

**In the name of God**

**Statement by H.E. Dr. Prof. Hadi Soleimanpour Secretary  
General of ECO  
at 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Heads of Maritime Organizations of ECO  
Member States  
(6 March 2019, Tehran)**

**Mr. Chairman, distinguished Delegates, honored guests:**

It is a privilege for me to be here at the Fifth Meeting of the Heads of Maritime Organizations of the ECO Member States. First of all, I would like to convey my sincere greetings and best wishes for the success of this august event. Let me also express my profound gratitude to the Host Organizer for excellent arrangements made for the participants. The momentum of the Meeting is marked by its close proximity to the eve of the new year of Nowruz and may be a symbol of re-strengthening cooperation on maritime to be further strengthened with effective links to inland transport structures. I wish you all happy Nowruz.

**Dear Colleagues:**

Globally, maritime is a vastly emerging dimension for cooperation amongst regional countries. In our organization, we have exerted considerable effort to ensure that economies in the developing

countries of the region can harness the effectiveness of networking amongst coastal countries and landlocked countries. Such networking may emerge through an integrated concerted move to enhance economic growth in ECO's technology-oriented regional economy. Here, we are already seeing clear outlines of a prospective future should we wish to establish strong networks amongst ourselves, first. It is the effective networks that change the rules of the game in today's world. According to the UNESCAP estimates carried out in relation to any of its regional countries that if all other drivers of economic growth were to increase by 10 percent and transport linkages were to stay constant, then the resulting growth in individual income in regional countries would only be 9 percent, that is, 1 percent less than it otherwise would have been. In relation to the ECO region, if the average regional income as of 2018 was at an estimated 6,000 US dollars, the projected increase by at least 1 percent in it will result in 60 US dollars surplus in individual incomes of our regional residents. For another, the individual income entailing from transport in the ECO region reached 140 US dollars in 2018. If 80 US dollars of that amount would attribute to transport links, this may turn out to be a game changer.

For more than 40 years, we have been heavily investing in everything from roads to railways as we worked to improve sensible results in transit transport. We strived to remove bottlenecks for better customs facilitation - to prevent delays - to smoothly steer cargo freight across the region.

To date, the percentage of people in the region living within the middle income range has tripled since 2000. This means that the essential portion of the regional population has been lifted out of poverty and lower income levels to more prosperous standard of living. Most of these achievements were directly attributed to the regional transport development, in which maritime and railways are the key drivers.

Yet today, the landlocked countries in the ECO region continue to suffer from inefficiencies in transit transport links. Thus, the ECO railway routes have not been regularized yet since their launch in 2002 and 2009 owing to poor cargo mobilization in landlocked countries. Millions of metric tons of freight cargoes are at risk of falling back into continual delays or non-delivery. If we do not take decisive actions in linking the logistics of dry ports in landlocked countries with sea ports' outlets the above-said trends may persist.

From strategic perspectives, we established two goals: “to maximize on the existing economic potential of ECO countries” as laid down in ECO Vision 2025 and “to establish complimentary mutually beneficial networking amongst dry ports in landlocked countries and sea ports in coastal countries” - to increase cargo mobilization as recommended by Ministers of Transport of ECO Member States in the Turkmenbashi Declaration adopted in May 2018.

You - railway operators - and - maritime management can and must play a critical role in achieving the above-stated goals. I believe that if we work together, hand in hand, we can resolve the biggest global challenges of our lifetime, such as, shared prosperity in developing countries through the effective transit transport growth. Together, we can help our countries unlock new effective drivers of economic growth, and make the regional market system work for the benefit of our regional community. This is an urgent task, and we have no time to lose.

There is little doubt that the aspirations of our stakeholders will continue to rise. We are now geared to double our intra-trade by 2025 from the current 8.9% in 2019. Some of ECO studies estimate that by 2025, most of the 480 million people of our region may have an undisturbed access to ECO’s transport routes and destinations, including by rail, road and sea. That is a central question for the

development community. In establishing effective transit transport networks we should not ignore the value of connecting the Caspian Sea with the Persian Gulf, Oman Sea with Black Sea and all to Mediterranean.

If we do little to build new effective drivers of economic growth in maritime and railways, some regional countries may go down the path of ineffective utilization of their currently available potentials. That may turn out detrimental for their economies. Today, we avail of international seaports in the Caspian Sea, such as, Baku Port, Port Aktau, Turkmenbashi Port and Anzali Port. All these new ports have an international status. We need to connect them with coastal sea ports in the Oman Sea and the Persian Gulf in one side and Black Sea and Mediterranean on the other side via ECO's railway lines. To date, we have Qazvin-Rasht-Astara railway route of which the final Rasht-Astara link is under intensive construction as well as KTI route, we also have Bandar Abbas-Almaty and Almaty-Istanbul routes connecting Bandar Abbas Port as well as Istanbul and Mersin with landlocked countries. Thus, we can maximize on the existing rail routes in order to move our cargoes to open sea outlets.

We may start with those proposals that the Secretariat or the Member States may initiate during today's deliberations on ways

how to install the complementary networking in the ECO region, and how inter-connect the pre-Caspian states via maritime transportation, and also, on the tools of linking the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea. This may initiate a tremendous sense of cooperation in ECO - to rethink in a fundamental way how the connectivity, big data, and new technologies can create new drivers of economic growth in transport tourism enabling opportunities for all.

On cargo transport, we already have multimodal train, which was dispatched from China via Kazakhstan passing through the Caspian Sea to reach Anzali and Baku Port. These are a test run of international multimodal transport. In other words, this is a first act of realization of the decisions adopted throughout the 1st to 4th Meetings of Heads of Maritime Organizations of ECO Member States relating to the implementation of international multimodal transport.

**Honored guests:**

Until now, we have witnessed great successes in our partnership and we will continue further along this chosen path. But to make that statement come true, there is so much work that we must do together. By working with you all, we are confident, we can do it. Knowing that contribution to the GDP of any of the ECO economies stands within the range of 10%, we can significantly expand on the

transport inputs through effective networking between maritime and railways and such move is well-aligned with international steps taken on Almaty Plan of Action for landlocked countries, and Intergovernmental Agreement on dry ports, and IMO conventions on international multimodal transport.

**Distinguished participants:**

Before I conclude, I would like to invite you to particularly focus on the agenda item No. 6 of the draft agenda under the title of “Review of the Progress in the field of Maritime Cooperation”. Five Sub-items are there each of them needs careful deliberation and design to turn into project. Maritime transport and port facilities to landlocked Member States linking the existing regional seaports to dry ports, establishing complementary network between ECO sea port in Caspian region as well as in south in Persian Gulf on Oman Sea, and finally tourism cruise lines in the Caspian Sea.

I would like to take this opportunity and thank you all for the time that you allocated in your busy schedules to participate in the discussion, today, and wish you every success in adopting the right decisions at the right timing.

Thank you.