

ANNEXES I-IX

of the

Report of 23rd Council of Ministers (COM)

(17 April 2018; Dushanbe-Republic of Tajikistan)

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23rd Council of Ministers (COM) Meeting*(17 April 2018, Dushanbe, Tajikistan)***LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

ECO MEMBER STATES	
No.	Name & Designation of Delegate
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN	
1.	H.E. Mr. Salahuddin Rabbani, Minister of Foreign Affairs (Head of Delegation)
2.	Mr. Mohammad Ismail Rahimi, Deputy Minister of Economy for Technical Affairs
3.	Mr. Naqibullah Hafizi, Deputy Director General of Regional Cooperation Directorate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
4.	Mr. Sebghatullah Ahmadi, Deputy Spokesperson and Directorate General of Communications, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
5.	Mr. Farmanrz Hossaini, Assistant of the Minister of Foreign Affairs
REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN	
1.	H.E. Mr. Mahmud Mammad-Guliyev, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, (Head of Delegation)
2.	Mr. Hasan Mammadzade, Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan to Tajikistan
3.	Mr. Anar Huseynov, Director of Economic Development Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
4.	Mr. Rashad Novruz, Head of Regional Cooperation Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
5.	Mr. Aghali Aghayev, Attache, Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Dushanbe (Tajikistan)
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN	
1.	H.E. Dr. Mohammad Javad Zarif, Minister of Foreign Affairs (Head of Delegation)
2.	Dr. Gholamreza Ansari, Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy
3.	H.E. Mr. Majid Bizmark, Director General for Multilateral & International Economic Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
4.	H.E. Mr. Gholamreza Bagheri Moghaddam, Director General for Eurasia of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
5.	H.E. Mr. Hojatollah Faghani, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Republic of Tajikistan
6.	Mr. Hosein Gharibi, Assistant to the Minister of Foreign Affairs
7.	Mr. Abolghasem Tahmasebi, Director for ECO Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
8.	Mr. Shahrokh Edrisabadi, Senior Expert for ECO Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
9.	Mr. Akbar Khodaei, Senior Expert for ECO Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
10.	Mr. Mirdamadi, Media officer of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN	
1.	H.E. Mr. A. Kamaldinov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs (Head of Delegation)
2.	Mr. Amreev Bagdat, Ambassador the Republic of Kazakhstan to Iran
3.	Mr. Seitimov Nurlan, Ambassador the Republic of Kazakhstan to Tajikistan
4.	Mr. A. Bakaev, Director of the Asian Cooperation Department of Ministry of Foreign Affairs
5.	Mr. A. Gobdlullin, Counsellor, Asia Cooperation Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
6.	Ms. Ramazanova, Second Secretary, Asia Cooperation Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
KYRGYZ REPUBLIC	
1.	H.E. Dr. Kemelova, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs (Head of Delegation)
2.	Mr. M. Niyazov, Ambassador of Kyrgyz Republic to Tajikistan
3.	Mr. S. Kochkorbaev, Counsellor, Embassy of Kyrgyz Republic to Tajikistan
4.	Mr. A. Tulugenov, Attache of the DIA
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF PAKISTAN	
1.	H.E. Mr. Sartaj Aziz, Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission of Pakistan (Head of Delegation)
2.	Mr. Tariq Iqbal Soomro, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to Tajikistan
3.	Mr. Asif Ali Khan Durrani, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to Iran
4.	Ms. Syeda Saqlain, Director General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
5.	Mr. Shahid Ali Seehar, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Dushanbe (Tajikistan)
6.	Mr. Ghulam Hussain, First Secretary, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Tehran (Iran)

7.	Ms. Saman Muneeb, Deputy Director, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN (HOST)	
1.	H.E. Mr. Sirodjidin Aslov, Minister of Foreign Affairs (Head of Delegation)
2.	H.E. Mr. Ismatullo Nasriddin, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs
3.	H.E. Mr. Nematullo Emomzoda, Ambassador of Tajikistan to Iran/Permanent Representative to ECO
4.	Mr. Luqmon Isomatov, Head of Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
5.	Mr. Ardasher Qodiri, Head of Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
6.	Mr. Ilhom Abdurahmonov, Director of State Unitary Enterprise "Tojikdipservice", Ministry of Foreign Affairs
7.	Mr. Dilshod Sharifi, Head of Department, Ministry of Economic Development and Trade
8.	Mr. Shoev, Head of Department, Ministry of Finance
9.	Mr. Manuchehr Hojiev, Deputy Head of Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
10.	Mr. Jobir Manuchehr, Deputy Head of Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
11.	Mr. Salohiddin Nasreddinov, Head of section, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
12.	Mr. Salohiddin Kiromov, Head of section, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
13.	Ms. Matluba Turaeva, Concellor, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
14.	Ms. Rakhshon Gardakova, Second Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
15.	Mr. Ashraf Kabirov, Second Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
16.	Mr. Parviz Eshonjonov, Attache, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
REPUBLIC OF TURKEY	
1.	H.E. Mr. Ahmet Yildiz, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs (Head of Delegation)
2.	Mr. Riza Hakan Takin, Ambassador of Turkey to Iran and Permanent Representative to ECO
3.	Mr. Ozgur ARSLAN, Head of Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
4.	Mr. Mehmet YILMAZ, Head of Department, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency
5.	Mr. Gokten Damar, Planning Expert, Ministry of Development
6.	Mr. Ferruh TIGLI, Advisor to the Minister Ministry of Development
7.	Ms. Hatice OZDIL, Third Secretary Embassy of Turkey to Iran
8.	Mr. Oncu GUNES, Attache, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
9.	Mr. Ali Rifat KOKSAL, Ambassador the Republic of Turkey to the Republic of Tajikistan
10.	Mr. Emre POLAT, Second Secretary, Embassy of Turkey in Dushanbe
11.	Mr. Arif EKMEKCI, Third Secretary, Embassy of Turkey in Dushanbe
12.	Ms. Dildar SIRZAD, Deputy Coordinator of TIKA Dushanbe Office
TURKMENISTAN	
1.	H.E. Mr. Rashid Meredov, Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers , Minister of Foreign Affairs
2.	Mr. Ahmed Kairbanov, Ambassador of Turkmenistan to Iran
3.	Mr. Alayev Chary, Ambassador of Turkmenistan to Tajikistan
4.	Mr. Shalar Geldinazarov, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
5.	Mr. Serdar Kuvatnyyazov, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
6.	Mr. Eziz Nazarov, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN	
1.	H.E. Mr. A. Abduvakhitov, Deputy Minister of Foreign affairs (Head of Delegation)
2.	Mr. B. Abdullaev, Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Iran
3.	Mr. E. Shaismatov, Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Tajikistan
4.	Mr. J. Nuritdinov, Head of the International Legal Department, Ministry of Justice
5.	Mr. L. Khodjaev, Head of the Division of the Department for Cooperation with Middle and Near East Countries, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
6.	Mr. T. Alibekov, Head of the Department of the Ministry of Finance
7.	Mr. U. Babev, Third Secretary, Embassy of Uzbekistan, Tehran
ECO OBSERVERS	
TURKISH CYPRIOT STATE	
1.	H.E. Prof. Kudret Ozersay, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs (Head of Delegation)
2.	Mr. Mustafa Lakadamyali, Undersecretary, Deputy Prime Ministry and Ministry of Foreign Affairs
3.	Ms. Gulfem Veziroglu Sevgili, Director of OIC Affairs, Deputy Prime Ministry and Ministry of Foreign Affairs
4.	Mr. Gunes Onar, Advisory and Political Affairs Director, Deputy Prime Ministry and Ministry of Foreign Affairs
5.	Mr. Cagri Kalfaoglu, Second Secretary, Deputy Prime Ministry and Ministry of Foreign Affairs

COOPERATION COUNCIL OF THE TURKIC SPEAKING STATES	
1.	Dr. Omer Kocaman, Deputy Secretary General (Head of Delegation)
2.	Ms. Hatice Ozge Pan, Project Director
ENERGY CHARTER	
1.	Mr. Marat Terterov, Principal Coordinator
INVITED GUEST	
1.	H.E. Mr. Lebedev Sergey Nikolayevich, Chairman of the Executive Committee, the CIS Executive Secretary
2.	Ms. Pratibha Mehta, UN Permanent Representative and Resident Coordinator to Tajikistan (UNDP)
3.	Mr. Jan Peter Olters, Head of World Bank Office in Tajikistan
4.	Mr. Hisham Taleb Maruf, IDB Regional Director for Central Asia
ECO SPECIALIZED AGENCIES/REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS/AFFILIATED BODIES	
ECO CULTURAL INSTITUTE (ECI)	
1.	Dr. Mohammad Mahdi Mazaheri, President (Head of Delegation)
2.	Ms. Fatemeh Mirbagheri, Cultural Expert
3.	Mr. Hamid Reza Javadi
4.	Mr. Mahdi Omraninejad
ECO-EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE (ECO-EI)	
1.	Prof. M. Akif KIRECCI, President
2.	Ms. Olga Sanli Gerger
ECO SCIENCE FOUNDATION (ECO-SF)	
1.	Prof. Dr. Manzoor H. Soomro, President (Head of Delegation)
2.	Mr. Adnan Ali Abbasi, Accounts Officer
ECO Cultural Institute (EI)	
1.	Dr. Mohammad Mahdi Mazaheri, President
2.	Ms. Fatemeh Mirbagheri, Cultural Expert
ECO COLLEGE OF INSURANCE	
1.	Dr. Atousa Goudarzi, Dean
ECO INSTITUTE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGIES (ECO-IEST)	
1.	Dr. Asghar Mohammadi Fazel, President (Head of Delegation)
ECO POSTAL COLLEGE	
1.	Khalid Awais Ranjha, Director
ECO SECRETARIAT	
1.	H. E. Mr. Halil Ibrahim Akca, ECO Secretary General (Head of Delegation)
2.	Mr. Kanan Nazarov, Deputy Secretary General
3.	Mr. Hadi Soleimanpur, Deputy Secretary General
4.	Mr. Fuad Farzalibeyov, Director (Energy, Mineral & Environment)
5.	Mr. Ahmad Saffari, Director
6.	Mr. Bahodur Rahmonov, Assistant Director (Coordination and Follow Up)
7.	Mr. Muhammad Muqet Asim Shah, Assistant Director (International Relations)
8.	Mr. Duran Simsek, Chief d' Cabinet
9.	Mr. Mahmoud Khoubkar, Legal Advisor
10.	Mr. Muhammad Safdar, Programme Officer
11.	Mr. Israr Ahmad Khan, Steno-Secretary
12.	Mr. Arshad Ali Jatoi, Steno-Secretary
13.	Ms. Aynur Mammadova, Russian Translator
14.	Ms. Nurgul Duissenova, Russian Translator
15.	Mr. Amriyo Boboev, Russian Translator
16.	Mr. Berik Buzauov, Russian Translator

The ECO Secretary General's Statement at the Senior Official Meeting (SOM) preceding the 23rd ECO Council of Ministers Meeting (Dushanbe 16th April, 2018)

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Dear Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would like to welcome all of you, on behalf of ECO Secretariat, at the 23th Meeting of ECO Council of Ministers. At the outset, I wish to express my gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan for the excellent arrangements and the warm hospitality extended to all delegates.

This ECO Council of Ministers (COM) Meeting is the first formal COM meeting, since the adoption of the "ECO Vision 2025" by the 13th ECO Summit, in March 2017, in Islamabad. The Vision, addressing the emerging needs and requirements for economic development of ECO Member States and the Region, will guide our Organization in the next 10 years. As it is known, Sustainability, Integration, and Good Governance are the core principles of the Vision. This Vision focuses on the following six priority areas namely Trade, Transport and Connectivity, Energy, Tourism, Economic Growth and Productivity, and Social Welfare and Environment. Each of these areas has its own Strategic Objectives, Policy Environment and the Expected Outcomes. These are also the variables against which the implementation of the Vision will be measured.

Excellencies,

At the beginning of my statement, allow me to share with you information on the ECO overall profile that will reflect the potential and the untapped potential of the region towards achieving the very goals that the Organization has been established for.

The share of ECO's aggregated GDP to the world GDP improved from 2.06 percent in 2000 to 2.63 percent in 2015.

On the trade count, the total trade of the ten ECO countries amounted to US\$ 626 billion in 2017, which has registered a marginal decline by decrease of 3.4 percent in comparison with 2015. This was mainly due to the global recessionary trends and decrease in oil prices. Exports account for 46 percent while imports constitute about 54 percent of total volume of merchandise trade.

The share of the ECO region in the world trade is 2.1 % as against its population of 6.2% of the world population. It is worrisome that the ECO's share in global trade has been stagnating around 2 percent.

Moreover, the intra-regional ECO trade accounts for 7.64 percent of the total trade of the ECO member states in 2016, which is far below than its potential and other regional economic blocs.

The ECO countries received 36 Billion US\$ as foreign direct investment in 2016, which is a relatively modest figure comparing the development needs of the region.

These figures reflect the low level development and the poor integration of ECO region with the world economy and within the region despite its rich natural and human resources, and corridor status between big markets.

Excellencies,

Since the last Meeting of the COM, in Islamabad, we have made notable headway in promoting cooperation in various sectors of activities. In some sectors, we are successful in achieving our targets; while in others we need more focused efforts to overcome bottlenecks and achieve breakthrough. It is my distinct honor to present this august forum a brief account of the activities and progress of the ECO achieved over the previous year.

Trade and Investment sector occupies the foremost important place and is among the core priority areas which can play its crucial role in improving the economies of the Member States in particularly through expansion in the intra and inter regional trade.

International trade statistics reveals that the aggregated world trade of the ten ECO Member States amounts to US\$ 626 billion in 2016 compared with US\$ 648 billion in 2015, a decrease by 3.39 percent. Both trade aggregates i.e. exports and imports have witnessed decline in 2016 as compared to 2015, exports from US\$ 285 to US\$ 276 billion and imports from US\$ 363 billion to US\$ 350 billion. The aggregated trade decline is marginal which is in line with the global declining trend of trade. However, it is less pronounced in 2016 relation with the sharp decline in 2015 from US\$ 828 billion in 2014 to US\$ 648 billion in 2015, a decline by 21 percent. Data further reveals that exports in 2016 are composed of 44% of total volume of merchandise trade whereas imports make up 56% of total volume of merchandise trade, almost same in percentage terms in both the years under reference. Furthermore, the share of the ECO region's trade in the global trade of US\$ 31.94 trillion is almost 2 percent as against ECO region's population of 6.2 percent in the world population.

Intra-regional trade accounts for 7.64 percent of the total trade of the ECO member states. Although a part of this decrease is due to slow down in the international trade fall in oil prices, it is still far below than its potential and other regional economic blocs/groupings like EU, ASEAN, NAFTA, etc meaning thereby ECO region is the least integrated one. Within ECO, the top exporter countries are Turkey, Kazakhstan, Iran, Pakistan, and Azerbaijan. These five countries, in aggregate, make up 94 percent of ECO's total exports. Furthermore, investment trend is not different from the trade profile.

ECO countries received Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) of about US\$ 36.5 in 2016 as compared to US\$ 31 billion in 2015, thereby showing an increase of US\$ 5.5 billion (an increase of 17%). However, this is still too low compared to the developmental needs of the member countries.

Now, against this backdrop, I will briefly touch upon some major achievements of ECO and also planned activities for the year in terms of trade and investment.

I am pleased to share some achievements with this august gathering. **The Articles of**

Agreement of the Economic Cooperation Organization Reinsurance Company has now been ratified and the Agreement entered into force on 3rd December 2017. The First Meeting on the ECO Reinsurance Company was held at Karachi on 26th February 2018. It was attended by the three Contracting Parties. It will be based in Karachi. It will supplement the existing reinsurance services in the region, promote growth of the retention capacities, minimize the outflow of foreign exchange and to support economic development in the region. The Company will also provide additional and high underwriting capacity to the ECO Region with standards of reinsurance service equal to that provided by the international market. The First Meetings of the General Assembly and the Board of Directors of the ECO Reinsurance Company will take place on 2nd May, 2018 in Karachi, Pakistan.

The second achievement relating to trade and investment is the entry into force of **the Agreement on ECO Smuggling and Customs Offences Data Bank** which has been established in Ankara. It is a landmark achievement with the core objective to help in boosting revenue of the Member States and stopping leakages in their national revenue by sharing information on vital data fields. The First Technical Meeting on Establishment and Operation of ECO Smuggling and Customs Offences Data Bank was held on 20 February, 2018 at Ankara, in order to finalize arrangements pertaining to the Data Bank. It was attended by all the parties which have ratified the Agreement. The Data Bank will be functional from 1st July 2018. Furthermore, the parties also agreed on organization of a workshop hosted by Turkey before the 30 June 2018, in order to train the authorities working on the said Data Bank. I call on the remaining Member States which have signed the Agreement to ratify it at the earliest and other Member States to sign/ratify it to take advantage from it.

As I already mentioned, trade is one of the priority areas and our aim is to double trade by 2025. The ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA), flagship preferential trade agreement of the organization, has been signed by five Member States. It is aimed at promoting open trade in the region. It is quite a comprehensive Agreement in terms of commodity coverage and it will scale down tariffs. The concessions are to be operationalised gradually. It is designed to play instrumental role in enhancing intra-regional trade bearing in mind the aims and objectives of ECO as laid down in the Treaty of Izmir.

The 7th Meeting of the ECOTA Cooperation Council was held at the ECO Secretariat in January 2017. I hope that the Contracting parties would find a way to operationalize this Agreement in the next meeting of the Council.

Excellencies, the leadership in the region needs to come together and deliberate upon measures to reinvigorate ECO trade. I hope that the 5th Ministerial Meeting of Commerce and Foreign Trade planned in Pakistan this year will find a way forward for expanding ECO trade including the intra-regional, and move forward on trade liberalization regime arrangement.

Now I move on to the ECO Trade and Development Bank (ECO-TDB) which has continued to expand its operations including scope of products and services to meet the growing demand for finance of the region. It is a matter of satisfaction that membership base is imperative to expand to all ten ECO Member States from the current membership of 6 member states and it should be further supported to strengthen its role and enhance its capacity for financing trade and development projects. However, the membership base should be expanded to all ten ECO Member States and it should be further supported to strengthen its role and enhance its capacity for financing trade and development projects of the Member States.

The authorized capital of the Bank is 1.089 billion SDR and total paid-in capital is 326,75 million SDR. Iran, Pakistan and Turkey have equal share with 100 million SDR for each in the paid-in-capital. The Republic of Azerbaijan with SDR 9.75 million paid-in-capital contribution, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan with SDR 15 million paid-in-capital contribution and Kyrgyz Republic with SDR 2 million contribution became new members of the Bank. Since the Bank started its operations in 2008 the total amount of loans disbursed by the Bank had increased to about US\$ 1.226 billion by the end of the Year 2016.

I also hope that the 2nd Meeting of ECO Heads of Central Banks in the Islamic Republic of Iran would explore means and ways to facilitate member states in enhancing merchandise trade, services and tourism in the region.

I am pleased to inform that the Republic of Turkey has provided a very comprehensive draft on **Trade Facilitation Strategy** which has been circulated amongst the Member States for views. Once views are obtained, they will be incorporated in the draft. It would lead to ECO Trade Facilitation Agreement (ETFA) at the later stage.

Similarly, the 8th Meeting of the ECO Council of Heads of Customs Administration (CHCA) along with the 4th Meeting of the Sub-Committee of Customs Experts (SCOEs) on 13-14 November, 2017 in Islamabad finalized the draft of the "Agreement on the Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters" after incorporation of valuable views of the esteemed Member States and has been circulated for views from the capitals.

The ECO attaches high importance to the capacity building of the relevant institutions and officials of the Member States. In this connection, a Trade-related Capacity Building Project is being carried out in collaboration with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in the areas of Standards and Quality. Implementation of the 3rd phase of the Project started in 2014 and has been completed in February 2017. Under implementation of the 3rd Phase of the Project training the master trainers of the Member States in the field Standardization Metrology, Testing and Quality (SMTQ) have been completed and ECO Regional Quality Policy and Guideline for National Quality Policy have been formulated. Initiation for the next phase is in the agenda of ECO. The Project will be instrumental in the elimination of non tariff barriers (NTBs) in the region which is one of the most effective way to increase the intra as well as inter regional trade.

