

## **PRESS CONFERENCE**

**THE REMARKS OF THE ECO SECRETARY GENERAL,  
H.E. DR. HADI SOLEIMANPOUR  
WITH RESPECT TO THE 24<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF  
MINISTERS  
(Antalya, 9 November 2019)**

First of all, I would like to express my profound gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Turkey for hosting the 24<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Council of Ministers – the highest decision-making body of the Economic Cooperation Organization and for the warm hospitality extended to all delegations. The active engagement and fruitful brainstorming of our Member States today vividly manifested their resolve and commitment in enhancement of regional cooperation within the framework of ECO.

Over the past period, ECO has prioritized its activities in six areas, namely trade, transport, energy, agriculture, tourism and the sustainable development goals.

Today, we marked the assumption of the Republic of Turkey the Chairmanship of the Council of Ministers for the next period. Under the able leadership and brilliant conduct of Chairmanship of H.E. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, the Council succeeded to generate crucial outcomes.

I would like to highlight some significant conclusions of today's Ministerial Meeting. The Council made certain headway in the Institutional Reform Process of our Organization that would inevitably contribute to forging ECO as a robust, resilient and project-oriented Organization more responsive to the recent regional and global economic developments as well as to the needs and requirements of our Peoples. This process will also increase a sense of ownership of our Organization.

Driven by the fact that intra-regional trade is an engine of sustainable economic growth and regional development, the Council resolved on stimulating the experts level consultations on the soonest implementation ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA). This commitment will enable the Ministerial Meeting on Trade to make a substantive progress on regional integration through the establishment of the Free Trade Area as envisaged in ECO Vision 2025 – a key strategic document of ECO.

The Ministers encouraged the ongoing efforts to expand the membership and operations of ECO Trade and Development Bank (ECO-TDB) – a key regional financial institution of ECO – and enhance contributions of the Member States to play a greater role in the economic development of the region.

Furthermore, the Council resolved on consolidation of steps targeted on regional connectivity and full implementation of the Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA). ECO is also currently engaged in promotion of the East-West, North-South and South-West transport corridors. We are striving to maximize

connectivity and accessibility by making the major transport corridors commercially viable and operational, and transformation of the selected transport corridors into a sort of economic corridors that would integrate transport, energy, telecommunications and other links in the long-term perspective.

In view of the forthcoming mapping out of the next, fundamentally new multi-year ECO Strategy on Energy Cooperation, the Ministers supported the steady progress in promoting the project of establishment of the ECO Clean Energy Centre as an explicit endeavour to contribute to the sustainable energy transition in the ECO Region. This Centre will act as the regional hub and think-tank for sustainable energy in ECO Region. The Council also called for renewed impetus for early launching of the ECO's flagship energy project of establishment of the ECO Regional Electricity Market (ECO-REM).

While tourism represents one of the catalysts of regional integration, the Council supported the steady implementation of ECO tourism projects, and encouraged the efforts to facilitate tourist flows and people-to-people contacts in the ECO Region.

As regards the upcoming policy-making event, ECO is expected to organize a number of sectoral Ministerial Meetings in near future, namely on Agriculture and Economy with a view to stimulate the high level policy debates with a view to enhancing regional synergies, promoting activities and projects in the respective fields, as well as developing policy guidelines for realization of relevant components of "ECO Vision 2025".

Given the fact that the peace and stability constitute a prerequisite for economic development, the Ministers reiterated their concerns about the existing unresolved conflicts, disputes, threats, and biased measures and pressures against some of the Member States in the ECO Region. In this context, they also expressed solidarity for each other in line with the relevant resolutions of the UN and International Law. Meanwhile, they condemned all forms and manifestations of terrorism and supported ECO Member States in their counter-terrorism efforts.

Once again, I would like to express my deepest thanks to the Republic of Turkey, and H.E. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu for their hospitality and excellent arrangements made for the overall success of the event. The Secretariat will exert its efforts to implement the outcomes of this Council Meeting and, in collaboration with the Member States lay the proper ground for enhancement of our regional cooperation.