

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Sirojiddin Muhridin,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan
at the 26th Meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the
Economic Cooperation Organizations
*January 24, 2023, Tashkent, Uzbekistan***

**Mr. Chairman,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Dear Colleagues,**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan for warm hospitality and excellent arrangements made for hosting this meeting.

It is an honor to join other colleagues and sincerely congratulate H.E. Mr. Bakhtiyor Saidov on his recent appointment as the Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Tajik delegation thanks the ECO Secretary General Ambassador Mr. Khusrav Noziri and his team for preparation of today's ministerial meeting.

Dear Colleagues,

The current changing global economic realities, including at the background of COVID-19, especially challenges related to food security and agricultural development in the region, water shortage, land degradation, climate change, drought and other natural disasters demand our increased constructive efforts to enhance the capacity of Member States to tackle these challenges.

In this context, the Economic Cooperation Organization has a crucial role to play in regional integration and cooperation processes in our vast area.

Excellencies,

The Republic of Tajikistan has always advocated and is committed to the progressive development of regional cooperation and the achievement of economic prosperity based on mutual collaboration. We regard the regional cooperation as an essential element of national development. Building and strengthening regional cooperation remains among the top priorities of our foreign policies.

The ECO is a valuable instrument for regional economic development. Tajikistan is fully committed to further strengthening the **comprehensive cooperation in trade, investment, energy, transport and communication, industry, agriculture, environment and tourism sectors** with the other ECO Member States.

The ECO region enjoys an incomparable geographical location as a corridor between large markets. The future socio-economic integration of the region depends on how economic corridors can be operationalized **by creating regional production and value chains, as well as new industries to revitalize economies and their trade with diversification and job creation.**

Land-locked countries should be offered access to the sea, and thus transformed into land-linked countries. **Regional connectivity, especially transport links are critical for further integration of the ECO.**

In this connection, I would like to highlight the initiative for the First Ministerial Meeting on Transit Cooperation between Iran and the Central Asian countries that was held in Tehran on October 9, 2022.

Dear Colleagues,

Being mindful of the fact that enhanced energy security and sustainability in the region is among the ECO's strategic objectives, we need expanded efforts towards **electricity market, transformation to renewable as well as cleaner and sustainable energy sources.** This strategy could facilitate the implementation of projects that focus on the **increased use of renewable energy and development of a "green" economy.**

The implementation of the CASA-1000 high-voltage electricity transmission line as the first energy bridge between the South and Central Asia regions is a timely initiative. We hope that this strategic project will make it possible to connect the energy grids of the countries of the two regions and promote the achievement of the SDG 7 - **ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.**

Hydropower plants make the core of the energy sector in Tajikistan. **98% of electricity in our country generated with the use of renewable energy sources. Tajikistan is among the top six countries of the world in terms of “green energy” generation and ranked as one of the countries with huge hydropower resources.**

The hydropower potential of the country is 527 billion kw/hours of clean electricity per year. **We currently use only five percent of it.** This is despite the ever-growing demand in electricity in the **ECO wider region’s energy market.**

Last year, together with one of the ECO Member States, we launched a joint project to build two hydropower plants in Tajikistan with a total capacity of 320 megawatts (MW), which is a good example of mutually beneficial investment and energy cooperation between the two neighboring countries.

Dear Colleagues,

The ECO Member States possess vast potential for development of regional tourism. The expansion of cooperation in tourism sector is amongst the priorities of the Organization, which is envisaged as important objective under the ECO Vision 2025.

Tajikistan has a favorable climate, beautiful nature with unique landscapes and many historical and civilizational sites attractive for tourists. Given these opportunities, the Government of Tajikistan has been developing and implementing specific public programs on tourism development.

Taking into account **the rich cultural and historical heritage of the ECO region**, we need to increase joint efforts for the elevation of tourism sector based on the targets of the ECO Vision 2025, and paying special attention to the development of pilgrimage tourism.

Excellencies,

On the 14th of December of last year, the United Nations General Assembly at the initiative of Tajikistan and active support of the ECO Member States unanimously adopted its resolutions to declare 2025 as the «International Year of Glaciers' Preservation», proclaim March 21st as the «World Day of Glaciers», establish an “International Trust Fund for the Glaciers' Preservation” and convene High-Level International Conference on Glaciers' Preservation in Tajikistan in 2025 to facilitate access to accurate and timely information on the cryosphere.

The ECO region is a hotspot where climate change threatens to result in severe economic, environmental, and development losses. Climate change has had a particularly severe impact on water, land and soils, among other things due to the melting of mountain glaciers. Since these risks have no borders, we **believe that the practical implementation of this resolution opens up new avenues for our cooperation in this field.**

Furthermore, on December 21, 2020, the UNGA, in its 75th Session, unanimously adopted a **resolution entitled “United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018-2028”**, tabled by Tajikistan with the co-sponsorship of the absolute majority of the UN Member States - 190 countries.

In this regard, we believe that the ECO Member States will proactively continue participating **in implementation of the new Decade and will substantively contribute to the implementation of water related objectives and targets.**

Taking this opportunity, I would like to encourage all the ECO Member States to participate in the UN 2023 Water Conference taking place on March 22-24, 2023, in New York under the co-chairmanship of Tajikistan and the Netherlands.

Dear Colleagues,

The Government of Tajikistan is keen to have friendly relations and mutually beneficial cooperation with all countries as well as regional and international organizations. Accordingly, we stand ready to expand our partnership with all the ECO Member States in the areas of mutual interest.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Republic of Uzbekistan for highly effective and productive Chairmanship in ECO in 2022 and its great contribution to our common cause.

I also congratulate H.E. Mr. Jeyhun Bayramov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan for assuming the ECO Chairmanship in 2023 under the important theme of “Green Transition and Interconnectivity” and wish him every success.

I thank you for your attention.