

ADDRESS
at the 27th Meeting of the
Council of Foreign Ministers of the ECO Member States
(October 10, 2023, Shusha)

Dear Mr Bayramov,

Dear Mr Secretary-General,

Distinguished Delegates!

I am sincerely glad to meet you again, now in the gorgeous city of **Shusha**, which is rapidly returning its historical beauty in a new look and becoming one of the cultural centers of brotherly **Azerbaijan**.

This is our **second** meeting in recent weeks and the **third** meeting this year, which indicates the intensification of the **ECO** activities and the **significance of the mechanism of the Council of Foreign Ministers.**

I am confident that today's meeting will be a landmark event in the history of our Organization and will allow us to define priority areas for practical regional cooperation.

I would like to express my appreciation to **His Excellency Mr. Jeyhun Bayramov**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the **Republic of Azerbaijan**, for the outstanding organization of this event in **Shusha** and traditionally warm hospitality.

Along with this, I extend my best congratulations to you on the successful **Azerbaijan's chairmanship** in the **ECO** under the motto "Green Transition and Connectivity".

It is not an overstatement to say that the chairmanship was characterized by excellent dynamics, new content and strong commitment to achieve our common goals and objectives.

Under the chairmanship of **Azerbaijan** number of important events was held during **2023** aimed at further deepening of economic cooperation within the **ECO**.

In particular, the holding of an informal meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers on the sidelines of the **UN** General Assembly in **New York** once again demonstrated proactive role of **Azerbaijan's diplomacy**.

We fully support the agenda of the meeting and the main provisions of the **Shusha Declaration**, the adoption of which will make a valuable contribution to the prospects for strengthening interaction between the **ECO** member countries.

Esteemed participants,

Our common goal is the development of trade and economic ties, a joint search for solutions on vital issues of our time, increasing the well-being and prosperity of our countries and peoples.

Unfortunately, we are currently facing an unprecedented level of uncertainty and an aggravation of the geopolitical situation in the international arena.

We experience the negative consequences of the economic, energy, food, water and increasingly growing environmental crises.

In these circumstances, in our opinion, it is necessary to **consolidate common efforts** to develop a set of adequate operational measures to respond to modern challenges and threats.

It is **constructivism, pragmatism, and reasonable compromises** that can help find answers to these issues.

I am convinced that we will be able to achieve our goals by mobilizing our huge potential and resources, thereby making a practical contribution to ensuring a sustainable and predictable future not only in our macro-region, but also in the whole world.

Dear colleagues,

The **ECO** is an area of broad economic opportunities. Our large region has a total population of **500 million** and a combined gross domestic product of more than **\$2 trillion**.

However, I suppose my colleagues will agree that the current indicators of economic cooperation within the **ECO** are far from the expectations that we have.

We still have a lot of work to do before we achieve the desired levels of mutual trade and investment cooperation.

It is a demand of the time to enhance the international status of our Organization, to establish our unique agenda as compared to other regional organizations.

We have to improve institutional mechanisms for our cooperation in order to make the most of untapped potential and new opportunities.

Taking into account our geographical, economic and other advantages, in order to improve practical collaboration within [ECO](#), we propose to focus on the following priority areas.

FIRST, further development of industrial cooperation.

Considering the fact that the industry is a key driver of the economic growth, attention should be paid to the development of industrial cooperation, as well as financial instruments to stimulate joint projects.

In this regard, we propose to elaborate a **Comprehensive Program for the development of industrial cooperation** within the **ECO**. It could cover such industries as textile, electrical, agricultural, food, pharmaceutical, as well as mechanical engineering and IT.

We are fully confident that the adoption of this document will contribute to the effective use of our industrial advantages on the principles of **complementarity**.

In turn, this will give a powerful impetus to the accelerated development and modernization of industry and the creation of new jobs.

SECOND, strengthening transport connectivity in the **ECO** region.

This can be achieved through the implementation of joint infrastructure projects, harmonization of transit tariffs, exchange of best practices and experiences.

Working together, we can create a seamless, efficient and a stable transport system for the benefit of all member states.

It is important to remember that the **ECO** area is a natural transcontinental bridge connecting **Europe** and **Asia**.

Uzbekistan submitted an official application to join the **North-South transport and logistics corridor** in April this year, which will facilitate expansion of additional routes and increase in freight flows.

We count on support for the initiative of the President of **Uzbekistan** to create an **Interregional Connectivity Center** under the auspices of the **UN**.