The Agreement on Promotion and Protection of Investment (APPI) among ECO Member States has been signed by five ECO Member States namely, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. So far two ECO Member States namely the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan have ratified the Agreement along with the Amendment Protocol and deposited the Instrument of Ratification. Entry into force of the Agreement requires ratification/deposit of instrument of four Member States. The entry into force of the Agreement on Promotion and Protection of Investment (APPI) could help economies in several ways. The investment activities would certainly gain momentum with the flow of investment, transfer of technology, new employment opportunities and utilization of raw materials to the optimum level. The implementation of APPI will particularly be beneficial for increased investments in the Organized Trade Zones (OTZs), Free Trade Zones (FTZs) and Industrial/Export Processing Zones established by the Member States.

Since the creation of the original Millennium Development Goals in 2000, the role played

by the private sector in development is better understood. The private sector is one of the key stakeholders in economic development. Apart from being a major contributor to national wealth, it provides 90% of the employment. In trade, it delivers critical goods. However, the private sector cannot act alone. The governments still have the main responsibility for providing favourable legislative and regulatory environment which enables the private sector to play its part.

In this regard, the ECO Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ECO-CCI) plays the role of a bridge between the government of the ECO and its private sector, apart from organizing the activities of the private sector of the region while cooperating with the ECO by putting into place the initiatives and legal instruments like ECOTA, APPI, Trade-related Capacity-Building etc, which I mentioned earlier in my speech. I would also like to commend the role played by the ECO Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ECO-CCI) during the past three years. It has regularly held its meetings and made considerable progress in the areas like trade facilitation, women entrepreneurs and arbitration.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,

As Transport & Communications is concerned, I'm pleased to report progress with regard to both fields:

ECO, in consistency with its Vision-2025 document considers Corridor development and corridor management activities as an institutional priority of ECO in the transport sector. In this regard, ECO focused its efforts on the corridors determined previously which include Istanbul-Almaty, Bandar Abbas-Almaty, Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul, Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan and Iran (KTI), Kyrgyz Republic-Tajikistan- Afghanistan- Iran (KTAI) and Qazvin-Rasht-Astar railway projects and Kyrgyz Republic-Tajikistan- Afghanistan- Iran (KTAI) and Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) road projects.

The long-awaited field study has recently started and ongoing under the project on establishment of two Road Corridors, namely KTAI Corridor between Kyrgyz-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran and ITI Corridor between Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI). These two significant Studies are intended to address opportunities and challenges being faced by transport operators along these Road Corridors. In line with the Project work plan, the field visits were recently organized to the road segments and border crossing points in the territories of the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey.

The Studies are designed to provide updated information to the Governments of the enroute countries on latest status of their transit routes and the impediments practically faced for making the transit function of those routes work efficiently. The Studies are also aimed at assisting the enroute Member States to synchronize their national plans with the global trends and requirements of the transport industry.

A corridor-based approach is also one of the potent ways towards increased reliability, efficiency and viability of railway freight transportation along the railway corridor. Today, the KTI route presents the fastest, most efficient and direct ECO's link to Europe. It paved the way for the freight container trains from China in 2016 and a series of consecutive test runs in late 2017 from different industrial provinces of China to ECO region's borders where the running time in the territory of Kazakhstan constituted three days and up to 15 hours in the territory of

Turkmenistan to reach the borders of Iran. The latter allowed Chinese shippers to assess the opportunities of the route in terms of shortening running distance and, accordingly, costs of transportation. More trains are expected to come. Further to this, ECO has come up with the initiative to commercialize KTI via signing the Technical Cooperation Agreement between ECO and IDB on this Project in August 2017 at IDB's Headquarters to undertake comprehensive trade flow and commodity analysis so that at the end to put in place an appropriate mechanism for managing regular train services by the enroute countries. The Project is due to start soon in collaboration with UNESCAP.

The Almaty-Istanbul and Almaty-Bandar Abbas, covering 5,760 km and 3740 km of rail, are widely known ECO routes and being considered a part of today's Silk Road. At the request of 28th RPC (Islamabad, December 2017) The ECO Secretariat has prepared the Preliminary Plan of commercialization of the routes to be discussed by 2nd meetings of HLWG on Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,

As ICT related activities are concerned, the two regional studies have been conducted in collaboration with ITU, one addressing ICT needs of the Member states, and another analyzing the current status of e-applications in education, health and agriculture.

2nd Meeting of ECO Ministers of ICT (Baku, December 2017) took an outstanding forward step towards ICT cooperation of ECO Member States within the context of ECO Vision 2015 and welcomed preparation of the "2025 ECO Regional Strategy for Information Society Development" and Plan of Action, which represent a comprehensive roadmap to promote the integration and cooperation in ICT among ECO member countries and create conditions for development of world-class information society and digital economy for coming decade.

These outcome documents shall serve as an evolving reference which maybe regularly updated and where necessary revised to respond to contemporary needs of the Member States. The adopted report has asked Secretariat to make necessary preparation on establishment an appropriate mechanism to enable the Member States to regularly meet and address the issues related to implementation of the Regional Strategy and the Action Plan.

Excellencies,

Notwithstanding the fact that energy constitutes one the priority areas of our cooperation, in the third decade of its existence ECO's potential for advancement of regional energy agenda still remains untapped. The advancement of the energy agenda of ECO requires focused attention by all stakeholders. In this regard, ECO Energy Ministers proclaimed 2013-2022 as the "ECO Decade for enhanced Energy Cooperation", which also conforms to the UN Secretary General's initiative of UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All. "ECO Vision 2025" stipulates the enhancement of energy security and sustainability through wider energy access and trade as one of ECO's strategic objectives.

Driven by "ECO Vision 2025" and the trending UN SDGs, we are in the process of elaboration of the next "ECO Plan of Action for Energy/Petroleum Cooperation" for the period of 2018-2022, building on the achievements and shortcomings of the existing ECO Plan of Action. The envisaged new Plan of Action is sought to be finalized and approved by the 4th ECO

Ministerial Meeting on Energy expected to be held this year. We call upon the interested Member States to express their willingness to host this Ministerial Meeting, which will capture priority areas for reinvigoration of potential partnership frameworks and key actions for further engagement of regional and global energy players.

Intra- and inter-regional energy connectivity in the ECO Region is enhancing through implementation of several huge energy infrastructure projects with global importance. This is where ECO Member States could find critical mass of common interests. Meanwhile, it is our understanding that ECO may yield tremendous benefits from promoting and implementing UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global SDGs, in particular those related to sustainable energy and cross-cutting environmental challenges. In this vein, ECO Secretariat is keen on contributing to these global trends by stimulating multilateral policy debates and pursuing proactive cooperative policy with other international organizations, including UN System with a view to unlock huge cooperation opportunities in this priority area.

In view of the aforementioned, the regional electricity trade and connectivity are conceived to generate maximum benefits to all ECO Member States, whether producer, consumer or transit countries, as well as other stakeholders beyond. In this vein, the establishment of ECO Regional Electricity Market (ECO REM) is regarded as one of the most prospective initiatives of our Organization.

We have been preparing the ground for the early launching of the envisaged REM, having been guided by similar success stories in other regions. The ECO Secretariat has drafted and circulated the Terms of Reference (ToR) for hiring international and local consultants for preparation of a Feasibility Study on establishment of ECO REM. The subject ToR is sought to be adopted by the 3rd Iran-Turkey Bilateral Meeting on establishment of ECO REM at the managerial level, expected to be held in May 2018 in the ECO Secretariat, and which may also define the roadmap for further action on this initiative. ECO Secretariat will continue its engagement with international partners, primarily the International Energy Charter (IEC) for technical and financial support for ECO REM project.

Meanwhile, the ever increasing dynamics of renewables and energy efficiency in the global energy agenda, the vast potential and growing interests of ECO Member States in development of renewables and energy efficiency policies may trigger a paradigm shift towards prioritization of these issues in our energy agenda. We continue to add more weight to the ECO's profile on renewables and energy efficiency with a view to support sustainable energy development.

In this rationale, and in pursuance of “ECO Vision 2025 Implementation Framework”, the last year we have launched consultations with our international partners on establishment of ECO Clean Energy Center. The Secretariat has been engaged in consultations with UNIDO, IsDB and other potential international donors/ institutions for promotion of this project initiative. The preliminary draft project document on preparatory phase for its establishment has been designed and agreed upon by UNIDO and ECO.

We pin hopes that this august meeting will pave the way to further streamlining solutions and mechanisms for regional cooperation on sustainable energy development.

As regards minerals, although the ECO Member States are well endowed with mineral

resources and for some deposits they have leading positions in the world, and despite the fact that mining sector plays a crucial role in overall macroeconomic development of our Member States, the cooperation potential mostly remains untapped. We reckon that these potential, along with the available frameworks and agreed initiatives may enable key stakeholders and policy makers to build on the coherence and synergies, and elaborate the effective platforms for extending ECO cooperation in this area.

In 2017, we finalized the ECO Seismic Hazard Reduction Programme (ECO-SHARP). As an outcome of the 6th ECO Minerals Experts Group Meeting, several project initiatives for enhanced regional cooperation in the field of minerals and mining industry are currently under consideration by the Member States.

Excellencies,

In the past few years, ECO's environmental profile has been increasing steadily. The 5th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Environment (December 2014, Istanbul) designated the environment and impacts of climate change as a cross-sectoral priority of our Organization to be considered by all ECO activities and events on different issues and levels. ECO Secretariat continues to streamline the environmental agenda to the needs and aspirations of ECO Member States, and galvanize policy debates for developing partnership frameworks with a view to address the environmental concerns in the ECO Region. The Project Development Phase of the ECO Regional Project to Combat Desertification has been progressed in cooperation with the ECO Institute of Environmental Science and Technology (ECO-UEST) over 2017.

ECO Plan of Action on Environmental Cooperation and Global Warming (2011-2020) still represents our major cooperation framework, which requires active involvement of all stakeholders in the whole value chain within ECO and outside. ECO has also expanded its outreach through active engagement in important environmental fora and interactions with UNEP, UNFCCC, UNFF, ESCAP, CBD and others. Notably, ECO Secretariat has intensified its engagement with UNEP for joint preparation of the State of Environment (SoE) report for the ECO Region, and with UNFF on promoting the ECO regional strategy on sustainable forest management and institutionalization of inter-regional forestry coordination mechanism.

We are hopeful that the next ECO Ministerial Meeting on Environment would provide a suitable platform for keeping up this cooperation momentum with a view to enhancing the regional synergies, and streamlining and advancing ECO environmental agenda.

Excellencies,

Agriculture is key sector and essential in achieving food security for ECO region. The region is very rich in variety of soil, environmental and climatic conditions, suitable for crop and livestock diversification. However, despite the modest increases seen in recent years there is still an untapped potential for the growth of agricultural production and trade. In the ECO region as of 2016 approximately 55 million people, constituting the 12 percent of the population are still under-nourished and unfortunately 5 out of 10 ECO members are low income food importing countries according to the figures of FAO.

In this context, ECO, as a regional organization dedicated to economic and social development of its member states accords top priority to food security and agricultural development in the region. To this end, ECO has launched The ECO Regional Programme for

Food Security (ECO-RPFS) with the technical assistance of FAO in 2004-2005, which is updated several times, subsequently. Moreover, the ECO Regional Coordination Center (ECO-RCC) for implementation of this programme was inaugurated in Ankara, mobilize and coordinate the implementation of the project in collaboration of the Member States in this regard.

In the 2nd Meeting of the Programme Steering Committee of the ECO-RCC, the working principles of the ECO-RCC approved and the member states were requested to send at least one concept project with the budget not exceeding 200.000 USD for national projects and 1 millionUSD for multi-country or regional projects. Projects ideas will be evaluated under FAO-Turkey Partnership Programme (FTPP-II) with an amount of 20 millions USD for financial support.

The joint ECO/FAO-SEC Project on Seed Sector Development in the region were completed with the formulation of the "Draft ECO Regional Seed Agreement". The ECO Regional Seed Strategy document is also under process of finalization.

In addition, FAO Sub-regional Office for Central Asia (FAO-SEC) in close cooperation with the Republic of Turkey also prepared the "Project Concept Note on the Multi-country Project Proposal on Seed Sector Development Priority Area". The said Project Concept Note has been sent Member States for their feedback, views/comments for finalization.

The 6th Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture will be the important milestone in setting the future course of action of the Member States. It is imperative that we hold this meeting as soon as possible, as there are crucially important decisions that are awaited to be taken in this meeting. I would also like to highlight that the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has ratified the Statute of the ECO Permanent Veterinary Commission (ECO-VECO).

Besides agriculture, industry is one of the main drivers which brings nations prosperity. ECO Member Countries are at varying degrees of industrialization; however, less-involvement of women, regional sub-quality infrastructure and insufficient capacity of for high-tech and new technologies are among the bottlenecks for a rapid and cohesive industrial development.

Industrial paradigm of the ECO Region needs to be reviewed to meet the SDG's relevant 'standards and criteria' and 'establishment and enhancement of quality infrastructure'. In this vein, The ECO Vision - 2025 has envisioned the strategic objective of achieving long term high level growth, knowledge and information based production through increased contribution of research and development (R&D), entrepreneurship, involvement of private sector, increased women participation and SMEs for the Region. There has been some progress but a due strategic attention and contribution of all the Member States are needed. In this connection the ECO Vision requires the ECO Secretariat to proceed with establishment of Special Regional Forum to undertake international exhibitions and conferences to introduce ECO Region as an attractive destination and develop a framework for cooperation in the hi-tech fields among the ECO countries.

The 4th Ministerial Meeting on Industry will be the significant event in setting the future course of action of the Member States and demonstrates ownership and strong political will of the member states for regional cooperation on industry.

Nanotechnology, as a relatively new domain of human knowledge, has a tremendous impact on different aspects of life and promise great potential for transforming the future and speed of growth and development. So it deserves a much more serious attitude by the Member

State. In this regard, I would like to thank the Islamic Republic of Iran for renewing its offer to host the 2nd Steering Committee Meeting on Establishment of the ECO Nanotechnology Network (ECONAN), and Workshop on NANO-technology Opportunities for Textile Industry in ECO region in June, 2018.

The ECO Regional Institute for Standardization, Conformity Assessment, Accreditation and Metrology (RISCAM) as a Regional Institution is a successful experience which its Central Secretariat, and Technical Management Board of Conformity Assessment, was inaugurated in 2016 in Iran. As per RISCAM statute, it shall come into force upon ratification of 4 ECO Member States. So far, Iran and recently Turkey has ratified the Statute. For early functioning of the Institute the rest of Member States are requested to sign and ratify the Statute.

Due to the change in the establishment of the Secretariat of the Metrology Board by Islamic Republic of Pakistan in place of Kazakhstan, the Article 5.4.1.10 of the RISCAM Statute needs to be changed and the COM is requested to approve the amendment of the RISCAM Statute based on Pakistan's proposal.

In today's world, inter-organizational communications has a significant impact on the growth and strengthening of an international organization. ECO is not an exception. In this regard the Secretariat has signed a MOU with World Intellectual Property Rights Organization (WIPO) on 22 Jan 2018. Its main propose is providing a framework for cooperation between two organizations with the aim of promoting the protection of IP for sustainable economic development and creating capacity building in the Region. This MoU will cover various areas of cooperation such as Develop joint projects, Exchange information and documents, Participate in each other's meetings and etc.

Dear Participants,

The historical and cultural commonalities provide the ECO Region with tremendous potentials for tourism cooperation as an ever-lasting and sustainable asset for economic development. ECO Region is the inherent of the history, culture, architecture, art and traditions of the ancient Silk Road, promotion of which will help, among others, establish closer economic interconnections as well as cultural affinity. New sectors of tourism industry like ecotourism, health tourism and religious tourism are being developed in the world, which also needs due attention in the ECO Region. Different elements of sustainable development are key factors in promotion of tourism industry without which continuity and progress will not be achievable.

The ECO Vision 2025 considering the huge potential of tourism industry as a driver for economic and social development has afforded prime significance to this industry as one of the main priority areas of regional cooperation and therefore has set the strategic goal of establishing a peaceful and green tourism destination with diverse products and high quality services in the region.

In this regard, The Meeting of the ECO Tourism Ministers will be the most important meeting which determines the tourism policy of the organization and defines a regional strategy for development of sustainable tourism. Due to the importance of the Meeting in advancing the tourism purposes of the organization, I hope it will be organized as soon as possible and held with active participation of the Member States.

The 27th & 28th RPC Meeting reiterated its request to the Member States to encourage

the private sector involvement in the regional tourism activities through participation in the relevant meetings/events/initiatives. And in this connection, the ECO-CCI was requested to explore the possibility of setting up regional tourism platforms to coordinate the activities of the national private sector associations/ forums/ federations with the purpose of sustainable tourism promotion and propose to the 3rd ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism.

I would like to emphasize the importance of early preparation of the ECO Tourism Strategy and request the Member States to host the First Working Group Meeting on ECO Tourism Strategy as soon as possible. Also in this connection the Secretariat consider seeking technical assistance from relevant international organizations i.e. UNWTO, UNIDO, UNESCO.

Regarding the relations with the international organizations and agencies, I would like to mention the working cooperation which has started to establish between the Secretariat with UNIDO and UNESCO in order to promotion of tourism in the Region. Of course it isn't enough and the Secretariat tries to expand its relations with the other international organizations and agencies.

The ECO Secretariat welcomes successfully holding of three rounds of International ECO - Silk Road Food Festival organized in Iran in 2015, 2016 and 2017. The Fourth round of this Festival will be held in May, 2018 in Zanjan.

Excellencies,

Importance of strong and professional background research for initiating projects with optimum results is well understood in ECO. ECO Secretariat works in collaboration with the Economic Research institutes and National Statistics Offices of the Member Countries to select relevant topics for economic research and compile regional data and statistics to undertake research helpful in informing region wide policies in various sectors of economy and devise development projects for the region.

With the collaboration of member countries, ECO Secretariat has devised "ECO Plan of Action on Economic Research" which is the framework for cooperation in the area of economic research in the ECO region. Regular Meetings of the ECO Permanent Steering Committee on Economic Research (PSCER) are held to continuously update as well as implement the plan.

ECO Economic research studies are conducted through implementation of the ECO Joint Economic Research Programme (JERP) and within its framework two research projects were launched namely (i) "Economic Management Modelling in the ECO member countries" and (ii) "Analyzing Food Security Issues in the ECO Region" by the Islamic Republic of Pakistan through Pakistan Institute for Development Economics of Pakistan (PIDE). Both projects are in the final stages of their implementation.

The research project on "Exchange of Experiences and Strengthening Inter-agency Cooperation on the development of Ecologically Clean Agriculture Model in ECO Member Countries" being implemented by the Republic of Azerbaijan through its Institute for Scientific Research on Economic Reforms (ISRER) under the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan is in its final stage of implementation.

Also two economic research projects are under consideration namely the "Setting Social Accounting Matrix (SAM) and capacity building for Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan" proposed by the Republic of Azerbaijan and the "Decomposition on Input-output

Table at the Regional Level" proposed by the Republic of Kazakhstan.

It was expected that establishment of ECO Research Centre (ERC) in Baku approved by 21st COM in 2013 would serve as the ECO economic think tank to work out economic development strategies and policies for the region. ECO appreciates the willingness and efforts of the Republic of Azerbaijan to complete all formal procedures and expedite ratification of the Charter and formulate basic documents needed for operationalization of the (ERC). However it would be desirable to launch the ECO Research Centre as soon as possible for the benefit of all Member States.

The 26th Regional Planning Council (RPC) Meeting recommended ECO Secretariat to initiate a three-year capacity building and technical training programme for the Member States in the areas of project management, economic research and strategy and statistics. ECO Secretariat has accordingly planned to devise a program of at least 15 training workshops spanning over a period of three years on different topics and schedule these trainings in the member countries. The themes/topics are required to be finalized on the economic research needs of the Member States. To this end, the ECO Secretariat once again requests the member states to send their inputs in this regard and identify the topics where the training is needed.

