

Statement by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan
H.E. Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev
14th ECO Summit

First of all, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the Chair, the Republic of Turkey, for organizing this event.

We are especially grateful to the brotherly Turkish nation and personally to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for providing valuable assistance in the fight against the pandemic. A friend in need is a friend indeed.

In these challenging times our countries have witnessed once again that mutual assistance and support are inherently important at the global level.

Therefore, I believe our partnership within the Economic Cooperation Organization will proceed in a similar constructive spirit in the years to come.

Turkey's chairmanship of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), with the support of all Member States and the Secretariat, has been very fruitful.

Together, we have successfully carried out the reform of the Organization. We are now able to resolve many pressing issues and boost our interaction.

I am confident that the upcoming chairmanship of Turkmenistan will give a new impetus to the further development of the Organization for the benefit of the entire region.

I express my special gratitude to the ECO Secretary General, Mr. Hadi Soleimanpour, for his effective work and leadership in this turbulent period.

World economy and our countries as well felt negative effect of the pandemic.

Kazakhstan's economy fared better than global economy on average. Our GDP declined by 2,6% compared to 3,5% globally.

Thanks to the well-financed and comprehensive anti-crisis plan, Kazakhstan was able to minimize negative impact of the pandemic and even achieve growth in areas such as construction, agriculture and manufacturing.

This year, we expect a stable GDP growth of over 3%.

Dear Participants!

Cooperation with ECO remains one of the priorities of Kazakhstan's foreign policy.

We believe that large infrastructural, social and cultural projects should become anchors of our cooperation.

First. Railway connection across our region is one of the key dimensions. During the pandemic we have seen the shift from freight traffic towards rail transport.

Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, implemented jointly by our countries and China, is set to become one of the promising projects.

In November 2019, a container service on the Xi'an-Istanbul-Prague route connecting Kazakhstan, China, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey was launched.

In April 2020, an inaugural container train traveled on the Xi'an-Izmir route. The train covered the distance of almost 7,000 km in 16 days.

These are good instances of our collaborative efforts. However, we still have a great deal of work ahead to ensure lasting progress.

This year we need to ensure that the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran (KTI) railway route reaches its full capacity.

Additionally, we are looking for new routes. A high-speed railway from Turkestan to Tashkent is expected to increase tourism potential of both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, reduce travel time to 2 hours and facilitate B2B, and social contacts between the countries.

Kazakhstan is also participating in infrastructure projects in Afghanistan. Together with Russian and Uzbek partners, we are constructing the Mazar-i-Sharif-Quetta and Mazar-i-Sharif-Peshawar railways. And we believe that acceleration of work on these projects is essential.

Our bilateral trade with Afghanistan grew by 55% last year (from \$402 to \$624 million).

Lifting of some restrictions to our transit of grain, flour, oil products to Afghanistan, will open up opportunities to increase supply of these vital goods.

Second. Food security is another major priority for our region. Kazakhstan supports all ECO initiatives in the field of agriculture.

As you know, our capital is home to Islamic Organization for Food Security (IOFS).

I call on all member states to join this organization and ratify its charter.

We are working to establish a national network of wholesale distribution and logistics centers.

Food security and affordability is a common concern, therefore, we believe there is a great potential in joining our efforts on creating efficient logistics.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are working on construction of the International Center for Trade Cooperation at our border.

I have instructed my Government to speed up the project.

Third. Even though it has been hit hard by the pandemic, tourism remains another promising area of our cooperation.

In Kazakhstan, we intend to bring the share of tourism industry to 8% of GDP by 2025.

In this regard, we are actively developing the city of Turkestan, sacred for all Central Asian countries and the entire Turkic world.

In 2020 alone, domestic investment in urban infrastructure, tourism and logistics in Turkestan amounted to nearly \$1 billion.

Along with Turkestan, we have identified TOP-10 tourist destinations in Kazakhstan that may be of interest to investors and tourists from your countries.

Projects in these destinations will enjoy various forms of support from the government and municipalities.

We invite our friends and partners to actively participate in tapping our tourism potential.

Fourth. Health care has also become a "center of attraction" for foreign investment in Kazakhstan.

We offer competitive tariffs, well-educated work force and plenty of public-private partnership opportunities.

Our Turkish friends have long been actively and productively involved in building new hospitals in Kazakhstan and equipping them with high-tech medical equipment.

Turkish Rönesans Holding is commencing construction of its clinics in seven cities of Kazakhstan.

We also welcome Orhun Medical which together with the Kazakh National Institute of Oncology and Radiology plans to put in operation Tomotherapy Center in Almaty this year.

I am confident that we will continue our cooperation with Turkish companies and invite partners from other member states to invest in Kazakhstan's healthcare system.

Fifth. Improving efficiency of the Organization in new conditions.

This is a special year since 6 member states of the Organization will celebrate 30th anniversary of their independence.

For many years, Economic Cooperation Organization has proven an effective multilateral platform for the development of our independent nations.

And yet there is further potential in the Organization.

Kazakhstan, as Chair of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), is ready to provide assistance in developing cooperation between ECO and CICA in the economic dimension.

Interaction between these institutions has great potential to bring about tangible results in the areas of transport and logistics, agriculture, finance, energy, tourism, digital technologies, among others.

In addition, I propose to instruct the Secretariat to prepare a comprehensive functional analysis of the Organization with concrete ways to increase its overall efficiency.

We believe that new times call for new answers.

For our part, we suggest to abandon the practice of dividing ECO member states into "founders" (Iran, Pakistan and Turkey) and "non-founders" (5 Central Asian countries, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan).

In our opinion, this is outdated and is not reflecting the contemporary spirit of our partnership.

Dear friends and colleagues!

We hope that comprehensive cooperation based on mutual interests and practical joint projects will allow us to withstand challenges of today and prepare us for the opportunities of tomorrow.

We pin our high hopes for the Organization.

In conclusion, I wish our Turkmen friends a very successful chairmanship.

Thank you for your attention!