

27th Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers (COM)

October 10, 2023, Shusha, Republic of Azerbaijan

Shusha Declaration

Green Transition and Interconnectivity in the ECO Region

We, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs/Heads of Delegations of the ECO Member States, have met at the 27th Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers (COM) on October 10, 2023 in Shusha under the Chairmanship of H.E. Mr. Jeyhun Bayramov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and while:

Reaffirming our resolve and commitment to the fundamental principles of the Treaty of Izmir and targets set forth in the ECO Vision-2025, as well as the guidance provided by ECO Heads of State/Governments in the Ashgabat Consensus for Action and our previously expressed assertions and iterations to enhance multifaceted cooperation for sustainable progress and economic development in the region;

Commending the Republic of Azerbaijan for effectively performing the ECO Chairmanship in 2023 under the vigorous yearly theme “*Green Transition and Interconnectivity*”;

Welcoming the ECO Chairmanship of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2024 under an important regional theme “*Enhanced and Resilient ECO Region through Expansion of Intra-Regional Trade*”;

Realizing the importance of acceleration in trade and investment activities for boosting regional economic profile through productive measures, including removal of trade barriers in the region;

Noting the value of developing linkages for wider connectivity, including through all corridors under ECO Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) (May 9, 1998) , and their further improvement and expansion to be linked with other regions in Europe, Asia, and the Persian Gulf; **Highlighting** the importance of digitalized transport, customs and border crossing procedures for enhanced regional connectivity and importance of strengthening cooperation on the Digital Economy and the Fourth Industrial Revolution among the ECO Member States;

Understanding the importance of energy security and sustainability in special consideration of the prevailing energy crisis that warrants a balanced, just and mutually resorted approach to facilitate smooth, efficient and sustainable regional

energy transition with due consideration to different national circumstances, economic linkages and respective capabilities of the Member States;

Realizing the need to work collectively towards greater stability and security of energy supply and demand in the ECO Region and beyond; considering the critical role of enhanced cooperation among the Member States as well as among their private sectors in exploration, production and trade of energy resources in the Region;

Recognizing the need for regional oil and gas Markets for ECO Member States, increased energy productivity and efficiency, promoting joint investments and encouraging public and private companies to be involved, training and development of human resources of energy sector; *Acknowledging* the necessity of ECO to enhance cooperation on oil and gas sector and removal of trade barriers as relate to interconnection of oil and gas systems of the Member States and facilitating the regional energy trade;

Stressing the meaningfulness of North-South and South-South dialogue in imperative topics related to sustainable, just and climate resilient clean energy transition, including, but not limited to decarbonization, renewables, transitional fuels, energy efficiency, clean energy investments and technology transfer on preferential terms;

Reaffirming our joint commitment to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for improvement and development of various sectors; *Welcoming* the outcomes of the recent SDG Summit as well as 2023 High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development held in New York during the High Level Week of the 78th Session of the UNGA;

Recognizing the need of enhanced cooperation amongst the Member States on issues emanating from natural disasters in particular reference to the recent devastating earthquakes in Türkiye and Afghanistan, as well as the catastrophic floods in Pakistan;

Acknowledging that agriculture, as a major driver of national and regional economies, plays an instrumental role in generating wealth and employment opportunities leading to the economic growth and sustainable and resilient development as well as collective welfare of our peoples;

Underscoring the significance of ECO Tourism Capitals for displaying the cultural and tourism potentials of the Member States, promotion of their tourism

destinations, enhancing the involvement of local communities and private sector in the region's tourism activities;

Recognizing the utmost importance of sustainable peace, stability in Afghanistan for regional development and prosperity; **Reiterating** our support to assist the process of reconstruction, development and socio-economic progress in Afghanistan, as set out in the ECO Advocacy Program for Afghanistan;

Welcoming the initiative of the Republic of Uzbekistan aimed at solving acute social problems in Afghanistan through an appropriate mechanism;

Taking into account that in the bilateral and regional context, ECO Member States are interested in cooperation with Afghanistan to strengthen peace and stability, through the further development of trade-economic and humanitarian ties as well as the implementation of regional and international economic projects in Afghanistan;

Expressing deep concerns over the transnational organized crimes and their impacts on regional economic development; *Reemphasizing* the need for early finalization of ECO relevant mechanisms on police, judicial and anti-corruption cooperation;

Realizing the need to enhance parliamentary dialogue and interaction under the umbrella of PAECO as an effective tool for helping secure ECO's socio-economic objectives; *Encouraging* the remaining Member States to sign/ratify the PAECO's Charter;

Emphasizing the need for augmenting scientific, industrial and technological cooperation amongst the Member States; *Underscoring* the contribution of ECO Specialized Agencies, Regional Institutions, Affiliated Bodies and Observers and their supportive role and activities for materializing multifaceted cooperation;