Secretariat received relevant inputs from Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Turkey. It is expected that the remaining Member States would provide inputs to the Secretariat for the early finalization of the said programme for the benefit of the ECO region.

Excellencies,

The 2030 Global Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), regards disaster risk reduction (DRR) as a core component of development. ECO Region is one of the most disaster prone-regions in the world. In the period of 2000-2015, about 333 natural disasters were reported within our borders. Empirical evidences along with scientific findings show that our region may be prone to more calamities in the future.

ECO has been focused on this issue in collaboration with Member States, UN and international development partners, since adoption of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. An important output of this collaboration is ECO Regional Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (ECORFDRR) which was finalized in October 2017, Ankara. The ECORFDRR is expected to serve as a roadmap for the implementation of Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction in the ECO Region.

I am pleased to mention here that the ECORFDRR is adopted by the 28th RPC in Islamabad in December 2017 and we plan to submit the Framework to the 8th ECO Ministerial Conference on DRR for approval this year.

On human resource development, the draft Plan of Action on Health Cooperation in ECO Region has been prepared taking into consideration the immediate regional health-related concerns as well as the global health agenda and SDGs. After all Member States provide the Secretariat with their views and inputs on the draft Plan, the Secretariat will be able to develop the revised draft of the "Plan of Action" on Health for the approval of ECO Health Ministers. Following the approval of the Plan of Action, health experts from the ECO Member States will get together to develop and agree on time-bound modalities for the implementation of Plan of

Action.

The “2nd Meeting of the ECO Heads of National Organizations/Centers for Civil Registration” was held on 17 October 2017 in Istanbul. In the meeting, civil status registration and best E-government practices; technological and educational cooperation among ECO civil registration organizations; sharing best practices and experiences in Geographic Information Systems, on ID Cards; verification of citizens’ identity in production and release of statistical data were discussed. Furthermore Member States were requested to cooperate in some areas including, composing a task group of high level Registration Experts and developing a comprehensive project/programme for implementation of the above agreed actions.

Education has always been an integral part of the sustainable development agenda and has the key role in shaping values that are supportive of sustainable development. ECO Educational Institute (EI), for which a President had been selected in 2017, is supposed to be the backbone for the cooperation in the education sector of the region. I invite here all Member States to kindly support this new institute, EI, so that it can better prepare for the challenging tasks that need to be accomplished on education.

Excellencies,

ECO continues to be one of the most challenging regions in the world when it comes to drugs and organized crime related problems. However, it is encouraging to see that Member States are expanding cooperation against organized crime so as to establish conducive environment to reap the economic benefits.

Since holding of the last COM, the Member States made satisfactory headway towards establishing Regional security institutions. The decisions taken in the 3rd Meeting of Heads of Anti-corruption Organizations and Ombudsmen (Baku, 06-07 June 2017) and 3rd Meeting of Attorneys/Prosecutors General of ECO Member States (30-31 January, Islamabad) have laid firm foundations for a secure region.

Excellencies,

International relations and relations with the UN system are among the top priorities for ECO. Development and promotion of mutually beneficial relations with the United Nations system, Regional and International Organizations and relevant non-ECO states are fundamental to ECO’s vision and approach to realize its goals and objectives. In the sphere of external relations, continued efforts aimed at enhancing ECO’s image, increasing its standing, expanding its presence and enlisting technical and financial support of our partners have been made. The guidance in this regard is derived from the Treaty of Izmir, decisions of the Summits/COM, the Comprehensive Plan of Action to enhance ECO’s External Relations and other ECO Basic Documents.

ECO enjoys observer status with the United Nations and its various organs such as UN Environment Assembly, UN Convention to Combat Desertification, UN Convention on biological Diversity, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, UNCTAD, and World Trade Organization, the Organization of Islamic Conference, and the Islamic Development Bank. ECO is currently under process of getting Observer Status in Energy Charter Treaty on reciprocity basis.

During the period under review, closer ties were also maintained with the observer members. The Turkish Cypriot State, as an Observer, has been regularly participating in ECO's Council of Ministers and other Meetings. In the light of the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in 2014 between ECO and the Cooperation Council of the Turkic-Speaking States (Turkic Council), more efforts are underway to enhance the existing level of cooperation and provide a concrete shape in terms of the projects, programmes, studies. ECO and Energy Charter have recently established strong relationship on the basis of reciprocal observership, which is sought to enhance synergies, offer policy advice and international consultancy on establishment of ECO Regional Electricity Market (REM), as well as immense opportunities in capacity building, and facilitate exchange of experiences.

Over the years, ECO has signed 47 MoUs and Agreements with the UN system as well as other regional and international organizations. It merits mentioning that certain MoUs/Agreements are in the different phases of process like the ones with World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, and World Tourism Organization to enhance scope of activities for development of the ECO-region.

ECO has, most recently, signed an MoU with WIPO - World Intellectual Property Organization, which is a primary global source for global intellectual property (patents, industrial designs, copyright, trademarks etc.) information, resources, and services.

In early 2018, ECO also signed Memorandum of Understanding with the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Center for Islamic Countries (SESRIC), a subsidiary organ of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) having 40 years of experience in the fields of socio-economic research, statistics, training and the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV), a Turkey's largest economic policy think-tank accordingly. It is believed that ECO would be able to utilize technical support and huge expertise of these Organizations for the benefit of ECO Member States.

Excellencies,

ECO also attaches utmost importance to the peace, security and stability in Afghanistan. We have been paying special attention to this issue in our regional programmes and activities. ECO has also developed Afghanistan-friendly projects, including rail and road transit corridors, and has established a Special Reconstruction Fund for Afghanistan, with a view to assisting this Country in overall efforts to respond to its developmental needs and requirements. We have developed and adopted our new Vision for the next ten years, which entails re-defining ECO policy towards Afghanistan, with a view to responding more effectively to the emerging needs of this Country.

Excellencies,

With the "ECO Vision 2025" we have set ambitious targets in a wide range of areas extending from trade to tourism addressing the needs and requirements for economic development of ECO Member States and the Region. Framework for implementation and periodic review also in place to achieve the priorities of it. However, the current projects and programmes as well as the agreements and the mechanisms that are regulating the operations of the ECO fall short of fulfilling the objectives of the Vision for both ECO Secretariat and Member States. Therefore, It is imperative that we further develop current projects and programmes as

well as adding new and comprehensive ones to them for realizing the objectives of the Organization and implementing the Vision.

In relation to but not limited to Vision, I would like to highlight that the 13th ECO Summit tasked the ECO Secretariat to take necessary and effective measures to bring about necessary Reforms in the Organization in order to create a more efficient and effective ECO, equipped with required capabilities and resources and to better serve the noble objectives of the Organization. In light of this, as well as the decision of the Council of Ministers on the ECO Reform and the recommendations of the Eminent Persons Group, the ECO Secretariat prepared "Scale of Assessment" and "ECO Secretariat Reform" documents which are under consideration of the Member States and deliberations have already been started at the Secretariat in this regard. Timely resolution on these issues has the utmost importance for the realization of the goals of the Organization as they set in the basic documents and in the Vision.

The activities of the ECO institutions and affiliated bodies are followed up by the ECO Secretariat for necessary coordination through a variety of channels. As per the decisions of previous COM and with consultation of the ECO Specialized Agencies, Regional Institutions and Affiliated Bodies, ECO Secretariat has been working on reforming the modalities governing the ECO Bodies so as to remove problems being faced by the ECO Bodies and ECO Secretariat. These include among others coordination activities and maintaining communication channels that would ensure better synchronization among the ECO Bodies and the ECO Bodies and ECO Secretariat. Based on the recent consultations, the Secretariat is submitting an updated version of the Modality for the ECO Bodies to the 23rd ECO Council of Ministers.

Excellencies,

Let me conclude my statement by reiterating the importance of the Meeting for the Organization and its approach towards future. I would like once again welcome you all and wish you a pleasant stay in Dushanbe. I would also like to once again thank the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan for their excellent hospitality.

**Opening Statement by H.E. Mr. Sartaj Aziz, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission
of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, as *Chairman of COM*
(Meeting of Council of Ministers, 17 April 2018)**

Honourable Deputy Prime Minister of Republic of Tajikistan,
Distinguished Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Assalam-o-Alaikum and a very Good morning,

I would like to avail this opportunity to express my gratitude to the people and the Government of Tajikistan for hosting this meeting and for the excellent arrangements and generous hospitality extended to us all.

I am thankful to all the Member States, Secretary General Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and his team for supporting Pakistan, in the last one year, during the our Chairmanship of this esteemed Organization.

Excellencies,

ECO provides a platform for the Member States to achieve the dual objective of projecting their country at the regional level and enhancing economic cooperation among the Member States through greater connectivity and trade.

Since the 22nd Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Organization last year the following developments occurred;

- (i) ECO Smuggling and Customs Offences Data Bank was established;
- (ii) ECO Reinsurance Company has come into being; and
- (iii) ECO Regional Institute for Standardization, Conformity Assessment, Accreditation and Metrology (RISCAM) has entered into force in December 2017.

In addition, the Statute of ECO Regional Center of Anti Corruption Agencies and Ombudsmen (RCCACO) has also been signed by Pakistan in June 2017 and ECO Plan of action on Health is also expected to be finalized this year. I am sure, the distinguished Secretary General will further elaborate on the activities of the Organization in his report.

We owe our achievements in the past year to cooperation and support of Member States.

I would like to thank you all for your active participation in the 13th Summit, 22nd COM and 28th Regional Planning Council (RPC) in Islamabad last year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today's Meeting is an opportunity for us to exchange views and lend full support to the ECO for fully activating the agreements signed under the umbrella of this Organization.

As envisaged in the ECO Vision 2025, an integrated region and sustainable economies provide the necessary means to Member States to plan a better future for the people of the ECO Region, where economic environment is conducive, people having high quality of modern education and prosperous socialites.

The diversity in resources among the Member States can lend greater strength to the Organization. Prosperity can be attained through intra-regional connectivity to ensure peace, prosperity and stability in our region.

Excellencies,

The theme of 13th ECO Summit held in Islamabad was "Connectivity for Regional Prosperity". We still have a long way to go in realizing this objective. We should give priority to

connectivity projects, which will link the region. These linkages once forged would definitely bring peace and prosperity to the whole ECO Region.

The Corridor and cluster based approach adopted by the Member States is promising and there is need to establish linkages between the already existing Corridors. This would stimulate trade and investment within ECO Region, and with the outside world.

Trade relations between the Member States of this Organization are of vital importance which deserves greater focus. The analysis of trade figures in previous years of the ECO countries shows that the share of the ECO regional trade in the global trade of US \$ 32 trillion is only 2 percent while ECO Region has 6.2 percent in the world population. The ECO region needs to make it one of the most integrated regions in the world. We must make concerted efforts to raise the volume of our regional trade.

Excellencies,

The 7th ECOTA Cooperation Council Meeting was held in January 2017. Unfortunately, there is no consensus among the Member States on “Product Lists”. Unless one of the Member States were to offer to host the 8th ECOTA cooperation Council Meeting in 2018, to negotiate “Product Lists”. ECO Secretariat may be authorized to host the said Meeting at the Secretariat in Tehran.

Excellencies,

I would like to specially make a mention of the ECO projects in Afghanistan aimed at helping the brotherly people of Afghanistan. A fresh proposal entitled “New Advocacy Program for Afghanistan” is on the table. With sincere efforts and perseverance this Organization can help Afghanistan overcome some of its difficulties.

Excellencies,

The ECO Secretariat is facing financial constraints; therefore, resolution of the issue of “New Scales of Assessment” by the Member States is of vital importance. The framework in the form of Working Group is already in place and it has held six meetings so far to discuss the “Scales of Assessment” and “Reforms at the ECO Secretariat” since last COM. We must support and encourage our Permanent Representatives to finalize these recommendations at the earliest for consideration and approval.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The affiliated bodies of the ECO are playing an active role in providing essential support to the Organization. I urge those Member States who have yet to join these affiliated bodies to becoming a signatory of these affiliated bodies and actively participate in their programs.

In conclusion, let me say that the potential of ECO is enormous. This needs to be channelized accordingly in order to ensure our success. With commitment, sincerity of purpose and strong political will, the region has the potential of becoming one of the most prominent economic blocs in the world. ECO is one of the most important Organizations to achieve this objective.

I thank you.

**Message of the Founder of the Peace and National Unity, the Leader
of the Nation, the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, H.E.
Emomali Rahmon for the participants of the 23rd meeting of the
Council of Ministers of Economic Cooperation Organization
(Dushanbe, 17 April 2017)**

**Distinguished Mr. Chairman,
Honorable Mr. Secretary General,
Dear Head of Delegations and Friends,**

First of all, it is a great pleasure to welcome all participants at the 23rd ECO Council of Ministers meeting in the hospitable Tajik land. The Government of Tajikistan highly appreciates the contribution of ECO in deepening and expanding cooperation to promote economic development and social well-being in the region. In recent years, Member-States have been actively working to realize the enormous potential for mutually beneficial cooperation within the Organization. Favorable conditions are created for expanding mutual trade and establishing transit and transport communications, also cultural and humanitarian cooperation has developed between our countries.

Nevertheless, the expansion of trade and economic relations and the implementation of joint infrastructural projects connecting the transport and energy channels of the Member-States of the Organization still require additional and concrete efforts. The need to strengthen interaction in the implementation of the project activities aimed at promoting social and economic development, reducing poverty and improving the well-being of our nations should be particularly mentioned.

We attach great importance to the ECO Vision 2025 approved by the 13th ECO Summit, which defines the main directions of our decade and intended to contribute to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in the ECO region. We hope that this road map will expand our interaction and help to strengthen the bonds of friendship, solidarity and brotherhood between our nations.

Tajikistan attaches great importance to the expansion of trade and economic cooperation and transit-transport potential of the countries in the region, interconnection of electric power networks and establishing the energy market of the Member-States of the Organization. We expect that the Organization will more actively participate in the implementation of projects aimed at establishment of Regional Electricity Market.

Tajikistan pays special attention to the development of cooperation in the field of transport, transit and communications. At the same time, we mean not only the formation of modern infrastructure but also the provision of free movement of goods, labor and capital.

Involvement of Afghanistan into regional economic integration should be a priority area of cooperation within Organization. Countries of the region need to streamline their efforts to enhancement of regional trade and participation of Afghanistan in regional projects.

Our region also possesses rich historical and cultural heritage which provides new opportunities for our interaction. To our opinion, cooperation in economic profile should be accompanied by adequate interworking in the fields of culture, education and science. Cooperation in tourism as one of the main areas of ECO Vision-2025 may assist in strengthening

of links and outspread of culture and education interchange between our nations.

Distinguished participants,

As you know, comprehensive water management plays an important role in achieving sustainable development. Rational management of water resources may promote our efforts aimed at eradicating poverty and inequality, reducing vulnerability, preserving environment and biodiversity.

International Decade of Action "Water for Sustainable Development 2018-2028" is targeted at implementation of these tasks and provides a broad platform for enhancement of existing capacity in utilization and management of water resources.

With a view to realize this initiative we intend to host the International High Level Conference on International Decade of Action "Water for Sustainable Development 2018-2028" jointly with UN and other partners. Using this opportunity I would like express my hope that our organization will greatly contribute to the implementation of the Decade and invite all of you to participate in this international event.

In conclusion I would like to mention that the Government of Tajikistan is very interested in deepening of this fruitful cooperation within the framework of the Organization.

We are confident that only through collective and coordinated endeavours as well as effective utilization of huge potential of ECO region we can achieve concrete results facilitation sustainable development and well-being of our nations.

I wish all participants fruitful work and pleasant stay on hospitable Tajik land.

Thank you for attention.

**ECO Secretary General's Statement
at the 23rd Council of Ministers (COM) Meeting
(Dushanbe 17th April, 2018)**

**Your Excellency Sirodjidin Aslov, Minister of foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan,
Honorable Foreign Ministers,
Distinguished Delegates**

It is my privilege to welcome you to the 23rd Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers in Dushanbe. At the outset, I wish to avail this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, particularly His Excellency, Sirodjidin Aslov, honorable Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan, for hosting this meeting. Allow me also to extend my heartfelt felicitations to His Excellency on his election as the Chairman of the ECO Council of Minister.

Excellencies,

First, I would like to share with you the overall profile of the ECO Region. According to the latest available data. The share of the population of ECO region in the world is 6.2 percent, GDP is 2.6, trade volume 2.1 and the share of FDI 2.4 percent. The share of intra-regional trade was 8.7 percent in 2015 which decreased to 7.6 percent in 2017 despite the fact that the ECO has a target to increase the intra-regional trade to 20 percent. These figures clearly reflect a low level of economic development and the poor regional integration of ECO region with the world economy and within the region despite its huge potential.

The ECO region enjoys an incomparable geographical location carrying the corridor status between large markets and an abundance of rich and varied energy resources. In recent years, these features of the region has taken increased international attention with remarkable and ambitious plans and projects out of ECO portfolio. They include Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, Lapis Lazuli transport corridor, CPEC, some power transmission lines and TAPI and other natural gas pipelines going to China and India, just to name a few.

Excellencies,

Since the last formal COM meeting in Islamabad, we have made some progress in promoting cooperation in various sectors. Here I would like to share briefly some important highlights.

In trade and investment, two agreements, "The Articles of Agreement of the ECO Reinsurance Company", and "the Agreement on ECO Smuggling and Customs Offences Data Bank", entered into force. The Company and the Databank were already established, respectively in Karachi and Ankara.

The ECO Trade and Development Bank (ECO-TDB) is functioning well and expending its operations. However, it is imperative expand the membership to include all ECO members, as it should be further supported to meet the growing demand of the developmental finance of the

region.

Our attempts for trade liberalization under ECOTA is going on. However, we could not have undertaken to operationalise the Agreement which is crucially important for regional economic cooperation.

Excellencies,

In the transportation & Communication sector, ECO focused on the selected corridors to improve the efficiency of the existing lines as well as the completing the missing lines. In this regard, ECO expedited its efforts on operationalisation of the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran (KTI) railway, for which ECO has signed the Technical Cooperation Agreement with the IDB. The road project of Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) is also under study. In the second group ECO has been working on Kyrgyz Republic-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran (KTAI) and Qazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran)- Astara (Azerbaijan) railway projects. The study for the Border Crossing has finalized and the “2025 ECO Regional Strategy for Information Society Development” and Plan of Action have been prepared.

In the Energy Sector, we have little cooperation at the regional level in ECO platforms. The major pipeline projects are developed outside the framework of ECO portfolio. Nevertheless, ECO has made certain progress with respect to the establishment of ECO Regional Electricity Market (REM). Certain progress also achieved on the renewable and alternative energy sources with the launching of consultations with our international partners on establishment of ECO Clean Energy Center.

Excellencies,

ECO region offers tremendous opportunities for tourism cooperation that can be everlasting and sustainable asset for economic development. In this regard, tourism development has been proposed as priority area in the ECO Vision 2025. To this end, in the last year the Tourism Strategy has been drafted for the development of the sustainable tourism and some new initiatives have been initiated.

In the Industry Sector, ECO Regional Institute for Standardization, Conformity Assessment, Accreditation and Metrology RISCAM and its “Technical Management Board of Conformity Assessment were officially inaugurated. For full operationalization of ECO-RISCAM, the ratification of its statute by four ECO Member States are awaited. In this sector, we continued to increase its international ties by signing the MoU with World Intellectual Property Rights Organization.

Agriculture is a key sector and essential in achieving food security for ECO region and developing countries. It employs 37 percent of total active population of the region. Under the ECO Regional Programme for Food Security several projects have been implementing targeting the food security through collaboration with relevant international organizations.

Education has been an integral part of the sustainable development. The ECO-Education Institute, which is supposed to be the backbone for the cooperation in the education sector of the region, was activated. Board of Trustees of the Educational Institute appointed the President and approved the scale of assessment and work program. And the government of Turkey allocated the premises for the institute.

