

**Statement by H.E. Mukhtar Tileuberdi,
Deputy Prime-Minister - Minister of Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Kazakhstan,
at the 26th Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers**

**Mr. Chairman,
Mr. ECO Secretary General,
Dear colleagues,**

On behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Kazakhstan let me extend our gratitude to the Republic of Uzbekistan as current Chair of the Organization of Economic Cooperation, for arranging the 26th session of the Council of ECO Ministers of Foreign Affairs, which aims for the greater unity and progress of our countries.

As close neighbours of brotherly Uzbekistan we know this friendly nation as the traditionally generous, open-hearted and hospitable people, who always warmly welcomes guests. And it is not coincidentally that the famous Uzbek proverb goes as:

Mehmon kelgan uy – barakali, which means:

The house in which the quest came is blessed.

In this vein, we cordially wish well-being and prosperity to our dear hosts.

I also sincerely thank the Chairman, Mr. Bakhtiyor Saidov, for hosting us with a traditionally warm hospitality and express appreciation to the Secretariat of the ECO for the organization of today's Ministerial Meeting.

Last year marked the 30th Anniversary of the enlargement of the Economic Cooperation Organization.

I extend our congratulations to the Member-States and the Secretariat on this occasion.

Dear friends,

Since joining the Organization, the cooperation with the ECO has been one of Kazakhstan's top foreign policy priorities. Over 30 years we have always supported ECO and its initiatives.

Our President, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, last year paid state and official visits to almost all ECO countries - Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Turkiye - where specific agreements were reached.

Today it is our pleasure to inform that in 2021, **trade** between Kazakhstan and ECO countries increased by 37.1% (2020 - \$5.6 billion, 2021 - \$7.6 billion).

For 11 months of 2022, mutual trade indicators also increased by 34.8% and amounted to \$8.5 billion.

This is a positive sign confirming that we have a large untapped potential for the development of trade and economic relations.

We all see an urgent need in unifying our efforts to address modern challenges and employ opportunities possessed by ECO member-states.

In this context, let me remind that Kazakhstan has always stressed the importance of ECO's **transport and logistics component**.

Current geopolitical trends clearly dictate a high necessity for strengthening our multimodal transport links, creating new and modernizing existing logistics centers.

Effective employment of ECO's unique geographical advantages, which are well suited for both cargo shipment and transportation of passengers from the East to the West, can give a significant impetus to the development of ECO economies.

Thanks to the joint efforts of the member-countries and Kazakhstan's active involvement, the new railroad routes are being developed. These routes link transport systems of our countries with other regions.

One of the promising directions is the North-South corridor, the eastern branch of which is the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway section.

In 2022, almost 130 thousand tons were transported along this route, which is 10 times more than in previous 2021 (13.5 thousand tons).

This is another positive sign confirming that we have a large untapped potential in this sector.

Purposeful and consistent development of this corridor can increase the capacity up to 10 million tons per year.

This requires further measures to improve infrastructure, increase capacity, remove administrative barriers, and create favorable conditions for carriers.

The expansion of intraregional railway connection, development of new routes will reduce travel time and costs.

We welcome the development of the Roadmap for the North-South corridor and the signing the Roadmap for the Trans-Caspian international transport route in 2022.

Kazakhstan supports all efforts to develop the North-South and East-West corridors .

Dear colleagues,

Kazakhstan, like many ECO Member-States, is concerned about the **situation in Afghanistan** and contributes within its capacity to the efforts of the world community to stabilize the situation in this country.

We regularly provide humanitarian aid (such as food, financial aids and emergency supplies) to the Afghan population, implement national and international programs to train Afghan youth in educational institutions of Kazakhstan.

It is clear that Afghanistan will need further support from the international community. We consider it important to continue practical cooperation with the de-facto Afghan leadership in the humanitarian and trade sector.

In this context, we call for active cooperation with the Islamic Organization for Food Security.

Speaking about international and regional cooperation, I would like to note that there is a number of multilateral structures in the world where ECO member states interact closely.

In this context the activities of the **Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia** are particularly important for all our countries.

In October last year, Kazakhstan hosted the 6th CICA Summit that coincided with the 30th anniversary of the Conference. The heads of state and government launched the process of CICA transformation into a full-fledged regional international organization, which has become one of the most important international events in the region in recent years.

We believe the transition to a new format of multilateral relations will expand the possibilities for rapprochement between Asian states, as well as enhance their combined influence in the international arena.

Kazakhstan is grateful to all the countries represented at this table for their active position in the Conference, their great contribution, and constructive approach to the work of the CICA.

We propose to strengthen the cooperation between ECO and CICA by holding joint events in the economic sector.

Dear colleagues,

The world is quickly changing and faces new challenges. Organizations such as ECO with all their capacity and most importantly with mandate granted by their member-states should keep up to date and assist all of us in overcoming economic hurdles.

If a new wave of reforms is needed to strengthen the ECO Secretariat and its Specialized Agencies/Regional Institutions/Affiliated Bodies, Kazakhstan is ready to extend its support.

In this context let me note that despite the fact that Kazakhstan is not the ECO's founding state, our country assumed a large portion of the membership fees and has become the fourth contributor to the ECO's budget after Iran, Pakistan and Turkiye.

In our turn, we see a high necessity in increasing the number of professionals in each field among our representatives including the highest executive staff. We believe sectorial expertise is very crucial in the functioning of organizations like ECO.

Let me also remind that at the 14th and 15th Summits Kazakhstan's leaders put forward a plethora of relevant initiatives to be urgently implemented.

In this regard, we would like to remind the Secretariat to prepare a comprehensive analysis of the Organization with specific ways to increase its overall efficiency.

In general, we agree with the whole Agenda of today's meeting.

We support the establishment of the High-Level Committee on preparation of specific proposals and recommendations for further improvement of the ECO activities. Kazakhstan is always ready to contribute to the betterment of our Organization.

We are grateful to the Council of Permanent Representatives and the ECO Secretariat for finding a way to cease the practice of dividing ECO member-states into «Founding» and «Non-Founding» members. Yet, there is still room for improvement.

Recalling the agreements reached in 2019 in Antalya, Kazakhstan supports the ECO Secretariat's Budget for 2023.

In conclusion, let me emphasize that we believe that the traditionally amicable and historically good-neighborly ties will serve as a solid basis for further strengthening prosperous and constructive cooperation for the sake of sustainable development of all ECO Member-States.

For our part, Kazakhstan is ready to do our best in order for our Meetings to become an important factor of our international policy, allowing us to determine the future development vector of the region in a confidential manner.

Thank you for your attention.