Endorsing the decisions and declarations made by all ECO Ministerial Meetings and other important high-level forums during 2023 and earlier, aimed at pursuing our mutual aims and objectives for greater economic integration in the region;

Supporting the normalization of inter-state relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia based on mutual recognition of/and respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity and inviolability of state borders; *Believing* that this development will pave the way for sustainable peace, social welfare and economic prosperity in the Caucasus Region through establishment of good-neighborly relations;

Have agreed to:

1. **Reconfirm** our commitment to implement Goals of ECO Vision 2025, including those related to enhancing cooperation in intra-regional connectivity, including trade, finance and investment, energy, tourism, food security, technology and innovation, protection of environment, disaster risk reduction capacity building, health, education and digitalization;
2. **Pursue** trade liberalization in the region by encouraging development of consensus, among interested Member States, through following the Implementation Framework envisioned in ECO Vision aimed at implementing ECOTA and expanding its coverage to a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) as specified in paragraph 6 of Ashgabat Consensus for Action and paragraph 3 of Tashkent Communiqué, aimed at, inter alia, improving trade facilitation by removing Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs), including reduction in cost/time of regional trade transactions in line with the international obligations of the Member States;
3. **Appreciate** the Republic of Azerbaijan for hosting the 9th Meeting of the ECO Council of Heads of Customs Administration and the 8th Meeting of Customs Transit Committee of Transit Transport Coordination Council in Baku, July 2023; **Task** the Secretariat to provide assistance in the implementation of ECO trade-related agreements/frameworks and organize, on an urgent basis, 5th ECO Ministerial meeting on Commerce and Foreign Trade, 9th ECOTA Cooperation Council Meeting and other relevant events/meetings for ensuring smooth accomplishment of the targets for trade liberalization, trade facilitation and trade promotion to boost the regional trade profile, aimed at its enforcement and subsequent benefits from the unexplored trade and investment potentials of the ECO region;
4. **Support** the initiative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to provide the modalities on Article 7 of the TTFA on combined and multimodal transport in the region; **Invite** the Member States to establish a mechanism for promoting multimodal transportation to supplement the region's contribution and diversity in global transportation;
5. **Recommend** the Member States to consider reduction in the costs of procedures at their border crossing points and introduce additional measure to ensure fast border crossing of goods and services for enhancing regional trade and connectivity; and in that regard welcome the Online Visa System (POVS) introduced by the Pakistan extended to multiple entries for one year with certain exemption to facilitate business and trade in ECO Region;

6. **Emphasize** the need to propagate green transport through applying recognized international procedures and best practices on transit and transport for intra and inter-regional smooth movement of goods, including through digitalization of processes, use of digital platforms/solutions and emerging technologies;
7. **Strengthen** interaction among the Member States in the implementation of the Five Years Action for the Development of Mountain Regions, adopted by the UN Resolution on Sustainable Mountain Development on December 14, 2022 at the initiative of the Kyrgyz Republic, as well as the joint work of the Organization with international financial institutions through the implementation of programs in the field of development of trade, improvement of transport and logistics infrastructure, attraction of investments, technologies and innovations, environmental protection, combating climate change, including the development of a green economy, green technologies, green energy, disaster prevention, popularization of culture and history, the nature of mountainous countries and tourism development, as well as through investing in projects in the field of sustainable development of mountainous regions;
8. **Welcome** the active implementation of the Digital Silk Way Project, which aims to create a new telecommunication backbone route between Europe and Asia by utilizing the existing capabilities/infrastructure of ECO countries;
9. **Pursue** the full implementation of the TTFA to facilitate the smooth operationalization of all ECO corridors; **Encourage** the Member States, who have yet to accede to the Agreement, to expedite their internal processes for accession to the TTFA; **Urge** all parties to the Agreement to adequately finance the TTFA Fund for ensuring smooth implementation of programs/projects within the envisaged framework;
10. **Support** the regional and global expansion of the ECO transport corridors for greater intra-and-inter-regional connectivity; **Task** the Secretariat to take necessary measures and collaborate with all stakeholders for increasing coordination, harmonizing practices, digitalizing documents and procedures, infrastructure development, logistic improvement and securing necessary finances aimed at ensuring maximum connectivity in the region through developing, improving and commercializing all ECO road and rail corridors;
11. **Welcome** the developments to establish transport and communication links between the Eastern Zangezur Economic Region and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of the Republic of Azerbaijan and in this regard; **Commend**

the Protocol of Intent between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Iran on the construction of a new railway line and railway bridges between the Eastern Zangezur Economic Region of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic passing through the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran signed on October 6, 2023 in Baku and subsequent ground breaking ceremony of a highway bridge, custom and border infrastructure held in Aghband settlement of Azerbaijan's Zangilan district on October 6, 2023 as part of implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Iran signed on March 11, 2022 to facilitate transport communication between the Eastern Zangezur Economic Region and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of the Republic of Azerbaijan through the territory of Iran;