Excellencies,

Instability in Afghanistan constitutes an important challenge in ECO Region. A number of international and regional initiatives to bring the peace and stability to Afghanistan has been developed outside the framework of ECO, such as Istanbul Process-The Heart of Asia and

RECCA. Afghanistan holds special significance for the ECO region and the Organization has been making contribution towards the nation's reconstruction through the Special Reconstruction Fund for Afghanistan. Moreover, a new ECO Advocacy Programme for Afghanistan has been prepared.

In the international relation, over the years, ECO has signed 49 MoUs and Agreements with the UN system as well as other regional and international organizations. During the period under review, ECO continued to develop further its international ties with the other regional and international institutions by signing MoUs with UNOSS, WIPO, OIC-SESRIC and TOBB-TEPAV establishing a reciprocal observership status with the Energy Charter Secretariat.

Excellencies,

I would like to highlight that the 13th ECO Summit tasked the ECO Secretariat to take necessary and effective measures to bring about necessary Reforms in the Organization in order to create a more efficient and effective ECO. In this regard, the ECO prepared "Scale of Assessment" and "ECO Reform" documents which are under consideration of the Member States. I hope that a consensus will be reached soon on these issues as the early resolution on them will have significant impact on the functioning and efficiency of the organization.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, I would like to thank your Excellencies for your participation in this important and timely meeting and would like to reiterate the importance of your valuable support and guidance to the Organization. I would also like to express once again my sincere thanks to the Republic of Tajikistan for hospitality provided to the delegations and excellent organization of all events.

I thank you for your attention.

Statement by
H.E. Mr. Sirodjidin Aslov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the
Republic of Tajikistan, as Chairman of the 23rd COM Meeting

Distinguished Ministers,

Distinguished Secretary General,

Dear Heads of delegation,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to welcome all participants of the 23rd Meeting of ECO Council of Ministers (COM) to the hospitable land of Tajikistan.

Let me thank H.E. Mr. Sartaj Aziz for his excellent leadership during his tenure as a Chairman of the 22nd COM and express my profound gratitude to the Council for reposing confidence in my election as Chairman of the Council.

Taking this opportunity, I assure the Council that with the support of my fellow colleagues, Secretary General and the Secretariat we can take necessary decision and contribute to further expanding of economic, humanitarian and cultural cooperation in the ECO region.

The main principles of the "ECO Vision 2025" are stability, integration and favorable environment, and its main areas of cooperation - trade, transport, communications, energy, tourism, economic growth and productivity, social welfare and environment, largely share the goals and objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and are in tune with our national development strategies. Therefore, having common goals and objectives, we shall act together to find effective

mechanisms for their implementation, for the benefits, interests and aspirations of our peoples.

Dear friends,

Regional cooperation for the restoration of peace, security and stability, as well as the creation of favorable conditions for economic and social development in Afghanistan, remains an important issue on the ECO agenda.

The Tajik side fully supports the idea and objectives of the new ECO program for Afghanistan. We believe that the activities of the Special Fund of the Organization for the Rehabilitation of Afghanistan, as well as the implementation of the Action Plan for the reconstruction of social facilities in this country will meet the interests of Afghanistan and will contribute to the achievement of sustainable peace and development in this brotherly country.

We are convinced that the successful implementation of the adopted programs within the framework of the ECO will also contribute to greater involvement of Afghanistan in regional integration processes.

Dear colleagues,

This is worthwhile to note that ECO provides an effective platform to Member States to discuss ways and means of accelerating economic development and promoting trade and investment opportunities. In this regard, there is a need for collective endeavors to utilize the enormous existing potential for economic cooperation among the Member States.

During our Chairmanship in the Organization, we will continue our efforts in strengthening connectivity through promoting regional projects in energy, transport, communications and tourism, as well as food security.

At the end, I would like also to note the progress that the Organization has made since our last Meeting and appreciate the work done by the ECO Secretary General and the Secretariat.

I wish you all fruitful meeting and pleasant stay in the beautiful city of Dushanbe.

Thank you!

**Statements by Ministers of Foreign Affairs/Heads
of Delegation of the ECO Member States**

STATEMENT BY ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

**H.E Foreign Minister Sirodjidin Aslov, Excellencies
Foreign Ministers,
Distinguished Colleagues and Heads of Delegation,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

At the outset, I wish to join you all in extending our sincere appreciation to the Government and people of Tajikistan for their exceptional, warm hospitality.

Let me congratulate my brother and colleague Foreign Minister Aslov for assuming the Chairmanship of the 23rd Council of Ministers of ECO, my special thanks also go to his colleagues at the Ministry for facilitating our 23rd gathering to discuss issues of common importance to the ECO member-states.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank H.E. Minister Sartaj Aziz for his excellent leadership and chairmanship of the organization, and I wish to express our gratitude to the Government of Pakistan for hosting the 13th ECO Summit last year.

The Islamabad Declaration helped set the agendas of ECO's various meetings since last year to help advance our nations' and governments' shared interests towards a much more

peaceful and prosperous ECO-region through full-spectrum connectivity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we all know, a shrinking world brings about many Opportunities and challenges.

This increasingly requires that nations come together to assess their shared interests, needs and threats for addressing them through joint, concerted efforts.

That is why the role of ECO- as a mechanism of regional economic cooperation towards multi-faceted integration against the ills of poverty and zero-sum politics- is ever more important.

This is especially so, considering our region's vast natural and human resources, which can and must be harnessed for securing the future of our nations.

Hence, the Government of Afghanistan fully subscribes to the **ECO Vision 2025** and continues doing our part to implement the core objectives and priorities of the Vision in line with its three principles of: **sustainability, integration, and conducive environment.**

Cooperation- in the areas of trade, transport, connectivity, energy, tourism, economic growth and productivity, social welfare and environment- lies at the tops of the sustainable development agenda of the **National Unity Government of Afghanistan.**

In each of these areas, more reforms were implemented and more policy and legal initiatives and measures were taken last year to help integrate our country with the ECO-region.

In turn, this work- in- progress has helped facilitate the implementation of our common objectives enshrined in the ECO strategies for sustainable economic growth in the region.

To name a few, through the **Heart of Asia-Istanbul and RECAA Processes**, we have actively promoted regional connectivity via Afghanistan and successfully secured regional cooperation to help expedite the implementation of such critically important connectivity projects such as **TAPI, CASA-1000, the Five-Nation Railway**, as well as the operationalization of the **Chabahar Port** and the **Lapis Lazuli Route Agreement.**

Our economy is being transformed, as we have passed unprecedented economic legislation- opening opportunities

across new sectors and reducing bureaucratic bottlenecks that encourages regional and global businesses to invest in Afghanistan's virgin markets.

Consequently, we have signed more than \$500 million in investment contacts since the start of this year, while we estimate a boost in our GDP growth from 2.5% to 4% in the coming years.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For Afghanistan's economic gains to be further consolidated and for our collective economic efforts to bear fruit on par with other successful regional groupings such as the **EU** and **ASEAN**, we need to work for ensuring regional peace and stability.

To do our part, **H.E President Ghani** made an unprecedented peace offer to the Taliban last February, as we proposed a joint regional **counter-terrorism** and **counter- narcotics** strategy for adoption and implementation by our near and far neighbors, which include all of the ECO member- states.

Our **peace** and **military strategies** are mutually reinforcing at the national and regional levels.

That is why I renew our call on the ECO member- states present here to use your bilateral and multilateral leverage to help stabilize Afghanistan.

The sooner the Taliban accept our peace offer to end war and violence through dialogue, the earlier the ECO region will be able to fully focus on our common economic agenda.

Without peace at the heart of Asia region—the very roundabout of which is Afghanistan- we as a group will not reach our full economic growth potential.

Last year's Summit took note of this fact, and member states reaffirmed their commitment to the long-term stabilization and **sustainable development of Afghanistan**.

In this connection, I wish to highlight the recent **Afghanistan Pakistan Summit in Kabul** where HE Prime Minister of Pakistan **Shahid Khaqan Abbasi** firmly committed to supporting the Afghan- led and Afghan owned peace process.

We also agreed to undertake effective action against fugitives and the irreconcilable elements, who will continue posing security threats to our two countries, as well as to the rest of the region.

In the coming months, we look forward to the full implementation of the **Afghanistan- Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidary (APAPS)**- which is an overdue step forward towards stabilization of Afghanistan for helping ensure regional security.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To reinforce our peace efforts for prosperity at home and throughout the ECO-region, we welcome **with appreciation**, the establishment by the ECO Member- States an Advocacy Program for Afghanistan.

This resulted from **our Summit last year** when ECO Member- States renewed their “**strong desire for a secure, prosperous and peaceful Afghanistan,**” supporting the **objectives of our National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF).**

We also welcome the **two principles** of the ECO Advocacy Program for Afghanistan: **complementarity** and **favorable treatment.**

Both principles will guide ECO’s assistance to Afghanistan, as well as the execution of the **ECO Fund for Afghanistan,**

in accordance with the **economic reforms** and **policy priorities of Afghanistan** that fully support our collective agenda under ECO.

Moreover, the Government of Afghanistan is grateful to the ECO Member- States for the selection of **Mr. Azerakhsh Hafizi** as the Head of the ECO Chamber of Commerce, as we look forward to another Afghan candidate taking up the position of the next Deputy- Secretary General for Trade, Investment, Agriculture, Industry and International Relations. Given the geographic centrality of Afghanistan in the ECO-region and our many intertwined interests and concerns, we believe an additional Director- level position for Afghanistan will further enable us to contribute much more towards the execution of our common goals under ECO Vision 2025.

Ladies and gentlemen

Thank you once again I look forward to our continued collaboration to advance and implement our collective agenda under ECO.

STATEMENT BY REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

STATEMENT

by H.E. Mr. Mahmud Mammad-Guliyev

*Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan,
23rd Council of Ministers Meeting of ECO*

Dear Mr. Chairman,

Dear colleagues,

Dear Mr. Secretary General,

First of all, on behalf of our Delegation I am pleased to greet all participants and express our gratitude to the Government of Tajikistan for traditional warm hospitality and creation of excellent conditions for a fruitful exchange of views in order to promote our cooperation within the ECO.

Developing stronger regional cooperation among our nations is utmost important, and the role of ECO in this context is undeniable. The Republic of Azerbaijan has always supported the objectives of ECO through a significant contribution to the enhancement of regional synergy and various partnership frameworks, particularly those relating to the field of economy.

When we speak about economy, the issue of transport and connectivity comes to the forefront. That basically serves the objective of trade facilitation, as well as mobility and people-to-people contacts. As stipulated in the “ECO Vision” document, we have the goal to double our intra-regional trade turnover and increase the share of ECO in global trade. Therefore, we need to be more competitive, both as producers and exporters and more attractive and reliable as transit countries. Creating strong logistics and special economic zones along trade routes, improving procedures for trade facilitation, and acting together in support of such approach will lead to a collective success.

In that regard, using our favourable geographic location, transit capacity should be an essential strategic competitive advantage of the ECO region. The cooperation in enhancing our connectivity is of paramount importance.

Azerbaijan tries to reinforce the links between our economies. The construction of the new Baku International Sea Trade Port, as well as a Free Economic Zone, will significantly increase the competitiveness of the international transport corridors, as well as trade and investment opportunities of the countries of the region.

Azerbaijan has also been contributing to enhancing ECO region’s transit potential through promoting East-West, North-South and South-West transport corridors. Baku-Tbilisi-Kars rail road, which was commissioned into operations last October, brings different segments of the Asian market closer to Europe. In fact, all ECO member-states can benefit from this rail line, because it is going to be a natural connector and extension to several different regional and non-ECO regional trade routes. We are glad that along with Turkey and Azerbaijan, such ECO member states as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan also participated at a high-level

ceremony on the commissioning of this strategic rail line. Iran, Tajikistan and Afghanistan are also among those who expressed their support and interest in using this infrastructure for their trade purposes.

Furthermore, an early completion of Rasht - Astara (Iran) – Astara (Azerbaijan) project which is a missing link of North-South and South-West trade corridors, will also help to expand trade opportunities for the whole ECO region and further beyond. I would like to highlight the project called Lapis Lazuli, which is critically important trade route for Afghanistan. In this regard, Afghanistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan signed and already started to realize the Agreement on the development of that route.

Distinguished participants,

Modern societies cannot be competitive without advanced ICT infrastructure. As you are aware, connectivity agenda constitutes another priority area in ECO. In order to streamline the regional cooperation in this area, Azerbaijan decided to organise the 2nd ICT ministerial meeting last December. As the adopted Baku Declaration stipulates, there is a special need for development of modern infrastructure projects to improve connectivity through deploying necessary ICT infrastructure in the countries. Therefore, Azerbaijan has actively developed regional broadband infrastructure projects – namely, Trans-Eurasian Information Super Highway (TASIM) in order to bridge a digital gap throughout the ECO region. I believe that this and other ICT projects across the ECO region will help to guide us in implementing “2025 ECO Regional Strategy for Information Society Development” and its Action Plan.

Energy cooperation also plays the role of a backbone of regional cooperation processes. It all started when Azerbaijan came up with a new energy strategy and a new vision of energy cooperation. Azerbaijan became an essential partner in ensuring energy security for a wider region. Azerbaijan’s diversified pipeline infrastructure links the Caspian, Black and Mediterranean Seas. Besides, Azerbaijan and Iran are exploring the opportunities how to raise their regional profile as electricity producers and transit countries. I would like to mention that there is a growing partnership in the field of energy with Turkey, Kazakhstan, Iran, and Turkmenistan. Knowing that there is even a bigger potential, we would like to move further ahead on the issues of regional cooperation in the field of energy. Practically, all member States of ECO more or less possess significant and diverse energy resources.

Dear colleagues,

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.

In order to improve the efficiency of ECO, from our point of view, non-economic activities should be at least temporarily limited and the principle of holding quantitative meetings should be avoided. Instead of organizing numerous meetings, we consider it more important to hold those events, which contribute to the preparation, implementation and coordination of economic projects beneficial for the region, and which attract financial resources. In that regard, we suggest that the issue of quorum be duly addressed.

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 the Organization as a project-oriented and a more visible regional player. ECO needs a stronger visibility throughout the region and beyond. Our dialogue and partnership with international organisations and specialized agencies must be prioritized, streamlined and strengthened in strict accordance with priority areas of cooperation inside ECO. Our best guideline in this undertaking is the ECO Vision for 2016-2025. This document defines the development agenda for the region and sets a strategic direction of the Organization for the coming decade. Azerbaijan supports ECO's reform process and believes that only through joint efforts we can enhance efficiency of the current institutional setup and be successful in meeting the objectives of the ECO Vision.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We always refer to the issue of cooperation and raising the profile of our Organisation as the community with shared values and solidarity. Yes, the pillar of cooperation within our Organisation has to do with economic projects, efficient use of natural resources and building our region on human capital. This all must take place in an environment of political stability. Regional conflicts and cases of military occupation prevent ECO member States from unlocking a bigger economic and trade potential. It is in this sense that I feel impelled to raise the issue of ongoing occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan and unlawful exploitation of Azerbaijan's natural resources by Armenia. That occupation undermines regional stability and economic growth of Azerbaijan. I call on all of you to demonstrate solidarity with us and to prevent the import, export, sale and realization of any goods and services in the ECO member States' markets which are illegally produced in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. We would appreciate if all ECO member States make their utmost efforts to ensure a strict non-involvement of their investment, capital, services, state or private economic players in any activities in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan.

Finally, I also would like to use this opportunity to highlight another important issue, which is very significant for my country and for the ECO community. Azerbaijan is the only member of the ECO that is bidding for World EXPO 2025 with a theme "Developing human capital, building a better future". The bid itself demonstrates our capability to organise such important event of a global scale. If successful with its bid, Azerbaijan will attract the attention of the entire world to our region. Therefore, I count on the member states to support our candidacy. That could be another demonstration of our solidarity. Bringing World EXPO to Azerbaijan means bringing it to the ECO region as well.

Thank you.

STATEMENT BY ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Mr. Chairman,

Dear Friends and Colleagues

At the outset, let me express my deep appreciation to the Government and people of the Republic of Tajikistan for graciously hosting this important meeting in beautiful Dushanbe.

Dear Brothers and sisters,

Our destinies are intertwined as members of one region; failure or success in one part of this region will impact all of us. Our cooperation is facilitated not just because of our geographical proximity, but also many affinities in so many areas, including civilization, culture, religion and shared history. We are all sitting in the same boat facing the same challenges and opportunities.

Geopolitics of the region that we share has become ever more complicated mostly due to uncertainties and persistent challenges triggered by systemic transitional fluidity since the 1990s. The mutually reinforcing foreign intervention and terrorism and extremism have destabilized many parts of our wider region for close to two decades. Violent extremism continues to represent a threat to the ECO region. Despite the territorial defeat of Daesh and other

terrorist groups and the destruction of their self-proclaimed caliphate, extensive networks of extremist groups, especially Daesh in West, South and Central Asia, represent the most serious threat to the ECO region. We need to synergize and forge a common regional strategy to halt the spread of their ideology of hate and cut their financial resources. My government has always been ready to cooperate in devising a comprehensive counter-extremism and terrorism strategy that fits the situation in our region. In this context, a joint counter-narcotics campaign can drain one of the most important the resources of extremist terror groups.

We are also facing a host of other challenges, including environment degradation, climate change, drought, dust storms and poverty in some sections of population, that we need to address. In the face of these challenges, we, as ECO Member States, should expand ECO's capacity and tap its potentials in the fullest possible way. ECO is a unique multilateral platform to mobilize our individual resources to meet collective objectives and confront common transnational calamities.

We can together stablish a strong ECO region. Each ECO Member State enjoys various resources and potentials. We can synergize to unleash huge energy for robust, inclusive and sustainable regional development. The ECO has played a prominent role in exploring these potentials and formulating mechanisms for regional cooperation.

At this juncture and after three decades of existence, ECO has proved its capacity to help Member States move towards development and integration. In recent years, ECO has become a visible player in the global arena and a reliable partner for the international community in implementing SDGs and other global agenda and programs.

Iran Firmly believes in the benefits arising from regional cooperation and interaction and has always manifested its full commitment to the objectives of the Organization and acceded to all initiatives, programs and agreements within the Organization. We are committed to developing a strong and prosperous ECO region, have allocated substantial resources in the form of development assistance and are determined to promote south – south cooperation within the ECO framework.

Dear Colleagues,

Since the adoption of ECO Vision 2025 during the ECO Summit in Islamabad, a range of activities and programs have been implemented by the Secretariat and Member States. However, the pace of activities and involvement of Member States fall short of the expectations of our leaders.

Apart from ensuring a conducive policy environment by all Member States for the realization of ECO Vision 2025, mobilization of budget and financial resources for its effective implementation is also of high

importance. Therefore, all ECO Member States should allocate extra-budgetary financial resources to help achieve our common goals and objectives through a well- formulated scheme.

With the ECO Vision as our agenda for the coming years, we expect to achieve by 2025 increased intra-regional trade and a bigger slice of global trade, facilitating commercial environment and flourishing tourism industry, better connectivity, improved energy cooperation, healthy environment and smooth visa regimes. On this path, it is imperative for all of us to employ our resources to help enhance institutional and operational capacities of the Organization to enable it to respond in a timely and effective manner to the needs and aspirations of Member States.

With welfare and prosperity of our people as the prime target of all the plans and activities of this Organization, the ECO should now focus on projects and programs which bring about maximum economic benefit to our peoples and the entire region.

In the meantime, materializing the envisaged goals and objectives of the ECO Vision requires a very professional and strong Secretariat to follow-up and implement the directives of the ECO-decision-making bodies and be more responsive to developments within and outside the region. Hence, strengthening the ECO Secretariat through providing high quality human resource as well as granting greater

authority to the Secretary-General in the recruitment process in this regard should be seriously considered. Let us hope that the reform process, already under discussion, will result in an efficient Secretariat, better and more responsive rules and regulations and professional staffing of the Secretariat.

Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Over the recent years, Iran's economy demonstrated that it has great potential for expansion and growth. Economic sanctions not only did not impede Iran, but instead solidified popular resolve to enhance domestic capacities. Achieving a good growth rate last year proved that the Iranian economy can become one of the vibrant global emerging economies within the next twenty years. Our strategic choice for achieving such sustainable and balanced growth is extensive global partnership through regional and multilateral arrangements, including utilizing our vast and developed transit and transport linkages on the North–South and South–West Corridors. We are of the strong belief that economy and security can only grow together, and common interests can bind us regionally and globally to guarantee both regional and global security.

We warmly applaud the efforts of our distinguished Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Halil Ibrahim Akca, and recognize the many

achievements under his able leadership. We are also grateful to all of you for placing your valuable confidence in Ambassador Soleimanpour to assume the immense responsibilities of ECO Secretary-General.

Allow me to conclude by underlining our unreserved support for ECO as it moves to accomplish its valuable objectives and programs, including those adopted here in Dushanbe. I am confident that the active commitment and involvement of all Member States will ensure our success in building a strong ECO region.

Thank you.

STATEMENT BY REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

STATEMENT

**by Mr. A.Kamaldinov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Kazakhstan at 23rd meeting of
the ECO Council of Foreign Ministers
(17 April 2018, Dushanbe)**

Dear Mr. Chairman

Distinguished Secretary General!

Honorable Ministers and Heads of Delegations!

Excellencies!

Ladies and gentlemen!

First of all, let me express my sincere gratitude to the Republic of Tajikistan for the warm hospitality and excellent organization of the 23rd meeting of the ECO Council of Foreign Ministers.

May I take this opportunity to congratulate H.E. Mr. Sirodjiddin Aslov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan on assuming the Chairmanship of the ECO Council of Ministers and to thank H.E. Mr. Sartaj Aziz, Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for his efforts during his tenure as the Chairman of the Council.

Dear colleagues!

Kazakhstan considers the development of cooperation with the ECO Member Countries as an important part of its foreign

policy. We have a strong focus on development of integration processes as a factor to promote economic growth.

Last year was very significant for the Organization. "ECO Vision 2025" as the outcome of the 22nd ECO Council of Ministers and the 13th Summit became an important step to realize the multifaceted potential of our countries and laid the foundation for the strategic development of the ECO for the next decade.

We offer the following perspectives of our cooperation within the Organization in the areas of transport, trade and investments, that we believe would benefit all ECO Member States.

Our region has a great capacity for development and favorable geopolitical location, at the intersection of the North-South and West-East transport corridors. We believe that the realization of our transit transport capabilities should be at the top of ECO's agenda as a major factor for the development of regional trade and attracting investments.

For Kazakhstan, the development of transport and logistics infrastructure is one of the most important goals. Two thousand kilometers of railways and four thousand kilometers of highways were put into operation in our country. Sea harbors and airports have been reconstructed. We have formed strategic transport corridors enabling us to connect directly Asia and Europe.

This allows the integration with major projects of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Chinese initiative "Belt and Road".

We propose to use our transit opportunities to expand cooperation of all ECO Member Countries.

In this regard, we welcome the intention of the ECO together with the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and ESCAP to implement the project on Commercialization of the important Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway corridor, as well as the signing of the Agreement on Technical Cooperation between the ECO and IDB in August 2017.

It is necessary to promote the joint establishment of multimodal transport, and to create an extensive network of transport infrastructure aimed at achieving the transit potential of the ECO Member States. In turn, the creation of favorable transport conditions will stimulate the development of regional trade and will open wide-ranging opportunities for access of national products to world markets.

Kazakhstan could potentially become a liaison between the Member States of the Organization and other Eurasian markets.

Given the importance for the ECO region of financing our cooperation we would like to highlight that in 2018 the Astana International Financial Center, the new high-tech exchange marketplace for capital market financing, asset management, Islamic banking, private banking and "green" finance became operational. We hope that ECO Member States will make use of this platform for investments.

Dear Chairman!

Dear colleagues!

We would like to point out that it is already one year passed since 22nd Council of Ministers directed the Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) to finalize the New Scale of Assessments and ECO Reforms.

We appreciate the work done by CPR and ECO Secretariat on elaborating and consolidating the positions of the ECO Member-States on these issues. We are aware of the complexities involved.

Yesterday, our Senior Officials had a comprehensive discussion on this subject. In this regard **we urge ECO Member States to intensify our common efforts and to finalize the New Scale of Assessments and ECO Reforms, preferably before 15 September of this year**, as it is recommended by Senior Official Meeting.

I strongly believe that it is an achievable goal and it is in our best interest to complete this process in time.

Excellencies!

I avail myself of this opportunity to express our gratitude to H.E. Mr. Halil Ibrahim Akca during his tenure as ECO Secretary General and his professional team for their contribution to the promotion of the ECO goals and objectives.

Mr. Chairman!

I would like to express my confidence that this meeting will provide impetus to our common efforts to further strengthen ECO's role in advancing cooperation for the welfare and prosperity of our countries and people.

Thank you for your attention!

STATEMENT BY KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

SPEECH

**Of First Deputy Minister of foreign affairs
Kemelova D.A. at the meeting of the ECO Council Ministers
(Dushanbe city, 17 April 2018)**

**Dear Mr. Chairman,
Dear Heads of Delegations,
Dear Secretary General,**

On behalf of the delegation of the Kyrgyz Republic I would like to welcome all the participants of the 23rd meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Economic Cooperation Organization and thank the Tajik side represented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan Mr. Aslov Sirojiddin Mukhriddinovich for the excellent organization of this meeting, for the warm welcome and hospitality.

Also I express my appreciation to Mr. Khalil Ibrahim Akça for the preparation of this meeting, the work that you are doing on the post of the Secretary General and the contribution to the development of the Organization.

Dear colleagues,

Last November was the 25th Anniversary since the expansion of ECO at the expense of the newly independent states of Central Asia. During this period, our Organization has achieved certain success, signed several important agreements, individual projects were implemented, institutions are developing, allowing them to play an active role in the activity of ECO. The Bank of Trade and Development was established that can finance projects and programs of the Organization.

As it is known the ECO region has all the potential, including economic opportunities, natural resources, communications and above all human resources in order to realize the main goals and objectives of the Organization.

Due to its geographic location, ECO and its member countries act as important connecting bridges on the Eurasian continent. In general, there are all the necessary conditions and premises for sustainable and stable development of our entire extensive region.

The Kyrgyz Republic has always been committed to the principles of mutually beneficial regional economic cooperation within the ECO, and it was the main reason for the country's accession to the Organization back in

1992. In particular, attaching special value to the interaction of member states in such fields as trade, transport, energy, agriculture and other.

However, despite the positive aspects of our cooperation, we should recognize that at present the role of the ECO in the system of regional economic and business ties does not correspond to its potential yet. Our common intentions and regional projects face with difficulties in their practical implementation.

Based on the principles of the ECO, it is necessary to improve and increase the efficiency of the ECO's activity and activate the project work in priority sectors that would meet the interests of all parties.

It is important to make an effort to put into practice the intentions and ideas, which are placed in the "ECO Vision". Firstly, this applies to such fields as trade, transport and communications, energy, tourism and environment. It is also important to pay attention to interaction in the field of agriculture, industry and information technologies.

One of the important tasks is expansion of infrastructure, including branched transport, telecommunications and energy networks that are an indispensable condition for regional and interregional cooperation in all other spheres.

Considering the land-locked geographical position of the Kyrgyz Republic, our country pays special attention to creating the transport and railway communications, on national and regional scales, in cooperation with regional partners participates in the work on the development of transport corridors "East-West" and "North-South".

It is important to us to implement the railway and highway construction projects along the route "China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan" and "Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran". Their start and their completion will provide our region with an unobstructed transport communication and transit component which will lead to the expansion of economic and trade relations between our countries with an access to other regions and markets.

A big role is played by the project "CASA-1000", which will contribute to the formation of the regional Central Asian and South Asian electricity market.

We also consider it important to actively use such a financial instrument as the ECO Trade and Development Bank, designed to provide regional projects with available credits.

Dear ministers,

The Kyrgyz side supports the intentions in reforming the ECO Secretariat and the Organization as a whole, transforming it into an

efficient and mutually beneficial platform for multilateral cooperation. It is very important to go back to the origins and direct efforts to practical implementation of economic projects and create a “success story” on the example of a transport project that can connect all countries of the region on mutually beneficial routes.

Modern realities require that the Organization and its Secretariat passed to a qualitative level of development, by optimizing its activity. Wherein it is important to create the conditions under which the ECO will be effective and viable Organization, and meet the interests of all its participants.

In view of the useful experience of other organizations, it is advisable to make appropriate changes to the statutory documents with a clear regulation of the rights and responsibilities of each ECO body, the order of consideration of issues and decision-making.

Also we propose to subsequently reject the application of tightly entrenched concepts in the terminology of our Organization such as the “founder states” and “new member states”, using in the future the term as a “full-fledged member state of the Organization”.

According to proposed “ECO Reforms”, the distribution of established posts in the ECO Secretariat will depend on the size of membership fees which does not comply with Article 3 of the ECO Constitution, where the equality of member states is fixed. This does not take into account and infringes the rights of the other member countries where the opportunity to apply to managerial and professional positions in the Secretariat is lost.

The transformations in the ECO, first and foremost, should be aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the Organization itself, at the primary and priority projects the implementation of which actually might have an impact on the development of the entire region.

Especially I would like to emphasize that the Kyrgyz side is ready to support the decisions and proposals submitted for today’s meeting which meet the goals and objectives of the Organization as need in the Izmir Treaty of 1996, taking into account the commitments of the Kyrgyz Republic in other international organizations, international law and national legislation of our country.

We hope that the ECO in the nearest prospects will be able to become a real platform of regional interaction and by our common efforts, the Organization will move to a qualitatively new level of development.

We consider that peace and stability in our region are the main conditions for realizing the true goals of sustainable development, economic growth and improving the welfare of our countries and people.

In this regard the Kyrgyz side reaffirms its willingness to support the regional and global efforts to assist Afghanistan in achieving lasting peace and prosperity.

Dear participant,

One of the aims of the Organization is further reinforcing of its historical and cultural ties between the peoples of the ECO region, and sharing in the field of tourism.

In 2014 and 2016, the First and Second World Nomad Games successfully took place in Kyrgyzstan, in which the sports teams of the ECO member states took part.

By the resolution of the UN General Assembly The World Nomad Games are recognized as an instrument of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding and cooperation for the sake of peace.

In continuation of this good tradition, the Third World Nomad Games will be held on the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul from 2nd till 8th September 2018. The Program includes three areas of activities, they are- ethnic sports, ethno festival and other cultural programs. Taking this opportunity, I would like to invite the National sport teams, the culture sphere representatives and guests from the ECO countries to these unique international sports and cultural events. I hope for representative participation of delegations of your states.

In conclusion, again I am confident that the ECO countries, having great potential and being in the center of the Eurasian continent, with good will, in full ability can implement the aims and objectives that the Organization is facing, so our region was stable, economically developed, attractive and competitive.

Thank you for your kind attention.

STATEMENT BY ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF PAKISTAN

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Sartaj Aziz, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission
of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, as Head of Delegation
(Meeting of Council of Ministers, 17 April 2018)**

Honorable Chairman H.E. Mr. Sirodjidin Aslov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan,
Honorable Secretary General,
Distinguished Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, I had the honour to hand over the Chairmanship of the ECO to the Republic of Tajikistan. As you emphasized the Council of Ministers (COM) is the highest decision-making body of the ECO. Therefore, it is up to us to make this organization more vibrant by making this region one of the prosperous regions of the world. This requires an objective assessment of our process and frank identification of difficulties and obstacles.

In my view, we have to identify our efforts for greater cooperation among the Member States, particularly in the field of connectivity and trade. We firmly believe that ECO must adopt result-oriented approach to achieve its objective of greater economic cooperation and integration.

Mr. Chairman,

As you mentioned in your statement that this is the first Meeting of the Council of Ministers after the Islamabad Summit in which ECO Vision 2025 was adopted in March 2017.

The ECO Vision is focused on priority areas like – increase in intra-regional trade, strengthen regional connectivity to operationalize major ECO transport corridors, coordinated efforts for energy security, wider access and energy trade in the ECO Region and promotion of tourism to contribute to economic prosperity in the Region by meeting the timeline mentioned in the Implementation Framework of the Vision 2025. We hope that all Member States would come forward in making the Vision 2025 a success.

Excellencies,

Our Region includes many important cross-roads of the world. It has the potential and capacity to function as a bridge between north and south, Europe and Asia. In this regard, Transit Trade Framework Agreement (TTFA) is one of the key legal documents of the organization. The main objective of this agreement is facilitation of movement of goods and services in the region without hindrance.

Physical barriers to trade are being gradually removed with rapid process and several corridors like China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), CAREC and Lapis-Lazuli Corridor. But that is not enough. As brother, Javad Zarif, just said that we have to harmonize our trade policies.

The ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA) is the organization's major initiative towards trade liberalization in the region, but it is stalemate. Pakistan would like to urge non-signatory

members of the ECO to sign this important agreement at the earliest. We are ready to offer our full technical support to the non-signatory Member States for its early implementation because trade will carry the benefits of ECO directly to the people.

Excellencies,

Our Vision of “peace for development” has consistently guided our efforts, to help create a conducive environment in which all Member States can achieve their true economic and development potential. Economic health can only come if there is peace and stability which necessitates stringent and collective measures against forces trying to undermine these efforts.

In this context, I would reaffirm Pakistan’s commitment to wipe out terrorism. Pakistan has deployed more than 200,000 troops in tribal belt to contain the menace of terrorism. We have rendered unprecedented sacrifices in this war more than 35,000 Pakistanis including 6000 security personnel have laid down their lives in this war. We are on the verge of success in wiping out terrorism from our soil and hope that similar efforts will be undertaken by other countries to bring peace and stability in the region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We want peace in Afghanistan and will continue our efforts for this purpose and for the economic revival and reconstruction of Afghanistan.

We also support the new “Advocacy Programme for Afghanistan”. This will focus on the ways and means to create and strengthen capacities of people of Afghanistan. In addition, it will broaden the scope of ECO assistance to our Afghan brothers in line with the activities foreseen in the ECO Vision 2025 and will help Afghanistan in its efforts for attaining stability, prosperity, economic growth and sustainable development.

Excellencies,

We believe that reforms in any organization are a continuous process and organizations such as ECO should adapt to ever changing challenges and environment. Therefore, we feel that reforms in the organizational structure of ECO are essential and needed. It is necessary, not only for the implementation of the Vision 2025 but also to consolidate the Economic Cooperation Organization as an organization and to give it dynamism in the coming decades. Pakistan has already agreed to the newly proposed Scales of assessment of the ECO Secretariat by paying its share of 22% along with other two founding Member States.

Excellencies,

We appreciate the Secretariat’s initiative of bringing parity in the procedure of establishment of an affiliated body in different member states and suggesting necessary changes in the existing rules of procedures and charters of the established bodies. In order to bring meaningful and positive changes we believe that the proposed reforms proposal may be further deliberated upon by the Member States.

Excellencies,

Pakistan has handed over the Presidency of ECO Chamber of Commerce to Afghanistan last month. During its presidency, Pakistan tried to bring closer the private sectors of the Member States. We hope our Afghan brothers would carry forward the task and assure them of our fullest support and cooperation.

Pakistan ratified the Articles of the ECO Reinsurance Company in July 2010 and we are pleased to note that Iran and Turkey have also ratified the Articles of Agreement. After necessary ratifications, the Agreement has now entered into force. Hopefully the Reinsurance Company would play a vital role in facilitating businesses amongst the Member States and beyond.

We believe that the ECO-Trade and Development Bank (ECO-TDB), can offer support trade and development activities within the region. Therefore, we should focus on increasing the membership, scope and activities of the ECO-TDB.

The ECO Science Foundation is operational in Islamabad and we encourage the remaining Member States to ratify its Charter at the earliest.

ECO Science Foundation (ECOSF) in collaboration with Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan, Pakistan Academy of Sciences (PAS), the Inter Academy partnership Science Education Program (IAP SEP) and Alif Ailaan recently organized an International Forum on Science Education in Islamabad – Pakistan. The main theme of the Forum was “Quality Science Education at Schools – A Must for Higher Education and Economic Development”.

We are glad that the ECO Cultural Institute (ECI) is playing an important role in promoting closer cooperation among the people of the region in the fields of culture, literature and arts. Again, I would like to urge non-Member States to join the ECO Cultural Institute and make the organization more vibrant.

Mr. Chairman!

I am of the firm belief that under your able guidance the Organization would further strengthen economic cooperation between the Member States.

Finally, I would once again like to place on record our profound thanks to our hosts, for the gracious hospitality extended to my delegation. I am also grateful to the ECO Secretariat for making arrangements for the successful conduct of this Council.

I thank you.

STATEMENT BY REPUBLIC OF TURKEY

SAYIN BAKAN YARDIMCIMIZIN EİT 23. BAKANLAR KONSEYİ TOPLANTISINDA YARARLANABİLECEKLERİ KONUŞMA TASLAĞI

(17 Nisan 2018, Duşanbe)

**Mr. Chairman,
Mr. Secretary General,
Distinguished Ministers and Colleagues,**

It is an honour for me to address you all in Dushanbe on the occasion of the 23rd Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). I wish to express my deep appreciation and thanks to the distinguished Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan H.E. Mr. Aslov Sirodjidin Muhridinovich for his warm hospitality and excellent organization of this meeting.

Distinguished Colleagues,

We, as ECO members, have as significant geopolitical power. Our region has an enormous development potential with its rich economic assets and natural resources which we should utilize in the interest of all our nations.

Thirty three years ago, with this notion in mind, our countries founded ECO to fulfil the true potential. Since then, we launched numerous projects. Yet today, we see that this enthusiasm has lost focus in its efforts to realize concrete projects and attain its goals. ECO should determine its priority areas of action and strive for them. Our objectives can only be accomplished by adopting a more focused and devoted approach to this Organization's activities. Needless to say, in order to achieve that aim, we need a collective will from all Member States.

I call upon all Member States to redouble their efforts in this regard and cooperate in renewing strength of our organization and realizing our hopes for the future of this region.

Distinguished Ministers,

Turkey is actively contributing to ECO projects at all stages, including from planning to endorsement and implementation. As the most recent example of this approach, "ECO Smuggling and Customs Offences Data Bank" was established and held its first meeting on 20th February 2018 in Ankara. I strongly encourage and invite all other Member States that have not done so to join this important ECO institution which will play a significant role in providing a safer intra-regional trade and transport in the ECO region.

Honourable Colleagues,

ECO's founding objective of regional cooperation and development can be achieved through enhancing intra-regional trade. I would like to remind you that the ECOTA is the most important instrument in our hand for realizing our shared goals and yet we failed to implement ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA), which entered into force back in 2008. Latest figures shows us that the cumulative world trade of the 10 ECO countries reached 626 billion US Dollars. We believe that our countries' economies are complimentary for each other. If we focus on such projects like ECOTA, we will raise the level of our trade volume -both intra and global- significantly, as well as increase the share of ECO in global trade and investment inflow.

In this regard, we encourage all Member States to join ECOTA for its implementation at the earliest possible date.

On the other hand, current budgetary problems within the organization prevent us from achieving our goals. We strongly believe that we should overcome this ongoing issue as soon as possible and all Member States should fulfil their responsibility in terms of burden-sharing. Without standing by our commitments to this organization, in particular in terms of timely and full payment of our budget shares, we cannot achieve our goals.

Of course, we are aware of the fact that some Member States are not happy with the current Scales of Assessment of our budget. This is a problem which we have been dealing for a long time. We need more efforts to find an equitable solution to this problem and on this occasion I call on all of you to give a careful consideration and adopt a constructive stand for overcoming this problem.

Excellencies,

Similar remarks can be made for the reform process. The need for reform of the organization is a reality which I believe none of us disagree on. However, we have failed to make a breakthrough on this important matter as well. We are confident that if we, instead of focusing on some narrow interests in terms of gaining some positions in the Secretariat, emphasize on strengthening the efficiency of the organization, we may get a satisfactory result on this issue. I also call on all of you to consider making more efforts in this direction.

