

Opening Speech

By

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First of all, I would like to welcome distinguished delegates and respected guests to the Fifth Reference Marine Organization of ECO. We are greatly delighted to host this Conference for ^{the} a third time. I hope that this conference could achieve our desirable outcome through exchange of views between participants with a central theme of development and promotion of the relations among the member states of ECO.

As we are well aware, transportation represents one of the effective and significant factors in development and economic growth of nations and plays a great part in their Gross Domestic Production (GDP). Accordingly, dealing with the issue of transportation, in particular with a special focus on development of infrastructure, is of paramount importance for the ECO

Member States. Promotion of commercial and economic ties among ECO Member States would not be meaningful and conceivable without transportation. This is the reason why various modes of transports, i.e. rail, road, air and maritime have become the center of attention of ECO from its inception for which specialized meeting and conference have been held.

I would like to point out a number of noteworthy subjects which deserve our special attention including: commonalities among ECO Member States, strategic position of Middle East, Central Asia and Caucasus in world trade, development of transport infrastructure, multimodal transportation and the need to forge regional cooperation among ECO Member States.

With 10 member states and a population totaling 460 million and religious, social, historical commonalties, ECO Member States enjoy great potentials for a comprehensive development and securing a high status worldwide. Moreover, existence of

huge energy and mineral resources in some of the ECO states is a unique privilege which may be used for meeting the needs of other states and promote the economic relations among these states enabling them to have a greater presence in the world economy.

Historically, traders and entrepreneurs of the Middle East, Central Asia and Caucasus have played a great role in the world trade. In the past centuries, caravans passing through this region used to trade manifold commodities from the Far East to the consumption market in Europe and in their way back used to take commodities from Europe to Middle East and North Africa, India and China for sale. In other words, the traders and enterprise of this region were the heart and driving force of world trade. Today, we may regard the objectives and measures already undertaken by the ECO to restore this role among

member states and establish an Islamic Market bearing in mind that Globalization phenomenon may contribute to this goal.

In the other hand we all know that promotion of trade and economic relations requires development of transport infrastructure. In this respect, some programs such as Almaati Action Plan from 1998 to 2007 and UNESCAP Trans-Asian Railway (TAR) and Asia Highway (AH) have been put into action improving transport infrastructure of ECO states. But the point is that these measures have been necessary but never sufficient. Understandably, failure to properly perform similar measures and taking a firm action in providing transport infrastructure to meet the future demands can hinder the promotion of bilateral relation on transit and cargo transport areas. Therefore, seriousness of the ECO member states in implementation of projects with a view to enhance transport infrastructure appears to be inevitable for promotion commercial

ties among them and other countries throughout the world. In this Conference, the ECO littoral states will present on their measures already taken and their future programs on the port and maritime areas and development of maritime cooperation between them.

With regard to Iranian maritime infrastructure, I would to mention that Islamic Republic of Iran has already undertaken effective measures to develop its ports. Currently, total capacity of Iranian ports amounts to 230 million tons which enables us to allot some ⁵⁰~~45~~ million tons of our capacity for handling oil and non-oil commodities coming from out neighboring states.

(Unfortunately, despite our readiness to put this capacity to cargo transit with our neighboring state, in practice only 50 percent of this potential has been realized.)

We hope that we could make the best use of this opportunity for promotion of cargo transit with our neighboring states, in

particular, land-locked members of ECO. We also have numerous developmental programs in our agenda to increase the capacity of our ports which Chabahar Development Plan is the most recent one which was inaugurated by the Iranian President. With regard to multimodal transport, ECO states enjoy great potentials for bilateral cooperation; but it seems that this type of transport has not followed an appropriate path in the past. It is imperative to formulate suitable solutions for removing existing problems and impediments in this respect by opting for setting up multinational companies by ECO states and adopting supportive and incentive policies by them. This requires defining legal frameworks to set the ground for establishment and operation of multinational companies. There is no doubt that activation of multinational companies can generate wealth and added value for ECO state and render to their economic prosperity.

Regarding regional cooperation, I would like to remind that effective participation in the world trade will originate from the regional markets. Accordingly, strengthening ECO to convert it into an economic and commercial association and enlarging it by admitting new members can contribute to this objective and requires a firm will of its states. Accomplishment of regional development and achievement of an acceptable standing in the world economy requires us to formulate and implement deliberate measures to provide for our transport infrastructure which is somehow underway in ECO states. We need to minimize trade and business formalities and cut unnecessary procedures. We have to simplify legal processes among our states and put in place effective regulations to remove tariff barriers to facilitate the trade flow among ECO states.

Among the other issues, which is significantly important in promotion of relations in transport areas is joint investment in

ECO states and paving the way for facilitation of investment by the private sectors operating in transport domains. I hope that the private sectors from ECO states participating in this conference could enter into trade agreements and state their demands from governmental sector in the final resolution of the Conference.

In conclusion I sincerely hope that this conference could achieve its intended goals and extend my appreciation to the distinguish participants and express my thanks for the valuable efforts of the organizers of the Conference.

THANK YOU.