

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov,
the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan,
at the 20th Meeting of Council of Ministers
(Baku, 15th October, 2012)**

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

At the outset, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and my own behalf, I would like to express an appreciation to the outgoing chair of the Council, H.E. Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey for his leadership, and certainly for the hard work of his dedicated team over the last two years.

It is a great pleasure and honour to assume the Chairmanship of the Council and to host this Meeting that marks the 20th anniversary of the ECO enlargement.

As one of the time-honoured regional organizations, ECO has gone through a serious transformation primarily driven by the historic and political developments in the region featuring the past 20 years. The enlargement has enabled Azerbaijan along with the brotherly countries of Central Asia and Afghanistan to join the ECO family and contribute to the consolidation of economic cooperation and integration efforts in the region, in the spirit of the goals and objectives set out in the Treaty of Izmir. The advancement of those goals is key to maximizing impact of our collaboration and preserving the Organization's credibility. Following the restoration of its independence, Azerbaijan has been an active advocate for a strengthened regional cooperation placing a special emphasis on strengthening economic ties and promotion of large-scale infrastructure projects in the region.

ECO region has a rich economic and intellectual potential, which largely facilitates the task of the Organization to enhance economic cooperation, and ensure its effectiveness and sustainability through focusing on the needs of the Member States and practical results. In our view, there is a need to short-list priority areas for cooperation based on the measurable results and comparative advantages of the region. Promotion of dialogue and business ties in the areas of transport, ICT and environment are essential. In this regard, strengthening an interaction in the field of science and research should be pursued as a cross-cutting objective.

Dear Colleagues,

It is our conviction that the region has a huge untapped potential in trade and investments. Therefore, a greater focus on these areas can enable the

Organization to fulfil its primary goals and objectives, and hence, deserves our special attention. With this in mind, Azerbaijan has recently taken steps towards joining the ECO Trade and Development Bank and hopes that the Bank will play an instrumental role in supporting the project development in the ECO activities, and hence, act as a development-oriented institution.

Speaking about other priorities, it is important to highlight the transport sector, as an essential prerequisite for the abovementioned regional trade development. In this context, Azerbaijan believes that ECO should aim at modernization of the railway routes and related infrastructure as well as creation of common railway network and its interconnection with European and Middle East networks. The early completion of the ongoing railway projects of regional importance, including Qazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran) – Astara (Azerbaijan) will create new attractive transit transport opportunities for countries of the region. In this regard, we welcome the establishment of the High-level Working Group on this project and hope that the first meeting of the Working Group to be held in Baku will serve as a useful platform for generating effective outcomes.

Elaborating on sectoral cooperation, I can not, but mention the synergies in the area of information-communications technologies (ICT), which can enable us to benefit from advanced regional connectivity solutions and telecommunications infrastructure. Bearing this in mind, in 2008 Azerbaijan initiated the Trans-Eurasian Information Super Highway (TASIM) project, which was unanimously supported by the UN Member States in 2009 (UNGA Resolution A/Res/64/186). Pursuing to further support the project implementation the Government of Azerbaijan plans on tabling a new TASIM resolution during the current GA session and invites the ECO Member States to continue to provide their valuable support.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the context of perspectives of future collaboration, it is important not underestimate the role and impact of ECO activities in consolidating peace and stability efforts in the region through socio-economic cooperation. Having said this we acknowledge the centrality of support for Afghanistan's development. Azerbaijan supports the Kabul process and stands ready to contribute to further stabilization of Afghanistan, *inter alia*, through integration of this country into transportation networks within Eurasia, including though the railway project Baku-Tbilisi-Kars.

Within ECO the South Caucasus is yet another region suffering from protracted conflicts. The aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan resulted in the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict still remains a major source of instability and impediment to the economic development and full-scale regional cooperation. For us, there is no alternative other than solving the conflict on the basis of respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of the internationally recognized borders of the Republic of Azerbaijan. In this respect,

we highly appreciate the continued support and common stand of the ECO Member States.

In our evaluation efforts, it is important to focus on increasing the efficiency of main bodies of the Organization and primarily the Secretariat. We should also refrain from a practice of proliferation of subsidiaries, which are expected to invent and cover new areas of economic cooperation, and instead to concentrate on expanding cooperative partnerships in the areas we have already pledged to work.

We hope that the recommendations produced by the Eminent Persons Group (EPG), created by the initiative of the Republic of Turkey, will receive a serious consideration of the Member States. In particular, we can benefit from the recommendations on how to increase the efficiency of our cooperation and accelerate the implementation of "ECO Vision 2015". Furthermore, in order to enhance dynamism, efficiency and visibility of the Organization, a follow-up mechanism to monitor and evaluate the overall performance of the Organization should be also set up.

Using this opportunity, I would like to congratulate our new Secretary General Ambassador Shamil Aleskerov and wish him every success in his future work. We are confident that under his professional leadership our Organization will fully utilize its existing potential. We also wish to thank former Secretary General Mr. Yahya Maroofi for his contribution to the work of the Organization for the past years.

In conclusion, on behalf of my delegation let me also thank all our experts for their efforts to reach common position on the draft declaration. It would be my pleasure to recommend the agreed text of the draft declaration to the Summit.

Thank you for your attention.