I believe that the "ECO Vision 2025" will give us the opportunity to continue our cooperation in various fields and strengthen the development of our region. For this purpose, we must finalize the modalities for Establishment of the ECO Vision Fund and implement "ECO Vision 2025" urgently.

Distinguished Ministers and Colleagues,

ECO is an economic cooperation-oriented organisation and should be safeguarded from political polemics. However, politics and economics are always interlinked with each other not only in ECO geography, but also all over the world.

Spread of terrorism and organized crime, spread of violence and extremism are all sources of concern to all of us. That was the coup attempt of FETO terrorist organization. Don't underestimate. FETO is not only a threat to Turkey. It poses a threat to all the countries where its members and affiliates operate. Their aim is to seize political power and get hold of economic riches.

We should be able to show our collective will to confront all forms and manifestations of terrorism, including through strengthened bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Therefore, we want you to be vigilant about the activities of these Gülenist establishments in your countries.

Distinguished Ministers,

While we think colonialism as something that had ended in the 20th century, unfortunately our Palestinian brothers and sisters continue to struggle for independence and sovereignty under the Israeli occupation. The Palestinian cause continues to be a bleeding wound in the conscience of humanity. US Administration' latest illegal decision to recognize Jerusalem/Al Quds as the so-called capital of Israel is a major blow to peace efforts and our Palestinian brothers' rightful aspirations and that is why it was confronted with the collective reaction of the Muslim world at the OIC Extraordinary Summit in Istanbul on 13 December 2017 and the overwhelming rejection at the UN General Assembly on 21 December 2017.

We are deeply saddened and concerned by the latest developments in Palestine. The killing of innocent Palestinians and the continued use of excessive force by Israel increased the concern of a new spiral of violence in the region. It is vital and high time for the international community to fulfil its responsibilities towards Palestine and to ensure that Israel abandons its aggressive stand and ceases its practices that violate the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people. We need to act collectively to put an end to the suffering of the Palestinians striving for their own independence as well as to help them establish their own state with East Jerusalem as its capital

Honourable Ministers,

In the absence of a settlement in Cyprus, the Turkish Cypriots continue to suffer under unjust isolation, through no fault of their own. We must assist them in overcoming these restrictions. ECO provides an ideal platform for the development of economic relations with the Turkish Cypriots. Extending their observer status under the name of the “Turkish Cypriot State” will be a clear demonstration of our continuing solidarity.

Distinguished Ministers,

Having entered its eighth year, the conflict in Syria continues to pose political, security and humanitarian challenges to not only Turkey, but the region as well. Turkey alone is hosting over 3,5 million Syrians as a result of this conflict, while over 2 million of them are scattered in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and other countries. In the turmoil of the conflict, terrorist organizations like DEASH and PYD/YPG have found fertile ground.

Since day one, Turkey has pursued a policy aimed at preserving Syria’s territorial integrity and unity, ending the bloodshed and resolving the conflict through a viable and credible political solution based on UN parameters that would satisfy the legitimate demands of the Syrian people. The Astana platform that Turkey launched together with Russia and Iran has been the only effective international initiative that helped reduce violence across Syria and gave impetus to the UN-led political process in Geneva.

Turkey’s resolve to fight DEASH, PYD/YPG and other terrorist organizations in Syria remains firm. Following the conclusion of Operation Euphrates Shield against DEASH last year, we have recently launched the Operation Olive Branch to ensure our border and national security, neutralize PYD/YPG and DEASH terrorists in Afrin and thus, save the brotherly Syrians from the oppression and cruelty of these terrorists. Operation Olive Branch has shown to the entire world how a counter-terrorism operation can be conducted without harming civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Ultimately, we want to see a democratic, pluralist, non-sectarian, territorially integrated and politically united Syria, governed by the will of its entire people. Turkey is determined to make every effort until a lasting solution for the sake of the Syrian people can be found.

Honoured Ministers,

Before concluding my remarks, I would like to pay a special tribute to Ambassador Halil İbrahim Akça who completed his tenure as the Secretary General of ECO. I warmly congratulate him for successfully steering the Secretariat for the past four years.

I also would like to congratulate Ambassador Hadi Soleimanpour on his new appointment as the new Secretary General and wish him every success in his new duties. We will give all necessary support to him during his term of office.

Thank you.

STATEMENT BY REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

Speech by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, A.A. Abduvakhitov, at the 23rd Council of Ministers of the Economic Cooperation Organization

(Dushanbe, 17 April 2018)

Dear Mr. Chairman,

Dear delegations,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to greet you on behalf of His Excellency Mr. Mirziyoyev Shavkat Mironiyovich, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and wish you success in discussing topical issues of economic cooperation between our countries.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to whole-heartedly congratulate His Excellency Mr. Sirodjidin Aslov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan, on occasion of his election to the position of Chairman of the 23rd ECO Council of Ministers and express sincere gratitude to the President and Government of Tajikistan for the hospitality and excellent conditions created for our work.

I also thank the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Khalil Ibrahim Akca for his active work and efforts to develop the Organization.

Dear participants of the meeting,

Uzbekistan supports the consistent development of regional economic cooperation. We are making efforts to expand mutual cooperation in order to achieve the common development and prosperity of our states.

In particular, one of the recent confirmations of our policy in this sphere was the International High-Level Conference on Afghanistan, held in Tashkent on March 27, 2018. Issues of stimulating regional economic cooperation were among the priorities of the agenda of this forum. The conference participants stressed that the timely implementation of regional trade transit, transport, energy, infrastructure and communication projects linking Afghanistan with its closest neighbors and a vast region will provide tangible benefits for the population of the region as a whole, improve livelihoods, and strengthen efforts to promoting peace and combating terrorism and illegal activities.

In this regard, we are considering the next ECO Council Ministers meeting as another opportunity to discuss topical issues of economic cooperation between the countries of our region.

Dear delegates,

The government of Uzbekistan ensures stable development of the country's economy. Since 2005, there has been a positive balance of trade and balance of payments, a surplus in the state budget. Thanks to the implemented measures, in 2017 the economic growth rate of our economy amounted to 5.5%, the volume of exports increased by 15%. The positive balance in foreign trade reached 854 million US dollars.

We introduced a free conversion of our national currency - sum. Legal entities and individuals have the opportunity to purchase and sell foreign currency in commercial banks without restrictions. Since the liberalization of the sphere, the volume of foreign currency purchase and sale transactions has increased 1.5 times and amounted to about 1.3 billion US dollars. At the same time, our country's gold and currency reserves increased by 1.1 billion US dollars.

Over the past 2017, the country has established 12 free economic and 45 industrial zones, which contributed to the accelerated development of our provinces. Work to organize another 50 new industrial zones in the near future is underway.

In 2017, thanks to the construction of new enterprises, the development of small business and private entrepreneurship, the expansion of the service sector more than 336,000 new jobs were organized. We have determined for ourselves the provision of employment of the population as a priority task, therefore we will continue to attach special importance to the growth of these indicators not only in quantitative but also in qualitative terms.

Speaking about the prospects for our cooperation within the ECO framework, in our opinion, the most urgent tasks for the countries of the organization should be identified issues of development of transport and transit communications.

In this context, I would like to briefly dwell on the promising directions that are opening up to ECO countries in using the communication potential of our region, taking into account modern realities.

We are talking about the largest regional projects, such as the International Trans-Afghan Transport Corridor, running through the territory of Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Iran and further to the seaports of the Persian Gulf, the transport corridor Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Oman.

These projects can open huge opportunities for our countries to enter the world market, significantly reduce the cost and terms of cargo transportation and give additional impetus to the further development of economic cooperation and the strengthening of the stability of the region. Uzbekistan is ready to fully implement all the necessary efforts, together with the countries of the region, in the practical implementation of these projects.

Uzbekistan makes a feasible contribution to the socio-economic revival of Afghanistan. Since 2002, we have been supplying electricity to Afghanistan. With the introduction of the new Surkhan-Puli-Khumri power transmission line, the volume of electricity supplies from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan will increase dramatically

Uzbekistan makes a feasible contribution to the socio-economic revival of Afghanistan. Since 2002, we have been supplying electricity to Afghanistan. With the introduction of the new Surkhan-Puli-Khumri power transmission line, the volume of electricity supplies from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan will increase dramatically.

In particular, together with the Government of Afghanistan, we are promoting the implementation of a strategic project - the continuation to Herat of the constructed by the Uzbek experts and the current railway Khairaton-Mazar-i-Sharif. This project will make a real, practical contribution to the reconstruction of the Afghan economy, create new jobs and increase the country's transit potential.

Uzbekistan welcomes the Advocacy Program of the Economic Cooperation Organization for Afghanistan and is ready to participate in its implementation.

As noted in the document "ECO Vision 2025", an important component is an increase in the volume of trade between the member countries of the organization. We share opinions and proposals on the need to stimulate mutual trade, increase mutual exchanges in this area, eliminate unnecessary barriers.

Today, Uzbekistan, which has sufficient industrial potential, exports a large range of highly competitive products of its own production to more than 140 countries. The republic can offer its close neighbors a wide range of quality products, such as automotive and agricultural machinery, electrical products, mineral fertilizers, petrochemical products, cotton fiber and textiles, fresh and processed fruits and vegetables, pharmaceuticals, construction materials and much more.

Uzbekistan also has a significant agricultural resource potential. In recent years, the fruit and vegetable sector of the republic's economy has seen a significant development, which is due to ongoing structural reforms, the implementation of state support mechanisms. As a whole, as of today fresh and processed production is delivered on the markets of more than 80 countries of the world.

Dear participants of the meeting,

One of the priority areas within the ECO framework for Uzbekistan are issues of cooperation in the field of investment.

At present, Uzbekistan is making active efforts to expand investment cooperation with its neighbors, to jointly implement projects of various scales in promising and demanded industries. We propose the establishment of cooperation in this direction within the ECO framework.

In accordance with the Development Strategy of Uzbekistan for 2017-2021 further deepening of reforms in the leading sectors of the economy is envisaged. Over the next five years, over 600 projects worth more than 40 billion USD are envisaged. As a result, the production of industrial goods will increase by 1.5 times, its share in GDP - from 33.6% to 36%, the share of processing industry - from 80% to 85%.

In 14 free economic zones operating in Uzbekistan, where favorable conditions for foreign investors are created in terms of taxation, customs duties, land and premises, and much more.

Dear participants of the meeting,

We wholeheartedly support the presentation in the draft of the Dushanbe communiqué proposal for the development of a regional tourism industry built on the abundance of natural resources and the priceless historical heritage of our ancestors.

We are ready to consider issues of intensification of cooperation in this field, considering the great potential in Uzbekistan, the presence of ancient, world-famous cities such as Tashkent, Bukhara, Samarkand, Khiva and Shakhrisabz, which attract millions of people from different continents. A special attention deserves the many sacred places of the Muslim world located on our territory.

We also attach importance to the strategic document entitled "ECO Vision 2025", which determines the strategic vision of the Organization for the coming decade.

I would like to express great hope that the Dushanbe communiqué, which will be adopted today, will provide an opportunity to strengthen the conditions for economic development and the solution of urgent tasks, and also give a new impetus to the activation of multilateral cooperation within the Organization.

Dear members of the official delegations,

At the end of my speech, let me draw your attention to the important for us item 8 of the agenda of our meeting regarding the cancellation of Uzbekistan's debts in full and reducing the existing base rate of the Republic's contribution to the ECO budget according to the Scale of Assessment.

Uzbekistan is interested in full participation in the ECO activities. However, it should be noted with regret that from the moment of Uzbekistan's membership in the Organization, some circumstances hampered its full participation in the activities of the ECO. Among them, we can identify the following points:

- first, unjustified establishment of the base rate of the Scale of assessments of Uzbekistan in the Organization's budget in the amount of 8.98%;
- secondly, the presence of a significant amount of our country's debts to the budget of the ECO Secretariat (about \$ 4 million), formed on the basis of an unjustified base rate in the Scale of Assessment.

In this regard, I ask you to positively consider the issue of writing off the debts of the Republic of Uzbekistan in full and reducing the existing base rate of the Scale of Assessments of our country to the ECO Budget, arguing for their vision by the circumstances that:

- since the moment of Uzbekistan's membership in the ECO, so far our country has not had its representatives in the structure of the Secretariat;
- participation of representatives of Ministries and Bodies of Uzbekistan in ECO-sponsored events was exclusively carried out on the basis of the invitation of the host country of the event;

- Parliament of Uzbekistan has not ratified the ECO Treaty of Izmir.

The adoption of a positive decision on this issue will contribute to Uzbekistan's more active participation in the activities of ECO in developing multifaceted cooperation with the Organization's member countries.

In conclusion, let me once again thank the leadership of the Republic of Tajikistan for the high organization of our meeting and for the excellent hospitality.

Thank you for attention.

Statements by ECO Observers

TEXT OF THE STATEMENT BY
H.E. PROF. KUDRET ÖZERSAY
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE TURKISH REPUBLIC OF NORTHERN CYPRUS
AT THE 23rd MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS (COM)
OF THE ECONOMIC COOPERATION ORGANISATION (ECO)
(DUSHANBE, TAJIKISTAN, 16-17 APRIL 2018)

**MR. CHAIRMAN,
MR. SECRETARY-GENERAL,
HONOURABLE MINISTERS,
DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,**

IT IS AN HONOUR FOR ME TO ADDRESS THE 23RD MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS (COM) OF THE ECONOMIC COOPERATION ORGANISATION (ECO). I EXTEND TO YOU ALL THE HEARTFELT GREETINGS OF THE TURKISH CYPRIOT PEOPLE AND OUR GOVERNMENT.

I WOULD LIKE TO, AT THE OUTSET, THANK THE GOVERNMENT AND THE BROTHERLY PEOPLE OF THE REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN FOR THE WARM HOSPITALITY EXTENDED TO ME AND MY DELEGATION SINCE OUR ARRIVAL IN DUSHANBE.

AS SECRETARY-GENERAL H.E. MR IBRAHIM HALIL AKÇA'S TERM OF OFFICE IS COMING TO AN END, I WOULD LIKE TO EXTEND OUR GRATITUDE TO HIS EXCELLENCY FOR HIS VAST CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORK OF THE ECONOMIC COOPERATION ORGANISATION. ECO VISION 2025, AN EPIC BODY OF WORK, ENVISAGING THAT *"ECO WILL PAVE THE WAY TO A TERRITORY OF INTEGRATED AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIES AS WELL AS FREE TRADE AREA ACHIEVED BY HIGHLY EDUCATED SOCIETIES AND IMPROVED GOVERNANCE THROUGH ENHANCED COOPERATION"* HAS COME TO LIFE DURING HIS TENURE. I ALSO WOULD LIKE TO THANK HIS EXCELLENCY FOR THE CONTINUOUS SUPPORT HE EXTENDED TO THE TURKISH CYPRIOT PEOPLE.

**MR. CHAIRMAN,
DISTINGUISHED COLLEAGUES,**

THE TURKISH CYPRIOT STATE, SHARES A COMMON HISTORY AND CULTURE WITH THE MEMBER STATES, AND IS FULLY COMMITTED TO THE OBJECTIVES OF THE ECONOMIC COOPERATION ORGANISATION AT LARGE AND THE ECO VISION 2025 IN PARTICULAR.

AS KNOWN WE HAVE BEEN PARTICIPATING IN THE ORGANIZATION'S ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS SINCE 1992, AND WERE GRANTED OBSERVER MEMBER STATUS IN 2012, WHICH WAS EXTENDED IN 2015. SINCE ATTAINING THE OBSERVER STATUS, THE TURKISH CYPRIOT STATE HAS BEEN A DEDICATED OBSERVER MEMBER, DOING ITS UTMOST TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE WORK OF THE ORGANISATION.

IN THIS CONNECTION, I WOULD LIKE TO STATE THAT WE HAVE BEEN A KEEN PARTICIPANT AT THE MEETINGS OF THE ORGANISATION AT ALL LEVELS; HAVE CO-HOSTED NUMEROUS SUCCESSFUL ECO EVENTS IN NORTH CYPRUS AND WILL CO-HOST 4 MORE EVENTS IN LINE WITH THE 2018 ECO CALENDER OF EVENTS; LAST BUT NOT THE LEAST WE GRANT SCHOLARSHIPS TO STUDENTS FROM ECO MEMBER STATES TO STUDY AT OUR UNIVERSITIES.

WE HOPE AND TRUST THAT OUR OBSERVER MEMBERSHIP WILL BE RENEWED AT THIS MEETING TODAY, SO THAT WE CAN CONTINUE TO WORK WITH THE MEMBER STATES TOWARDS THE GOALS OF THIS ESTEEMED ORGANISATION, BENEFITTING MEMBER STATES AND OUR REGION. I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO THANK THE SECRETARIAT AND ALL THE MEMBER STATES FOR THE VALUABLE SUPPORT THEY HAVE GIVEN US AS THE OBSERVER MEMBER OF ECO.

**MR. CHAIRMAN,
EXCELLENCIES,**

AS KNOWN, THE UNJUST AND INHUMAN ISOLATION IS STILL A HARSH REALITY IN THE DAILY LIVES OF MY PEOPLE, IMPEDING OUR COUNTRY'S DEVELOPMENT IN ALL SPHERES OF LIFE, RANGING FROM REPRESENTATION AND TRADE TO SPORTS AND CULTURE.

FOR THE LAST 50 YEARS, THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY HAVE ASSERTED EACH YEAR THAT THAT PARTICULAR YEAR WOULD BE THE YEAR FOR THE SETTLEMENT OF THE CYPRUS PROBLEM AND HENCE THE ISOLATION OF THE TURKISH CYPRIOT PEOPLE WOULD COME TO AN END. HOWEVER, A SETTLEMENT IN CYPRUS HAS ELUDED US FOR 5 DECADES, BECAUSE AS THE THEN UN SECRETARY-GENERAL MR KOFI ANNAN CONCLUDED, IN HIS REPORT OF 28 MAY 2004, FOLLOWING THE OVERWHELMING REJECTION OF THE COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT PLAN BY THE GREEK CYPRIOT SIDE, *"THE GREEK CYPRIOT SIDE IS NOT READY TO SHARE POWER AND PROSPERITY WITH THE TURKISH CYPRIOT PEOPLE"*. THE CYPRUS CONFERENCE, HELD IN CRANS MONTANA, SWITZERLAND, IN JULY 2017, WHICH COLLAPSED WITHOUT A SETTLEMENT, CONFIRMED, YET ONCE AGAIN, THE SAID CONCLUSION OF THE THEN UN SECRETARY- GENERAL.

UNDOUBTLY, THE UNJUST ISOLATION OF THE TURKISH CYPRIOT PEOPLE IS ONE OF THE MAIN CONTRIBUTORS TO THE GREEK CYPRIOT RELUCTANCE TO SHARE POWER AND PROSPERITY WITH THE TURKISH CYPRIOT PEOPLE FOR IT ALLOWS THEM TO UNILATERALLY EXPLOIT ALL THE BENEFITS OF THE SO-CALLED GOVERNMENT OF CYPRUS. HENCE, REMOVAL OF THE ISOLATION IS LIKELY TO ENCOURAGE THE GREEK CYPRIOT SIDE TO SHARE POWER AND PROSPERTIY WITH THE TURKISH CYPRIOTS, THUS MAKING A SETTLEMENT MORE ATTAINABLE IN CYPRUS.

EXCELLENCIES,

I HOPE AND TRUST THAT THE SECRETARIAT AND ALL THE MEMBER STATES WILL URGENTLY TAKE CONCRETE STEPS TO EASE THIS UNJUST ISOLATION IMPOSED ON MY PEOPLE. WE ARE READY TO TALK WITH THE ECO SECRETARIAT AS WELL AS WITH EACH AND EVERY MEMBER STATE ABOUT A ROAD MAP ON HOW WE CAN FURTHER DEVELOP OUR RELATIONS AND COOPERATION, WHICH, WOULD IN EFFECT, EASE THIS ISOLATION AND, NO DOUBT, BRING BENEFICIAL RESULTS FOR ALL THE PARTIES CONCERNED. IN THIS REGARD, COOPERATION AREAS SPECIFIED IN THE ECO VISION 2025, NAMELY *"TRADE, TRANSPORTATION AND CONNECTIVITY, ENERGY, TOURISM, ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PRODUCTIVITY AS WELL AS SOCIAL WELFARE AND ENVIRONMENT"*, ARE AREAS ON WHICH WE CAN COOPERATE.

THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR MOST KIND ATTENTION.

**Statement by Dr. Omer Kocaman, Deputy Secretary General of the
Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States at the 23rd Meeting of the
Council of Ministers - ECO**

(17 November 2018, Dushanbe)

**Distinguished Chairman,
Honorable Ministers and Delegates,
His Excellency Mr. Secretary General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great honor for me to address you at the twenty-third Meeting of the Council of Ministers as Deputy Secretary General of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (Turkic Council), observer organization to the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) since the year of 2012.

First and foremost, I would like to express our gratitude to the Government of Tajikistan for the successful organization of this important meeting and the warm hospitality extended to us.

As is known, Member States of the Turkic Council are as well members of ECO. Therefore, I would like to shortly brief you about the recent activities of the Turkic Council and developments taking place in our region.

As an Organization acting on the basis of **strong political will** of Heads of State, Turkic Council has proven itself to be a valuable platform for strengthening multilateral cooperation among its Members in the fields of economy, trade facilitation, education, tourism, youth and sports just to name a few.

The "economic cooperation" identified as the main theme of the Turkic Council 1st Heads of State Summit has a priority in the framework of the partnership between our member countries. In this context, the very foundation of the actual co-operation mechanisms of the Turkic Council was originally laid at the first Meeting of Ministers in charge of Economy. New mechanisms for transportation, tourism, education and business were established within the framework of the decisions taken at the meeting, which clearly proves that the Economic Ministers' Meetings are the "driving force" of the continued cooperation in the Turkic Council.

Today, significant progress has been made in our Member States, such as increasing investment, lowering customs taxes, harmonizing customs procedures, building transport infrastructure, implementing effective economic policies, and so on. Cooperation in the field of economy, which is supported by projects developed in different fields, and with the resources it offers, becomes a more attractive partnership area.

Turkic Council regularly brings together members of the private sector of the Member States by organizing technical visits for investors/businessmen, holding Business Forums and meetings of Turkic Business Council, Round Tables for the Businessmen.

As a case I can refer in this regard is the latest initiative of our economic team to create an online platform that will practically eliminate physical, bureaucratic and linguistic barriers in front of the trade among the Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) of our Member States. This platform aims at enabling instant communication between SMEs without any intermediaries and collecting information, the trade potential and activities that are currently dispersed among various other fora under a single web portal. It is our strong belief that by easing communication and centralizing the relevant information, we will greatly facilitate the increase of speed and volume of commercial interactions.

Once it is fully implemented, as Turkic Council, we will approach favorably for extending the reach of this platform to other countries. For this reason, we believe our early cooperation and coordination would expedite the integration of our joint efforts in the future.

Turkic Council work in cooperation with Statistical Economic and Social Research and Training Center for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) on the preparation of a comprehensive research paper on investment climate and international trade complementarities of the Member States trade and investment complementarities of our Member States.

In the field of transport, the completion of the crucial Baku-Tblisi-Kars (BTK) railway link, connecting Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, crossing the Caspian and Black sea was in that sense, an important step forward in establishing the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route. The BTK rail line emerged to complement the existing trade corridors by filling the missing rail freight connection between Turkey and Central Asia, allowing goods to be seamlessly transported from one side of Eurasia to the other in less than 15 days. Initially, 5 million tons of Cargo is expected to be transformed along the route annually with a movement of 1 million passengers. Turkic Council Secretariat continues to rally its efforts in the field of transport by developing its Sister Ports Initiative by involving Kuryk Sea Port into the process as well as by conducting close cooperation with international organizations and associations operating in the field (Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, UNESCAP and OSJD).

Education constitutes one of the areas of effective cooperation in the Turkic Council within which concrete results are obtained. As a matter of fact, following the conclusion of this meeting, our delegation will directly travel to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan to co-chair the 3rd General Assembly of the Union of the Turkic Universities of the Turkic Council. As the membership base grows with each Assembly, the Union has already succeeded implementation of an exchange program of students as well as academicians.

In the field of tourism, which is among areas of mutual interest of our two organizations, as the Turkic Council, we designed a unique initiative entitled “Modern Silk Road Joint Tour Package” that confirms the role of tourism to empower sustainable development in our region. Within this package, in a trip of 15 days, a curious tourist will be able to follow the landmarks of the historical Silk Road in our Member States. We successfully finalized the fam trips of this package in 2017 with the participation of 59 journalists and tour operators from 16 countries. The website of the tour has recently become operational. The Secretariat is currently carrying out promotion of the Package at national and international tourism fairs and exhibitions.

The Turkic Council also continues to enhance cooperation and to consolidate its existing relations with regional and international organizations. In this regard, Turkic Council was one of the implementing partners of the Global South-South Development EXPO 2017 organized by the

UNOSSC and hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey. This platform brought together more than 800 South-South and Triangular cooperation actors from 120 countries across the world. Within the EXPO, Turkic Council organized a solution forum in partnership with UNDP and a high-level roundtable on tourism with the participation of governors from the Member States.

The Turkic Council and UNOSSC jointly published the Report entitled “South-South in Action: How the Turkic Council Uses South-South Cooperation to Promote Regional and Global Development” which was launched in New York on the margins of 72nd Session of UN General Assembly.

The Secretariat continues its ongoing close cooperation with the UNAOC on tangible joint projects such as; the establishment of the online academy in cooperation with the Turkic Council and UNDP in the fight against violent extremism, as well as joint youth activities based on UNAOC’s Youth Solidarity Fund and Young Peacebuilders initiatives.

Coming to the mutual relations between our two organizations, the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2014 provides a suitable framework to enhance the cooperation. Having said this, there still is much to be done in terms of the implementation of this MoU.

First and foremost, we aim at drafting and concluding the working program that will define concrete goals and objectives for our collaboration. **Relying on the strong support of ECO members for the renewal of the Turkic Council’s observer status for another period,** we look forward to bringing together our respective focal points in the possible shortest time frame to determine the fields in which the two organizations could more effectively cooperate.

In conclusion, while emphasizing the Turkic Council’s resolve and determination to deepen the existing cooperation, I would like to express our sincere appreciation for the favorable consideration of the Senior Officials of the ECO Member States regarding the renewal of the observer status of the Turkic Council. We are of the conviction that the approval of the esteemed delegates would not merely an extension of term but a strong vote of approval for boosting the cooperation between these two crucially important multilateral organizations.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Dushanbe, Republic of Tajikistan, April 17, 2018

**23rd Meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Economic
Cooperation Organisation**

**Short statement on behalf of the Secretary General of the International
Energy Charter, Ambassador Urban Rusnak**

Dr Marat Terterov

Principal Coordinator of the Energy Charter Knowledge Centre

Your Esteemed Excellency ECO Council Chairman and Foreign Minister of Tajikistan: Sirodjiddin Aslov), Ministers (Sartaj Aziz last year's council leadership, Rashid Ovezgeldiyevich Meredov/Turkmen Chairmanship special thanks for last year's conference, Mr Zarif and Mr Rabani), Distinguished delegates, colleagues, friends;

I am delighted to be back in Dushanbe (I am astounded by such a beautiful ecological setting in which this hall is located) on the occasion of the 23rd COFM of ECO and would like to express my particular gratitude to the government of Tajikistan and the ECO Secretariat in Tehran for giving me the opportunity to be here, and to address you with a short statement on behalf the Energy Charter Secretary General, Ambassador Urban Rusnak

This is the second major ECO meeting in which I have participated in the last year or so, following on from the ECO Summit in Islamabad on March 1 2018, where I also had the opportunity to address you

I am very pleased and honoured that ECO Secretary General Ibrahim Halil Akca mentioned the excellent cooperation between ECO and the International Energy Charter since our reciprocal observer-ships were formalised last year

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Most of the people in this room should be at the very least broadly familiar with the Energy Charter Treaty, and the role that the International Energy Charter plays in the sphere of global energy security

But to refresh very briefly, it is sufficient to say here that our organisation was created on the basis of the heralding of the Energy Charter Treaty of 1994, when some 50 countries of the world signed this legally binding international document.

Since it came into full legal force in the 1990s, the Energy Charter Treaty has established itself as the only multilateral treaty in the world that provides legal security for foreign investments entering into domestic energy sectors.

The treaty applies to all forms of energy (conventional, renewable, non-conventional) and covers all forms of foreign investments, as long as they are related to the energy sphere of the economy (physical assets, infrastructure, upstream, downstream, etc)

We are based in Brussels, the capital of the European Union, but represent a growing constituency of more than 80 countries from Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas (more than 50 full members and more than 30 observers). These of course include not only some of the world's largest energy consuming countries, such as Germany, Japan and the United States of America, but also some of the major energy producers including the UAE and Nigeria).

While we were primarily created as an organisation to protect energy investments, much of our work as a Secretariat today is to help countries with investment promotion (many of our new observers are countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America and these countries are working with us on a plethora of capacity building projects in the area of investment promotion.

We also have new observers whose companies are looking for new investment opportunities – so feel free to come and talk to me if your country is looking to attract investment into its energy sector.

Excellencies;

Just to take one or two moments longer to make some remarks on what I believe should be the basis of Energy Charter-ECO cooperation looking ahead.....and to perhaps leave you with some food for thought/a message or two.

ECO is an organisation which has the issue of regional cooperation for sustainable economic development at the heart of its mission. Your governments created ECO in order to promote trade and investment through a variety of cooperation projects – and to improve the lives of the people in your member countries.

You will recall the main theme of the Islamabad Summit last year – Prosperity through Connectivity (mentioned by Sartaj Aziz). Many of you today have talked about trade, transport, energy and communications today, and the many endeavours that are underway in this region to sure up these activities.

And just like “prosperity through connectivity” is an issue which is so dear to all of you, **connectivity of regional energy markets** is at the very heart of the Energy Charter Treaty and process

Article 2 of the ECT talks about this Treaty creating an institutional framework for long-term inter-state cooperation in the field of energy as the core (Treaty) objective.

Eight of the ECO member states are also full members of the ECT and the remaining two countries – Iran and Pakistan – are observers, having signed the International Energy Charter political declaration of 2015. Therefore you are all already members of the Energy Charter family. **Further, the ECT is ‘the law of the land’ when it comes to foreign investments in eight of your countries.**

Further, I would like to remind you that in yesterday’s deliberations over the Dushanbe Communiqué (SOs were here till well into the night working on the text), one of the key themes which you highlighted was **“the pivotal role of the energy sector in the sustainable development of ECO member states”**.

So, I invite ECO and the ECO Secretariat to engage the Energy Charter as a body that can assist you through a multitude of activity in your efforts to promote regional energy cooperation for sustainable development.

In this context we can assist you in noble endeavours such as the establishment of the ECO regional electricity market and ECO Clean Energy Centre mentioned by SG Akca. We can also help you with investment promotion through our Energy Investment Risk Assessment Project (EIRA) and in trainings on regional energy connectivity, investment governance and other similar areas.

We of course already work with all of your countries – Turkmenistan hosted arguably the most impressive Ministerial conference that the Energy Charter has ever known in Ashgabat last November, with more than 60 countries participating.

But my presence here today is just to remind the opportunity for you to utilize the Energy Charter as a provider of specialised energy services through the unified ECO framework. There is a great deal that we can do together if we work in a coordinated manner.

Finally, while I am sincerely grateful to the government of Tajikistan for hosting this Ministerial Council, I also encourage Tajikistan to show full solidarity with all of the other ECO member states to sign the International Energy Charter of 2015 – the most significant political declaration of our constituency since the European Energy Charter of 1991.

The International Energy Charter is a declaration addressing many fundamental aspects of energy cooperation at the inter-state level. I sincerely hope that Tajikistan will show full solidarity not only with the other 9 ECO countries that have adopted the text, but also with the 80+ countries of the world that have endorsed this document, by signing in the nearest future.

Thank you, and God bless you;

NB. Section of text of Article 29 of the Dushanbe communique:

Emphasise the pivotal role of the energy sector in the sustainable development of ECO member states and the efforts to promote regional energy cooperation through the establishment of the ECO regional electricity market and ECO Clean Energy Centre.

Statements by
Heads of ECO Specialized Agencies and Regional
Institutions

Statement by President of ECO Cultural Institute
H. E. Dr. Mohammad Mahdi Mazaheri
The 23rd Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers
17 April 2018

Mr. Chairman, Honorable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen:

This meeting is a great occasion for ECO Cultural Institute to present an account of its latest achievements and international activities in areas of culture, arts and literature.

Today, we all recognize the role of regional and international bodies in establishing cultural relations. ECO Cultural Institute, being the oldest specialized agency of ECO family, is one of such organizations and has always made efforts to prepare the ground for cultural cooperation and synergy among the countries in the region.

Aiming at promotion of cultural diplomacy in ECO region and using collective intelligence of its member states, ECO Cultural Institute made every effort to demonstrate vast cultural potentials of the region despite all financial limits encountered during the year 2017.

In its comprehensive plan to develop cultural diplomacy during the last year, ECO Cultural Institute has arranged a wide variety of cultural programs and activities, including 5 international conferences on various themes including: “Culture, Psychopathology and Education”, “Visual Arts”, and “Women’s Role in the Society and Family Health”, in association with Al-Zahra University, and Caucasus Universities Association, Gaziantep University of Turkey and universities of Tehran, Shahid Beheshti & Allameh Tabatabaee.

Also, 5 exhibitions in areas of arts and culture including painting and photos, 7 sessions of lecture series on prominent literary figures of ECO region including Hafez, Rumi and Shams Tabrizi, 2 sports tournaments of table tennis and billiards, several MoUs with various cultural organizations to promote rich culture and arts of ECO region with a focus on relevant researches and studies, 6 workshops on various themes including: “Impact of National Culture on Organizational Environment in International Organizations”, “Philosophy of Islamic Art”, “Archeology: Authenticity of Historical and Artistic Objects” and two expert workshops on researching in area of music were organized. Furthermore, 2 books and a special issue of “ECO Heritage” which is the ECO Cultural Institute quarterly dedicated to sports in the region. I would like to announce that International Standard Serial Number has been obtained for ECO Cultural Institute’s journals. I will briefly elaborate on the most important activities of our Institute:

- Among the significant events during the last year, was the 4th meeting of the Heads of the National Libraries of the ECO Member States held on 27-29 November 2017 in Dushanbe,

Tajikistan, seven years after the last meeting. At the event, ECI President proposed that the year 2018 be proclaimed as "Year of Reading Culture" in the ECO region which was welcomed by the member states.

We, in ECO Cultural Institute, believe that cultural diplomacy of ECO region should be presented in international arena. In order to promote the rich cultural heritage of ECO countries on the international level and elevate ECI's standing globally, good partnership has been forged with the other international organizations including: UNESCO and ASEAN.

As per the MoU between the United Nations and the ECO Secretariat, as well as the resolution of the 65th United Nations General Assembly meeting on the subject of cooperation between the United Nations and ECO, negotiations have been made with the head of UNESCO cluster office and UN Resident Coordinator in Iran for collaborating with UNESCO, including obtaining observer status for ECI at UNESCO, as well as the registering the cultural commonalities of the region's countries in the UNESCO's World Heritage List under the title "The Common Heritage of ECO Countries". Also, negotiations have been made with top officials of other international organizations and ambassadors of different countries.

- One of our key priorities is cooperation with the academia in areas of culture, arts and literature. In this spirit, we have inked MoUs with leading universities of the region. Based on these MoUs, Allameh Tabatabaee University has granted 40 scholarships in BA and Masters levels and 5 PhD scholarship were granted by University of Tehran for the students of ECO Member States.
- To promote cooperation between the news agencies of the Region by means of establishing network connection among them, as emphasized in the charter of our Institute, a MoU with Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, World Service was inked.
- Also ECO Cultural Institute was active at Tehran International Book Fair during the period of which, an event was organized by the Institute on the subject of cultural dialogue in ECO Region. The event was attended by ambassadors and representatives of member countries as well as several cultural figures.
- One of the important elements in cultural diplomacy is art, particularly music. In this regard, a folk music ensemble from Kazakhstan, titled Saryarka, put on a concert at the Niavaran Artistic Creations Foundation in Tehran Under the auspices of Iran's Institute for Promotion of Contemporary Visual Art in cooperation with ECO Cultural Institute (ECI) and Niavaran Artistic Creations Foundation.
- At the invitation and support of ECO Cultural Institute and Republic of Turkey's Yunus Emre Cultural Institute in Tehran, a concert of traditional Turkish music was staged in Tehran. It was the fifth joint program of both Institutes. Moreover, the Institute in cooperation with the Iran Music Association organized the folklore Music Festival on June 27-30, 2017 in the city of Kerman.
- Another priority is the ECO Cultural Institute is promotion of tourism. To this end, the ECO Cultural Institute introduced the tourist attractions of the region at its stall booth in an event held on the occasion of the World Tourism Day, which was attended by a large number of ambassadors and representatives of various countries. Also, in collaboration with Diplomat Ladies Association, a one-day trip to city of Qazvin was arranged in February 2018 for female members of embassies and spouses of ambassadors and diplomats.
- The ECO Cultural Institute also participated in the International Peace Day celebration, which took place on Saturday September 14-21, 2017 at the Sadabad Palace and the President of the ECO Cultural Institute addressed the ceremony. At the event, a collection of photos on Peace, and a painting exhibition by children from different countries was on display.
- Also, during the program organized on the occasion of anniversary of the establishment of the

ECO Cultural Institute. ECO Apparel for Peace was unveiled. The dress is a joint product of Afghan women's embroidery on a textile hand-made by Pakistani women. The drawings and colors of this dress have been made by women of Tajikistan and designs and sewing done by Iranian women.

Additionally, to honor social standing of women, Dr. Maria Dotsenko, Director of the United Nations Information Centre in Iran read out the message of António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, on the occasion of the International Women's Day on March 8. The program was followed by unveiling of ECO Cultural Institute exclusive stamp.

- In area of visual arts, the International Exhibition of Paintings and Illustrations in the ECO region was held at diplomatic art gallery of ECO Cultural Institute in collaboration with the Faculty of Arts of Al-Zahra University and the Iranian Academy of Visual Arts in April. More than 50 artworks from 12 countries were on display at the exhibition. Also, the exhibition of illustrations based on the stories of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh by Babak Germchi was held in May 2017 at the Institute in the presence of ambassadors and representatives of various countries.

- I have repeatedly emphasized that the activities of the ECO Cultural Institute will be based on collective intelligence. In this spirit, a consultation meeting was held with other Presidents of the ECO specialized agencies, including ECO Science Foundation, ECO Educational Institute and the honorable ECO Secretary-General which was very beneficial. And we hope to carry out some joint projects in the near future.

Also, the Executive Committee of the ECO Cultural Institute convene its meetings with participation of Cultural Attachés of the member states and the Council of Permanent Representatives of the Institute convenes its meetings with the participation of the Ambassadors of the member countries on a regular basis.

To pay homage to the luminaries of ECO region, ECO Cultural Institute organized commemoration of Mirzo Torsonzoda, the Tajik national hero in May 2017.

We have made a comprehensive plan to promote cultural diplomacy. In partnership with its member states ECO Cultural Institute intends to organize the following events in the near future including the 2nd meeting of heads of Arts Universities of ECO member states, the 1st meeting of museums of ECO member states, the 1st meeting of heads of national archives of ECO member states, futsal tournament and competitions of tradition sports of ECO region including polo, swordsmanship and horseback riding. Also, in collaboration with Al-Zahra University, three scholarly journals will soon be published including a journal on "Critique of Visual and Applied Arts", a quarterly on the theme of "Women's Social Psychological Studies", and a biannual journal on "Women and Family Studies".

