

KONUŞMA NOTU

**Excellencies the Ministers,
Distinguished Participants,
Assalam-o-alaikum,**

On behalf of the Minister of Culture and Tourism of Republic of Turkey HE Mr. Mehmet Nuri ERSOY, I have great pleasure in meeting with all our distinguished colleagues in Khujand.

It is honour to participate in the 3th Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Ministerial Meeting on Tourism and to cooperate with you in this important regional organization. We think it is an important occasion to focus on the socio-economic impact of tourism on boosting bilateral ties, fostering regional integration as well as calling for peace in the world. We therefore share and support this vision to the full, and I believe our discussions during this meeting will help us move forward.

I wish to convey my deepest appreciation to his excellency Numon Abdughaffarzoda, Chairman of the Tourism Development Committee of Tajikistan for ably steering to host this important meeting.

I would also like to thank Secretary General of ECO his excellency Dr. Hadi Soleimanpour for skillfully organizing this productive meeting and entire ECO Secretariat, for the support they have extended in making this meetings a success.

Distinguished guests,

The main purposes of our meeting today are to assess the state of tourism, to identify Sustainable Tourism Development and the opportunities that undoubtedly exist. More importantly, we need to work together to devise ways to overcome the challenges while seizing the opportunities.

It is an opportunity to be here to renew our commitment to the ECO's founding principles and ideals. At this meeting, we want to focus on greater connectivity in tourism linkages amongst our countries, in order to deliver progress to the people of the ECO region. The ECO region represents a vast expanse of territory that is home to nearly a tenth of all humanity.

The links that bring tourism and the regional development together are important. As a tool of economic development and job creation, tourism policies turn into an instrument of territorial development, valorisation and preservation of cultural heritage. In several regions, the industry of tourism provides one of the most elevated economic growth and job creations. Via proper policies, the tourism can also be a tool of integration or equality of access before the fruits of growth.

Tourism has grown in a rapid and extraordinary way over the last decades, and has become one of the leading sectors of the globe. 1.8 billion people are estimated to travel internationally by 2030. In this framework, I would like to share some important remarks on tourism development in Turkey and recent projects to illustrate our vision and targets.

Turkey's approach on tourism aims at ensuring that we keep innovating, boosting connectivity and economic productivity, expand career paths and make tourism increasingly accessible for all. This approach is rooted in our belief that tourism is an industry that is crucial for the prosperity of our economy, businesses and our community.

As the sixth most-visited country in the world, Turkey is one of the world leaders in international tourism. We expect to receive 52 million visitors by the end of 2019, 75 million tourists and USD 65 billion revenue by the end of 2023. Of course it is possible to increase these figures by focusing on mass tourism to a greater extent. Although Turkey has the potential and capacity to address all types of tourism, we prefer to focus on quality and sustainability. This stems from our sense of responsibility for the future generations.

To date, what we wanted was to attract highest number of tourists possible. However, from now on, we would like to attract not only high number of tourists but also high quality tourists as well. To this end, first and the foremost we need qualified staff at the tourism sector. To achieve this, we have embarked on cooperation with our Ministry of Education. We chose 11 vocational tourism schools as a start; we will upgrade their status and make them tourism

colleges. The curricula will be in line with the needs of the sector. We will ensure the students will learn at least 3 languages during their studies there. In addition, the courses will take place at the hotels during the high season, which is the summer period. The students will get paid as interns. This practice will gradually be expanded to cover the tourism education system as a whole. We wish to support lifelong careers for those that work in tourism, thus create a better visitor experience throughout Turkey.

Diversification of tourism in all provinces of Turkey is among our priorities. I would like to mention how a transportation project can be utilized to promote cultural features of a region and accelerate tourism development. The Eastern Express (Doğu Ekspresi) travels on one of the oldest railways in Turkey. The last station is the city of Kars, which is one of the most notable winter destinations in the country and famous for its cultural diversity, breathtaking historical and architectural heritage and Archaeological Site of Ani. Touristic Eastern Express started between Ankara and Kars as of May 2019 in order to meet the increasing demand for better services. Passengers are experiencing beauties of Anatolia from the beginning to the end of their journey for 27 hours and all tickets are sold out months before the travels.

Silkroad is one of the most important tourism brands in global tourism and Eco Region is home to many distinctive destinations on it, which is a privilege. To get benefit of this potentiality, connection between the destinations should be facilitated, policies should be developed to facilitate visa and border formalities, security, transport and accommodation should be provided in the most practical way possible; thus the travel experience on the Silk Road should become more comfortable. At this point, allow me to indicate that the Modern Silk Road Tour Package, which Turkey is a part of under the umbrella of Turkic Council, is a useful step in this regard. With our partners Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan in the package, in collaboration with private sector stakeholders the travel agencies; even the first packages have been sold on the occasion of World Nomad Games in 2018. Diversification of such initiatives shall make considerable contribution to the sustainability of the Silk Road. We are eager to share our multinational experience in all platforms and we would be happy to contribute in the emergence of the similar projects.

Culture is an important feature of our tourism development strategy and we directed our efforts to get benefit of it more. To illustrate, 2019 has been declared as the “Year of Göbeklitepe”. The oldest temple in the world, Göbeklitepe is about 12 thousand years old and

it has been inscribed on UNESCO World Heritage List in 2018. For this landmark world heritage site, we collaborated with Dođuş Group, the Turkish-based international group of companies to promote its all features to the world and an important cooperation example for public and private partnership has been achieved.

Abroad, the Yunus Emre Institute has become an important institution of our international cultural relations with 58 Turkish Cultural Centers in 48 countries. Our Cultural Centers are of great importance. In addition to our promoted products, in each square of our centers, we describe our country's riches with care. As representatives of tourism and culture, our centers are also very functional.

Lastly, I should say that as Turkey, we have solid knowledge and experience in tourism industry for decades. We face with several difficulties and every time we find solutions and consider those difficulties as challenges making us stronger, more talented and flexible. Both public and private sector in the industry learned much from our experiences in destination planning, management and promotion, subventions, risk and crisis management and product development. In this context, we would be pleased to convey our experience and knowledge to our colleagues in ECO Region and would like to contribute to efforts of "ECO Tourism Experts Group".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a final note, I would like to express that Turkey, as the newly-elected Executive Council member of the UNWTO, would be happy to contribute to any cooperation and project which will be held between UNWTO and ECO.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.