12. **Commend** the joint efforts of the ECO Secretariat in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), aimed at developing transit and transport corridors in the region, including the Trans-Caspian East-West and North-South Corridors; the progress made on operationalization of the Trans-Caspian and Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul Corridors, and the endorsement of Terms of Reference of the Corridor Coordination Committee and 2023-2025 programme of work;

13. **Appreciate** the Islamic Republic of Iran to host the 3rd ECO Ministerial Meeting on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) held on July 13, 2023 at Tehran; **Emphasize** on the implementation of Tehran Declaration to raise the regional ICT cooperation and interaction in line with the emerging global ICT developments and trends;

14. **Welcome** the holding of the 12th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport in Tashkent, the Republic of Uzbekistan on November 1-2, 2023, and make every effort to further deepen regional cooperation in the transport and transit sphere;

15. **Support** the initiative of the Republic of Uzbekistan to establish an Inter-Regional Center for Connectivity in Uzbekistan under the auspices of the United Nations, which will facilitate the interconnectedness of the ECO Region with other regions of the world;

16. **Highlight** the ECO Regional Strategy for Information Society Development as a framework for cooperation towards building an inclusive information society in ECO Member States by 2025; **Recognize** that achieving this goal and implementing its Action Plan is incumbent on utilizing new and emerging ICT-related technologies;

17. **Urge** the Member States to make more concerted efforts for increasing energy security and sustainable energy development in the region, complementing the ECO Energy Strategy 2030; **Support** the operationalization of ECO Clean Energy Center by signing and ratification of its Charter; **Take necessary actions** towards the expeditious launching of ECO Regional Electricity Market;

18. **Invite** the Member States to enhance cooperation in the field of production, operations and distribution of crude oil, natural gas, petrochemical and petroleum products, expansion of energy transit by oil and gas pipelines, swap, with the aim of meeting the Region's energy requirements;

19. **Emphasize** the need for all stakeholders to maximize their efforts to establish and enhance cooperation with ECO Trade and Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank and other pertinent international financial institutions with a view to developing joint cooperation frameworks for ensuring additional resources for implementation of mutual oil and gas projects/activities and related studies in ECO Region;

20. **Reiterate** the need for strengthening cooperation amongst the ECO Member States on environment issue and further consolidate their joint efforts to launch global partnership on climate issue and actions and finance for resilience-building with increase investment to improve and develop strong and sustainable mechanism in the region; **Support** climate adaption and mitigation measures including the efforts for reducing carbon emissions, combating deforestation, glaciers preservation, promoting energy efficiency and renewables, sustainable agricultural practices, sustainable management of natural resources, and encouraging resource efficiency and circular economy, etc.;

21. **Recognize** the importance of provision of financial, technical, technological and capacity-building support to the ECO Member States by relevant international partners to develop their adaptive capacity on and implement all pillars of mitigation, adaptation, means of implementation, including measures for averting, minimizing, and addressing loss and damage, climate change policies and actions to meet certain challenges, including draught, flooding as well as supporting actions on health and wellbeing, food security, biodiversity conservation, global warming, etc.; **Invite** the relevant Ministers to attend ECO Informal Ministerial Meeting on environment and climate on the sidelines of the 28th UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP28) in Dubai on December 9, 2023;

22. **Welcome** the initiative of the Republic of Kazakhstan to host a Regional Climate Summit in 2026 under the United Nations and other international

organizations' auspices; Also welcome the initiatives of the Republic of Tajikistan to host the 3rd High Level Conference on Implementation of the Decade of Action "Water for Sustainable Development" in 2024 and the International Conference on Glaciers Preservation in 2025 aiming also to bring added value to the relevant areas of cooperation within ECO;

23. **Urge** for increased agricultural cooperation among the Member States focusing on regional food security and challenges through enhanced collaboration on implementation of ECO Regional Programme for Food Security (ECO-RPFS); **Facilitate** strong collaboration between the Member States and ECO Regional Institute for Standardization, Conformity Assessment, Accreditation and Metrology (ECO-RISCAM) for the promotion of desired quality management infrastructure and harmonization of standards in the region; **Encourage** the Member States to sign and ratify (except Afghanistan, Iran, Türkiye and Pakistan) the relevant Statute and Protocol;

24. **Encourage** the promotion of innovation and technology, exchange of experiences and knowledge sharing in order to ensure region's capacity-building in industrial sector especially in MSMEs, textiles, mining, energy oil, natural gas and petro-chemicals sectors to jack up regional economic growth; **Task** the Secretariat to facilitate organizing the 4th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Industry;