I'm of the opinion that in addition to governments, people are also effective in cultural relations. The people's effect may be produced by non-governmental organizations. Through their influential measures, such organizations play a constructive, important role in transmission of culture and expansion of international cultural relations. They may be regarded powerful, effective and affordable means of cultural diplomacy. I would like to propose that a proper mechanism may be adopted to provide the opportunity for selected non-governmental organizations from the ECO member states to attend ECO official forums and put forward their proposals for partnership in various areas of ECO activities and projects.

To attract utmost participation of ECO member states and benefit from their collective intelligence, ECO Cultural Institute has made great efforts to encourage the countries to accede to ECI because we believe that ECO Cultural Institute belongs to all ECO member states. In this regard, following our recent cooperation with the Republic of Azerbaijan, a signatory member of ECO Cultural Institute, an exhibition of photos from the country, on the theme of Islamic

solidarity was held at diplomatic art gallery of the ECO Cultural Institute which was well received by a great number of ambassadors based in Tehran. Thanks to the endeavors of the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Tehran, we hope to soon hear the news of ratification of ECO Cultural Institute's charter by the country. Also, as informed by the honorable ECO Secretary General, the Republic of Turkey plans to ratify ECO Cultural Institute charter by its parliament.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ministers,

Regarding the scale of ECO Cultural Institute activities, increasing inflation rate and the great goals and objectives planned for the Institute, the esteemed member states may kindly reconsider their contributions to the annual budget of ECO Cultural Institute.

Unfortunately, we went through many financial difficulties during the year 2017. In fact, only 40 percent of the annual contributions for the year 2017 was received from the member states while the Institute conducted almost 80 percent of its approved work program for the said year. I hope the esteemed member states will facilitate the function of the Institute by timely payment of their annual contributions and settlement of their outstanding arrears.

We believe that our member states can come up with a solution for our financial problems. In the event of accession of new member states to ECO Cultural Institute, it will widen the horizon to strengthen ties among our countries, particularly, cultural interactions.

In conclusion, I would like to appreciate the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan for its hospitality and special arrangements to make this event another successful experience in ECO's history.

Thank you

Statement of H.E. Prof. M. Akif KIRECCI
President
ECO Educational Institute

Honorable Ministers, Hn. Chairman, Hn. Secretary General, Heads of Delegation and Dear guests,

I salute the ECO Family here as a whole and present my sincere thanks to the Government of Tajikistan for hosting us in this beautifully preserved State Guest House. I am sure that the results of this meeting will bring the ECO member states to a new level of cooperation.

I would like to share some information with you on ECO Educational Institute.

ECOEI is established on May 9, 1998 in Almaty, in line with the Article 10 of the Treaty of Izmir, which deals with the “Special Agencies and Regional Institutions.” It is also decided by the signatory states that the ECO Educational Institute shall be located in Ankara.

The 2nd Board of Trustees (BoT) meeting of the ECO Educational Institute (ECOEI) was held in İstanbul, last year on 26 July 2017. During that meeting the BoT approved the Scale of Assessment, the Annual Budget, The Road Map and Work Program of the Educational Institute.

The charter of the Institute was signed by 8 members and ratified by 7.

As was detailed in the Action Plan, I devoted considerable amount of my time to the objective of acquiring a separate space for the Institute, a process of moving the Institute to its new space will be finalized soon.

In order for the Educational Institute to effectively continue and contribute to the wealth and well-being of the member states we need the cooperation of member states in the following points:

Educational Institute kindly requests from the member states to identify individuals to form its Academic Council, among which members of the Executive Committee of the Institute will be selected.

As a newly forming Institute, I believe that the success of the Institute heavily depends on the ownership of the member states; for that, continuous financial support is crucial for all planned activities to come real and create positive influence.

Educational Institute is looking forward to develop projects and joint activities with member states and the otherbodies of the ECO, especially with the ECO Science Foundation and ECO Cultural Institute.

I urge the member states to guide the Institute by asking research projects and activities related to their need in the field of education.

And, last but not the least, I would like to remind all members that economic cooperation is sufficient only when and if supported by cooperation in education. Let us remember that one dollar invested in education can contribute back fifteen-fold in economy.

There is an immediate need for building a more supportive and connected ECO bodies to ensure the prosperous and sustainable future that we all aspire to form.

Before I conclude I would like to extend my thanks to H.E. Secretary General H. İbrahim AKCA and his capable team for their productive service to the ECO Family and wish the

new incoming Secretary General a successful term.

I once again thank our Tajik brothers for their kind hospitality and look forward to closer cooperation.

Thank you.

Statement by the President ECO Science Foundation (ECOSF)

Excellency, the Chairman,
Excellencies the Ministers and delegates from ECO Member States
Excellency the Secretary General of ECO
Excellencies, the Ambassadors
Delegations of ECO Specialized Agencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalam-o-Alaikum!

At the outset, I congratulate the Chairman of 23rd ECO COM Meeting, on assuming the Chair of the Forum. It is indeed a great honour and pleasure for me to address this august forum.

Excellencies, on behalf of ECO Science Foundation and on my personal behalf, I express deep gratitude to all the Member States and ECO Secretariat for their cooperation extended to the Foundation. Our special thanks to the Government of Islamic Republic of Pakistan for patronizing ECOSF through its Ministries of Science & Technology and Foreign Affairs.

Ladies and gentlemen, ECO Science Foundation fully recognizes that investment in Science & Technology provides a strong foundation for sustainable economic growth and well-being of any country or region. In my considered opinion, ECO region can only achieve global competitiveness, if it is ensured that the region has qualified and capable human resource to develop and maintain the infrastructure and capacity along with technology. Thus there is a convincing need to build a strong S&T base for economic development in the region.

Since its inception, ECOSF has transformed itself into a dynamic and agile vehicle to promote Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) and Science Education to help build the capacity of its Member States in order to respond to the emerging challenges of future. The Foundation continues to enhance its efforts to pursue its goal of promoting scientific and technological research related activities with an end goal to raise socio-economic standing of its member states.

Excellencies, it is important to mention here that in spite of budgetary difficulties, we are constantly pursuing our planned activities- thanks to the Governments of Pakistan and Iran but also to our international collaborators for making financial and technical contributions and make those activities possible. I highly appreciate the Government of Islamic Republic of Pakistan for paying their full annual mandatory budget contributions since our inception in the year 2012. We are also grateful to Islamic Republic of Iran for paying budget contributions for the year 2012 and partial payment for 2013 and for some of ECOSF activities in Iran during 2016 and 2017. I very much hope that Iran and Pakistan will soon sort out the money transfer mechanism so that Iran can pay their

remaining share of budget contributions for the last four years. I also call upon the remaining three ratifying member states- Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan to kindly make their mandatory contributions at the earliest to strengthen the Foundation. A stronger Foundation can more actively contribute towards the promotion of STI based economic development in the region.

I request member states to realize that the Foundation finds itself in a very challenging position to continue its efforts for promotion of science education and realizing its potential, unless the mandatory financial contributions from the member states are made. I take this opportunity to urge member states that have not yet ratified the ECOSF Charter and its Additional Protocol, to kindly do so at their earliest so as to benefit from its programs and let the Foundation function at its fullest.

Excellencies, the ECOSF has established a "Science & Technology Fund" for financing the collaborative research projects, way back in 2012. All the modalities for utilization of this Fund were approved in the 20th meeting of ECO COM held in October 2012 at Baku, Azerbaijan. Recently as per decision of ECOSF BoT, the Concept Proposals for funding under the Fund were invited and reviewed by the experts. However, no member state has so far made any contribution to the S&T Fund!. Thus, we could not process the projects any further!

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Foundation has successfully initiated research collaboration between Pakistan and Tajikistan through Academy of Sciences of Republic of Tajikistan and International Center of Chemical and Biological Sciences (ICCBS) of University of Karachi – Pakistan. Partnership with IDB in its two Reverse Linkages Projects between Pakistan & Kazakhstan, and Turkey & Pakistan for capacity building at a total cost of US\$ 1.4 Million has been formalized and MoU signed with IDB for broader cooperation on S&T research and capacity building of ECO Member States.

Additionally, to ensure better engineering standards in ECO region, ECOSF in collaboration with UNESCO is playing a lead role towards development of engineering qualification standardization as per Federation of Engineering Institutions of Asia and the Pacific (FEIAP) standards. This road map is aimed at harmonization of curricula and engineering qualification standardization for the countries of the ECO region. This would ease the mobility of Engineers across the region and beyond. ECOSF organized a High-Level Policy Forum in Dushanbe, Tajikistan in March 2017 and has been contributing to the capacity building of ECO Engineers by providing them the opportunities to participate in various international forums on engineering standardization. This initiative is inline with the ECO Vision of development for Integrated Economic Growth through standardization to achieve the Vision 2025 goals.

Excellencies, it is compulsory to bring to your kind notice that ECOSF has developed good interaction with numerous international science and technology organizations and Donors including; International Science, Technology and Innovation Centre for South-South Cooperation under the Auspices of UNESCO (ISTIC), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia;

La main a la pate Foundation, France; European Union; UNESCO, Islamic Development Bank, Asian Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Think Tanks Network (ASTN) Korea, Korea Institute of Science & Technology Evaluation and Planning (KISTEP), The Academy of Engineering and Technology for the Developing World (AETDEW) based in Malaysia, International Science and Technology Centre (ISTC), Astana-Kazakhstan, China Association for Science, Technology (CAST) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). However, lack of funds is a major constraint in further strengthening international linkages!

Dear Delegates, the Foundation is of the view that Inquiry Based Science Education (IBSE) is the Root of S&T Development leading to economic development. Thus the Capacity Building Program in "Inquiry Based Science Education (IBSE)" launched in Astana-Kazakhstan in 2015 is continuing nicely. The Foundation has conducted Capacity Building Workshops in Pakistan (Sept 2016, Dec 2017) and Iran (Jan 2017). A workshop was scheduled in Tajikistan last year but had to be postponed on the request of hosting institution- University of Pedagogy! Lately ECOSF in collaboration with its international and national partners successfully organized an International Forum on Science Education last week- 9-10 April 2018 in Islamabad Pakistan; wherein, over 25 international science education experts and 200 local participants joined. The Foundation would be pleased to hold more capacity building workshops in other member states if hosting is assured by any member country.

Excellencies, the Foundation won the cooperation of China Association of Science and Technology (CAST) and have signed MoU in Beijing, last December for cooperation mainly in programmes of STEM and STI for children and youth. Under the MoU, ECOSF is a focal organization for STI and science education in ECO Region under the Chinese Belt and Road initiative. Under this programme, the Foundation would send young talents from ECO member states to attend S&T events in China. In this regard, ECOSF facilitated participation of 42 young students and teachers from Iran, Kazakhstan, Pakistan and Turkey in The 1st Belt and Road Teenager Maker Camp & Teacher Workshop held in Beijing in Dec 2017.

Ladies and Gentlemen, ECOSF is contributing towards development of the "Fusion of OBOR Civilization" school curriculum in collaboration with IAP-SEP, CAST of China under the mega initiative of China- One Belt One Road (OBOR). The idea is to bring together learned historians of S&T and curriculum design experts from Europe, China, Islamic world, Africa, Central Asia etc. to discuss the outstanding scientific discoveries in their own civilizations and work together to translate such discoveries into school curriculum material of use to teachers and students. The core objective of development of this curriculum is to foster peace right at the beginning of young children by employing Inquiry Based Science Education (IBSE) approach among the countries that share a common heritage of the ancient Silk Road. ECOSF hosted the Working Group meeting of OBOR Fusion of Civilizations Curriculum Design Experts in Islamabad, Pakistan in April, 2018 where they presented the draft curriculum at IAP SEP meeting.

Finally, I would like to say that the Foundation is making all possible efforts to promote science, technology, innovation and scientific education activities in the region with the collaboration and support of International Organizations. However, the greatest difficulty we are facing is; the slow response from the member states. Thus the Focal Points need to

be activated for timely response. I assure you that if quick response coupled with increased financial contributions by the Member States is ensured, the Foundation could increase its activities many folds and achieve much more milestones.

I hope that the Member States will consider my requests positively in the interest of promoting connectivity and knowledge based socio-economic development in the region. I express my sincere thanks again to the Government of Republic of Tajikistan and ECO Secretariat for the commendable efforts in convening this 23rd COM meeting.

I thank you Excellencies!

(Prof. Dr. Manzoor H. Soomro)

President ECOSF

Major Activities undertaken by ECOSF

1. Travel Grants for participation of Scientists, Engineers and Technologists in International S&T Conferences/Workshops abroad: ECOSF has successfully nominated and supported 44 experts & technologists from ECO Region to international S&T events in 2017.
2. Nomination of scientific experts from the member states to numerous International Forums including LAMAP, TWAS and IPBES.
3. Following events organized/co-organized/participated by ECOSF during 2017-18 in collaborations with its partners and other national and international organizations:
 - a. ECOSF organized the 1st National Workshop on IBSE in Iran for “Professional Development Programme on Inquiry Based Science Education” from 8-13 January 2017 at the University of Isfahan, Iran.
 - b. Regional Dialogue on SDG-6 jointly organized in Islamabad by ECOSF, the Embassy of Tajikistan and PCRWR on February 15th, 2017
 - c. ECOSF in partnership with Mehran University of Engineering and Technology (MUET), Jamshoro-Pakistan and Technology Times- a weekly Newspaper of Pakistan launched the AppIdea2R (ApplicationIdea2Reality), which is an app development contest to inspire, mobilize youth among its member states to accelerate the implementation of sustainable solutions in the community at national and international levels.
 - d. 6th International Fisheries Symposium and Expo-2017 jointly organized by ECOSF and University of Veterinary Science (UVAS) in Lahore
 - e. 2nd Meeting of the International Biotechnology Advisory Committee (IBAC) in FC College, Lahore
 - f. "Workshop on Science, Technology and Entrepreneurship co-organized by Centre of Excellence in Analytical Chemistry, University of Sindh, Jamshoro and ECOSF
 - g. ECOSF and Pakistan Science Club jointly organized Water Rocket Challenge
 - h. “Science Fun Mela 2017” organized at Look Virsa, Islamabad, Pakistan
 - i. International High Level Policy Forum and Workshop on “Developing the Roadmap on Engineering Qualification Standardization, Accreditation and Professional System” held at Dushanbe, Tajikistan from 27 -29 March 2017
 - j. World Water Day 2017 with the theme “Why Wastewater” on March 20, 2017
 - k. ECOFS Supported 6th Invention to Innovation Summit held in Lahore from 8-9 March 2017
 - l. ECOSF and FCC Lahore organized 1st International Training Workshop on Probiotics from 27-29 March, 2017 at Lahore
 - m. IRIS-ISTT-ECOSF-ISTIC held joint International Workshop on “Technology-Based Entrepreneurship for Developing Countries” from 25 to 28 April, 2017 in Isfahan-Iran.
 - n. ECOFS Supported 2nd Invention to Innovation Summit held at Quetta from 25-26 August 2017 at Quetta

- o. ECOSF and Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan in collaboration with French partner- “*La main a la pate*” Paris and the Embassy of France in Pakistan organized a High Level Forum on IBSE in Islamabad on 11th May, 2017.
- p. International Conference/Workshop on Nanotechnology and Nanomedicine held from 2-3 May 2017 at Karaj, Alborz, Islamic Republic of Iran
- q. 2nd International Conference on Role of Young Scientists in the Development of Science, Innovation and Technology held on May 11th-12th, 2017 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan
- r. ECOSF arranged lecture of renowned French astrophysicist Prof. Pierre Lena at GC University Lahore and FCC-Lahore on 12 May 2017
- s. ECOSF and PSC organized Science Summer Camp 2017 in Pakistan
- t. China Association of Children’s Science Instructors (CACSI), Children and Youth Science Center of China Association of Science and Technology- CAST (CYSCC), Chinese Society for the History of Science and Technology (CSHST), ECOSF and Inter Academy Partnership – Science Education Programme (IAP-SEP) co-organized the 2017 International Forum on Science Education in Beijing, China on July 3-4, 2017.
- u. ECOSF -UNESCO-PCRWR Sub-Regional Experts Meeting on Groundwater Management on August 3-4, 2017 in Islamabad
- v. ECOSF supported the 1st International Exhibition & Festival on New Urban Technologies (ICS 2017) held on August 4-7, 2017 in Isfahan, Iran
- w. ECOSF partnered with KISTEP Korea in co-organizing the 3rd Asian Innovation Forum on August 29, 2017 in Seoul, South Korea
- x. ECOSF participated in the ASTN Round Table Meeting as its Founder Members organized by KISTEP August 29, 2017 in Seoul, South Korea
- y. ECOSF supported 14th ASIALICS Conference in Tehran, Iran organized by IRAMOT from 30-31 August 2017 at Tehran, Iran.
- z. 21st International Scientific Conference with the theme “Science, Technology and Innovation for Global Peace and Prosperity” by the Islamic World Academy of Sciences (IAS) in collaboration with ECOSF and other International Organizations from 8-11 October 2017 at Konya, Turkey.
- aa. Children & Youth Science Center (CYSC) of China Association for Science & Technology (CAST) in partnership with ECO Science Foundation (ECOSF) and InterAcademy Partnership on Science Education Program (IAP SEP) organized “**the Belt and Road Teenager Maker Camp & Teacher Workshop**” from 17-22 December 2017 in Beijing, China
- bb. Inter Academy Partnership – Science Education Programme (IAP-SEP) and Academy of Sciences Malaysia are jointly organizing **Workshop on Fusion of Civilizations Curriculum Design for Schools along One Belt One Road (OBOR) Countries** in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from December 7-12, 2017.
- cc. ECOSF Co-organized with ICCBS the International Symposium-cum-Training Course on Molecular Medicine and Drug Research (MMDR-6) at Karachi Pakistan, November 6-9, 2017.

- dd. International Conference on “Redefining Prosperity Paths in Changing Global Economy Opportunities and Challenges for Pakistan
- ee. The Belt and Road Teenager Maker Camp & Teacher Workshop at Beijing, China”
- ff. Workshop on “South-South Cooperation for Strengthening Engineering Standards and Mobility of Professionals”. The workshop was held in Jakarta, Indonesia on 21 - 22 December 2017. The aim of this regional workshop was to develop the roadmap between UNESCO, ECOSF, Federation of Engineering Institutions of Asia and Pacific (FEIAP) with partners to enhance engineering qualification, standardization and south-south cooperation
- gg. Follow-up workshop of Master Trainers on IBSE was jointly organized by ECOSF and Sukkur IBA University (SIBAU), Sukkur- Pakistan from 25-29 December 2017 at SIBAU
- hh. President ECOSF led joint delegation of ECOSF and SAMEO to meet KOFAC officials in South Korea for Collaboration in Science Education and Creativity in ECO region.
- ii. UNESCO Regional Sciences Bureau in Asia and the Pacific with support of ECO Science Foundation (ECOSF) is organizing the Engineering Regional workshop on “Strengthening the Role of UNESCO and ECOSF to Support the Engineering Qualification and Standardization of FEIAP in Promoting South-South Cooperation for Sustainable Engineers’ Future in Asia and the Pacific Region.
- jj. ECOSF in collaboration with PCSIR organized the 4th International Conference on Frontiers of Advance Engineering Materials (FAEM-18), February 2018
- kk. Ferdowsi University of Mashhad in collaboration with MSRT Iran and ECOSF organized the 1st International Conference on Green University in Mashad, Iran, February 6-7, 2018
- ll. CIIT with the support of ECOSF, MoST, COMSTECH, IDB and INSTP organized a three-day International Workshop on Techno-Parks: Opportunity to seize a lever of competitiveness from January 30-February 01, 2018
- mm. ECOSF brings Iranian Mathematicians in the 2nd Annual Two-Day “Lahore Science Mela” at Lahore-Pakistan, January 27-28, 2018
- nn. ECOSF collaborated with Ferdowsi of Mashhad for organizing the 1st International Conference on Green University held from 6 -7 Feb 2018.
- oo. Meeting of Global Council of InterAcademic Partnership on Science Education Program (IAP SEP), April 10, 2018, Islamabad Pakistan.
- pp. International Forum on Science Education, April 9, 2018 Islamabad, Pakistan
- qq. Working Group Meeting on Fusion of OBOR Civilizations Curriculum Design April 9-10, 2018 Islamabad, Pakistan