There are number of prerequisites for the creation of this Center, such as:

- growing number of infrastructure projects;
- adoption of systematic measures for the sustainable transport development through the modernization of infrastructure;
- construction of logistic centers and the strengthening of intercountry communication ties.

Ways of deepening cooperation in the transport sector will be discussed in detail during the **12th** meeting of the **ECO Transport Ministers** on November **2** this year in **Tashkent**.

THIRD, climate change mitigation.

Against the background of the emergence of new challenges and threats due to global climate change, **the consequences of the deterioration of the water-ecological situation in the ECO region** as a result of natural disasters and man-made factors are of particular concern.

This in turn hinders the economic development of the countries in the region. Therefore, all this requires elaboration and implementation of further long term agreed steps.

In this sense, I would like to draw the attention of my respected colleagues to the initiative on creation of **the Permanent high-level Council with the participation of international scientists and experts in the field of the environment.**

It was put forward by the President of **Uzbekistan** HE Mr Shavkat Mirziyoyev at the **Ashgabat Summit** in **2021**.

The Ministry of Geology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change of **Uzbekistan** developed a draft Charter of the Council and forwarded it to the **ECO Secretariat** to agree with the member states.

We count on the early consideration of this document for its subsequent approval and holding the **first meeting of the Council in Uzbekistan in 2024**.

FOURTH, enhancing energy security in the ECO region.

Today, with aggravation of environmental situation and an intensification of triple planetary crisis caused by climate change, loss of biodiversity and environmental pollution, our region is becoming one of the most vulnerable to climate change.

There is an urgent need for cooperation to find effective solutions for the transition to a “low-carbon economy” and resource-saving technologies.

Uzbekistan, being committed to the principles of sustainable development, has set objective to increase the production of **renewable energy** in total consumption up to **40% by 2030**.

Our country is rapidly building large-scale solar and wind power plants. We plan to introduce about **25 Gigawatts** of clean energy capacity in the next **10 years**.

Indeed, all **ECO** countries are implementing programs of renewable energy and enhancing its national energy security.

However, we all understand that given the deteriorating situation on the global energy market, we will not be able to ensure energy security without **close regional cooperation**.

Therefore, we welcome the creation of the **ECO Clean Energy Center** in **Baku** and urge all member countries to consolidate its efforts to achieve **sustainable regional energy security**.

FIFTH, further development and recovery of tourism activities.

Today, tourism serves as one of the important catalysts for economic growth and a strong bridge that unites nations by complementing cultural traditions and values.

The **ECO** region, along which the **Great Silk Road** passed, has unique tourism potential. There are big number of the World Heritage sites registered by **UNESCO** in this area.

We are proud that the beautiful ancient city of **Uzbekistan – Shakhrisabz** has been chosen as the tourist capital of the **ECO** in **2024**.

We plan to hold number of events next year, including the development of ecotourism and the wide disclosure of the intangible cultural heritage of the city.

We support the election of the city of **Shusha** as the tourism capital of the **ECO** in **2026**.

Uzbekistan stands for the comprehensive consolidation of the efforts of the **ECO** countries to jointly promote our common tourism potential on the world stage.

We believe that holding the **25th** session of the General Assembly of the **UN World Tourism Organization** in **Samarkand** in October **16-20** will make a worthy contribution to achieving this goal.

We expect the wide participation of all our **ECO** partners in this important event.

Dear friends,

Undoubtedly, the key event of the year will be the **16th Summit of ECO heads of state in November 9** in **Tashkent**.

We are thoroughly preparing for this important event so that it is held at the highest level.

To enrich the content and give emphasis to more active practical cooperation between business circles, we are planning to host the **5TH ECO Business Forum** on the eve of the summit (*November 8*).

Taking this opportunity, I would like to urge you to bring the most active business circles to participate in the business forum.

I am confident that this event will become a convenient and effective platform for establishing direct ties between the business communities of the **ECO** countries and exploring new opportunities.

The upcoming summit and its results should become a new starting point in the evolution of our Organization and give a powerful impetus to the further deepening of our economic cooperation.

In this context, I would like to express my **gratitude to the ECO Secretariat** and personally to the **Secretary-General, Mr. Khusraw Noziri**, for kind support and assistance.

Distinguished delegates,

Today, in the speeches of my colleagues, important initiatives will be put forward in order to intensify practical economic cooperation between the **ECO** countries.

I believe it is very important that every proposal is carefully considered. Progress and prosperity will be possible only through joint efforts.

I am convinced that the results of this meeting will serve as the foundation for strengthening relations of friendship and close partnership between our countries.

It will contribute to ensuring the sustainable development and prosperity of our peoples.

Thank you for your attention.