

The 7th Ministerial Meeting on Transport & Communications
**Speech of H.E Mr. Hamidullah Qaderi, Minister
of Transport & Civil Aviation**

(Antalya-Turkey, 15-17 April, 2008)

Mr. Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is indeed an honour and privilege to be amongst you on the occasion of 7th ECO Ministerial meeting on Transport & Communication” in the historic city of Antalya. I would like to thank Ministry of Transport & Communications of the Republic of Turkey for organizing this conference in this very beautiful city. Let me put it on record that Afghan people has always cherished special relation with people of Turkey. I take this opportunity to convey strong support of H.E. President Karzai and people of Afghanistan for policies and programme undertaken by the ECO. I would also like to thank ECO member states for their support for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Broadly the ECO policies and strategies cover political and economical issues of the region. Each member of the ECO is keen to internalize its political policies and to take concrete action for greater economic cooperation between the member countries. Afghanistan policy is to leverage its geo-strategic location as a positive characteristic for Regional Co-operation. However, till now Afghanistan has not been able to capitalize its location for economic advantage. With proper support from member countries, Afghanistan can become a connecting bridge and transit corridor for the whole region. The Afghan Government’s goal is to contribute to regional stability and prosperity, and to enhance the conditions for Afghanistan to resume its vital role as a land bridge and business hub between Central Asia and South Asia, and the Middle East and the Far East. The reconstruction of our national highway system will enable connecting Central Asia to South Asia and Far East to Middle East – market of literally half of the world population and vast resources. Our vision for Afghanistan and its people is one where we act as a conduit for growing regional trade. Afghanistan has taken up lot of initiatives since 2002 in the form of simplification, standardization and harmonization of trade and transport related documents and procedures, strengthening institutional capability of trade and transport related entities, and customs reform to promote trade and commerce in the region.

Mr. Chairperson:

Due to initiatives taken by the Government, transit time through Afghanistan has already been significantly lowered through a 70 percent completion of the ring road and its links with neighbouring countries. A number of new transit highways have been officially opened this year, such as the Sher Khan Bandar Bridge connecting Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Following the officials opening of the Sher Khan Bandar Bridge, a transit agreement is currently being drafted between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. The land acquisition and de-mining of the Iranian funded Heart-Sangan railway project has started;

with the Iranian section already under construction. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Afghanistan and Pakistan on the Chaman-Spinboldak railway. Iran has also started construction of the first two section of the Khaf-Heart railway on its territory.

A number of bilateral and multilateral trade and transit agreements have been signed in 2007 with neighboring countries. Transit to Afghanistan through Pakistan is currently broadly governed by the 1965 Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA). Since Afghanistan has maximum trade with Pakistan, the agreement of 1965 needs revision as the economic and transport conditions for the transit of goods to/from Afghanistan through Pakistan has changed significantly during the period. Another positive development has been the IDFA of the Regional Opportunity Zone (ROZ) concept to facilitate trade contact on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

The infrastructural upgrades need to be coupled with more efficient customs and border posts, with streamlined border crossing formalities on both sides of the border, as well as infrastructure upgrades in the surrounding regions. The Government is working on a plan for secure international road corridors with efficient cross border ports, and the implementation of the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA)

Mr. Chairperson Ladies and Gentlemen:

We have to take concrete measure to realize the potential of greater regional economic integration especially the barriers that inhibit the movement of people and goods among our countries. For trade promotion, transport has always played a significant role in shaping the economies by linking not only markets but also people and cultures. Transport linkages are central to economic integration as seven member of ECO are landlocked countries. For better development of transport linkages in the region, Afghanistan and other landlocked countries should be given equal transit access to all regional ports. In this context, working towards transit and transport facilities under the Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA), is a key priority for ECO.

In this backdrop, the conference is a well-timed effort to promote trade of the land locked countries through better transportation system. The integration of transport system, a common understanding and approach in development of roadways, rail/road, promotion of private sector collaboration for development of multi-modal transport system and harmonization of customs transit documents and procedures among partnering countries are the challenges before us. The geographical location of Afghanistan can be leveraged if Afghanistan is connecting through rail link with ECO members' state.

Mr. Chairperson

In the end, I would like to draw you attention to the need to include reconstruction of Afghanistan as one of the goals of ECO, as peace, stability and economic development of Afghanistan would be in the best interest of the region. I hope that through the active and meaningful contributions of all participating delegations, the geographic disadvantage of landlocked countries of ECO can be turned into an advantage. We, the Afghan people stand ready to play our part. With that, distinguished delegates, let me end by wishing this conference every success in its deliberations. Thank you for your kind attention.