25. **Welcome** the Samarkand Declaration, the outcome document of the High Level International Conference on Food Security held in Samarkand on September 7-8, 2023 with the participation of the ECO Secretary General, aimed at developing agriculture in the most environmentally friendly way;

26. **Stress** an early implementation of the ECO Action Plan on Health for improving regional health services and development of medical sciences, as well as ECO Regional Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) through execution of the roadmap to prevent/meet the possible natural threats and challenges; and in this regard, **Welcome** the initiative of the Republic of Azerbaijan for hosting the 5th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Health in Geneva on the sidelines of WHO General Assembly on May 24, 2023; **Encourage** the Member States to organize related training programs/workshops on health, education and DRR with a view to share and exchange their relevant knowledge and expertise with each other in these important areas;

27. **Appreciate** the proclamation of Ardabil (Iran) as ECO Tourism Capital for 2023 and the successful organization of different tourism events in Ardabil, particularly the 5th ECO Ministerial Meeting with the significant outcomes on October 5, 2026; **Welcome** the selection of Shahrizabz (Uzbekistan), Erzurum

(Türkiye) and Shusha (Azerbaijan) as ECO Tourism Capitals for the years 2024, 2025 and 2026 respectively;

28. **Emphasize** an early implementation of the ECO Road Map on Facilitating Accelerated Recovery, Safe and Sustainable Development of Tourism after COVID-19 in the region to achieve an all-inclusive realization of the objectives of the Samarkand and Ardabil Declarations;

29. **Call** the Member States' attention and consideration to ensure early operationalization of the ECO Research Center (ECO-RC) in Baku; **Encourage** the non-signatory Member States to sign and ratify the Charter of the ECO-RC to make the Center fully and inclusively functional;

30. **Urge** the Member States to accelerate the process of establishment/operationalization of the ECO Regional Center for the Cooperation of Anti-Corruption Agencies and Ombudsmen (RCCACO), Economic Cooperation Organization Police (ECOPOL), as well as an effective mechanism for judicial cooperation/legal assistance in the region, which will contribute to the security, sustainability and economic growth of the Member States;

31. **Emphasize** the Member States (except Azerbaijan, Iran, Kyrgyz Republic, Türkiye and Kazakhstan) to sign and ratify the Charter of the Asian Ombudsman Association (AOA) headed by Federal Ombudsman of Pakistan; **Foster** cooperation among ombudsman institutions in the ECO region to realize the ultimate goals of Good Governance, Rule of Law, Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom directly bearing the objectives of RCCACO; **Appreciate** the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for virtually hosting the First General Assembly Meeting of the State Parties to the ECO-RCCACO on September 21, 2023;

32. **Praise** the ECO Secretariat to continue deepening Organization's relations with the United Nations and other relevant regional and international institutions as well as with its Observers; **Welcome** the renewed biennial United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/77/330 entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Economic Cooperation Organization adopted by United Nations General Assembly in its 77th Session on August 25, 2023;

33. **Welcome** the outcomes of 25th ECO Informal COM and 15th ECO-ASEAN Joint Ministerial Meeting (s) held on September 21 and 22, 2023, respectively in New York on the sidelines of the 78th Session of UNGA under the Chairmanship of the Republic of Azerbaijan;

34. **Urge** the Member States to vigorously engage with all ECO Specialized Agencies making them more vibrant and financially independent through their comprehensive membership by all ECO countries; **Commend** the ECO Cultural Institute (ECI), ECO Educational Institute (ECOEI) and ECO Science Foundation (ECOSF) for organizing various events, programs and activities to further consolidate cooperation in pertinent areas in the ECO Region;

35. **Call** the High-Level Committee of ECO Deputy Foreign Ministers for meeting in 2024 to be held at ECO Secretariat, Tehran to finalize the review process of the ECO Vision 2025, ascertaining appropriate recommendations for the possible extension of the implementation period of this policy document;

36. **Extend** deep gratitude to the Republic of Azerbaijan and honorable Foreign Minister of the country for exquisitely chairing the ECO in 2023, meaningful and result-based proposals for further improvement of the Organization during its Chairmanship, hosting the 27th Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers (COM) and making excellent arrangements to facilitate the visiting delegation in the beautiful city of Shusha;

37. **Welcome** the upcoming 16th ECO Summit in Tashkent, Uzbekistan on November 9, 2023, which will further consolidate our interaction and give a new powerful impetus to deepening regional ties;

38. **Congratulate** the Islamic Republic of Iran as next ECO Chair; **Express** our best wishes for greater success of the Organization during the country's chairmanship in 2024;

39. **Acknowledge**, with deep appreciation, the facilitative assistance rendered by distinguished ECO Secretary General and the members of his efficient team at the Secretariat in connection with ensuring smooth preparations and successful organization of this 27th Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers (COM) in Shusha, Azerbaijan.
