings to all participants of the 27th ECO Regional Planning Council meeting and express my appreciation to the ECO Secretariat for the efforts in organizing this event.

The recent developments in and around our region proved once more the importance of developing closer regional cooperation among our nations and the role of ECO in this context is important. Azerbaijan as one of the member-states of the ECO has always supported the main goals and objectives of the Organization and made a significant contribution in the form of specific actions in enhancement of regional synergy and various partnership framework, in the areas of transport, energy and trade.

It is important to highlight the development of transport and connectivity issues among priority areas, as an essential component for the regional trade development. Azerbaijan strives to use its transit and trade potential, by transforming the transportation system and services into one of the key points of its economy. With this in mind, by developing its transit potential, Azerbaijan strives to diversify and modernize its transport infrastructure, which will serve the interconnection of the Trans-European and Trans-Asian railway networks. Along with this, the construction of the New International Sea Trade Port and its International Logistic Centre will significantly increase the competitiveness of the international transport corridors and transit capacity of the countries of the region.

We do believe that, one of the priorities of the ECO agenda should be taking actions on the interconnection of ECO rail networks and the development of unified railway infrastructure of the region. It's my pleasure to inform you that 90% of total works on "Qazvin-Rasht" railway project is completed. The negotiation on financing of the railway project "Rasht-Astara" which is 165km is successfully going on.

In the beginning of 2017 the railway "Astara (Iran)–Astara (Azerbaijan)" will be launched. This project is an important step towards completion of North-South Transport Corridor. We convinced that an early completion of this project will give new impetus to economic growth, expand transport opportunities for concerned countries as well as the ECO region. Thus, with mentioned railway project, all goods loaded in Iranian Astara, via Georgia or Russia depending on owner's choice will be delivered to any destination in Europe.

The renewables is another promising sphere of cooperation in the ECO framework. Data Information Network on renewables initiated and put into operation by Azerbaijan is important tool to explore renewable potential and project opportunities across the Region.

Along with mentioned, we shouldn't neglect cooperation in spare of environment. As a part of our agenda Azerbaijan has joined 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 in April 2016.

Having talked about current fruitful cooperation in science and research, we believe that the establishment of the ECO Research Centre in Baku will give its contribution to ECO's future activity by elaborating efficient economic projects and research programs. Functioning of the research center is one of the most important issues today's agenda.

Distinguished participants,

Our Organization with its 10 member states, covering a large geography, connecting two big continents and gathering millions of people, have an incomparable space for cooperation in a different spares. That is why, we should double our efforts, develop present economic cooperation and to find new fields for the future cooperation. Our rich culture, ancient history, priceless monuments and architecture, amazing nature, marvelous music, delicious food etc. can become a new page for our future cooperation. With this in mind, we propose to ECO Secretariat and the member states to elaborate the possibility of ECO cooperation in the field of tourism as well.

We expect that current reform process within ECO will help boost the Organization's role as an important regional player. In this regard, we support initiatives to consolidate the work of all related bodies and remove the existing shortcomings. *-npenerobut*

Taking into account the comparative advantages of individual countries in respective fields, we recognize a need for short-listing of priority areas for cooperation. We should strengthen the capacity of ECO as a project oriented and a more visible regional player.

In order to improve the efficiency of ECO, non-economic activities should be limited. Instead of organizing numerous meetings, we consider it more important to hold those meetings which contribute to the preparation, implementation and coordination of economic projects beneficial for the region, and which attract financial resources. Azerbaijan is planning to continue hosting important ECO events in future for achieving key objectives of the Organization.

The New ECO Vision for 2016-2025 which is currently under preparation needs to reflect the interests of all Member States and define the development agenda for the region and set the strategic direction of the Organization for the coming decade. Azerbaijan supports this reforming process that via joint efforts can enhance efficiency of current institutions and provide a possibility for elaboration of actions for further development of the ECO.

In conclusion, I would like to wish you success during panel meeting of the regional planning and meetings of review committees and thank once again the ECO Secretariat for organizing this event.

Thank you for attention!