

**Address by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan
H.E. Shavkat Mirziyoyev at the 16th Summit of
Economic Cooperation Organization**

**Distinguished heads of delegations!
Esteemed secretary general!
Dear participants of the summit!**

I am delighted to see you at the Summit of the Economic Cooperation Organization.

Welcome to Uzbekistan!

Today's top-level meeting is a vivid testimony of our strong commitment to expand multilateral cooperation for the benefit of common development.

Nowadays the world's political architecture is indeed changing in front of our eyes and its global transformation is underway.

It is crucially important for member states of our Organization, which have their important place in these complex processes, to act together in unity and seek for effective solutions to emerging challenges and threats.

During our Summit under the slogan "**Through Cooperation to Economic Stability and Development**", we will have a detailed discussion with you, my distinguished colleagues, on how to take our multilateral relations to a new level and address the most topical issues.

I would like to express my special gratitude to all of you for your participation in today's event and for your great contribution to the development of our mutually beneficial relations.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to the **President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev** on his successful chairmanship in our Organization.

A series of events and initiatives that took place as part of the "**Year of Green Transition and Connectivity**" under Azerbaijan's Chairmanship have made a significant contribution to the expansion of our practical partnership.

We fully support the plans and objectives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which assumes the chairmanship of our Organization for the next year, to deepen cooperation through the facilitation of regional trade.

Dear colleagues!

Now, with your permission, I will take the floor first as the host of the Summit.

Dear participants of the summit!

We successfully held the 15th Summit of our Organization in Ashgabat precisely two years ago.

The important decisions adopted at our meeting in Turkmenistan gave a fresh perspective to the activities of our Organization.

A systemic work is underway to transform the Organization to increase its efficiency and international profile.

In particular, I would like to highlight the importance of the **Tashkent Declaration** adopted by our Ministers of Transport.

A practical work is underway to set up a Clean Energy Center in Baku and a regional electricity market.

A high-level Dialogue platform for ecology has been established.

In order to further expand cooperation in tourism a network of the Organization's tour operators has been set up and the Safe Tourism Program has been approved for the first time ever.

Distinguished heads of delegations!

The member-states of Organization are closely linked by common history and the holy religion of Islam, and they share rich culture and similar values. Our vast region, which is home to half a billion people, has a great potential for developing cooperation in trade, economy, industry, investment, innovation and transport.

According to the analysis, our economies are maintaining stable growth rates despite the global crisis.

You are all well aware that in recent years Uzbekistan is implementing irreversible reforms.

Our priority is to liberalize the economy and improve the living standards and prosperity of our people.

Over the past six years the GDP of New Uzbekistan has increased one and a half times. By 2030 we seek to double this indicator.

We intend to achieve this target primarily by creating "green" economy and a modern infrastructure, providing incentives to the private sector, creating new jobs, and actively attracting foreign investment.

In this regard, we are ready for effective cooperation with all member-states of our Organization, which have their own voice and prestige in the international arena.

As the economies of our close and good neighborly countries can complement one another. Common trade and transport corridors as well as energy networks inextricably connect our countries.

We certainly will achieve significant results in the future by finding together new "points of growth".

Dear participants of the summit!

Uzbekistan is in favor of summarizing the implementation of the ECO Vision- 2025, the framework document of our Organization.

We believe that it is high time for developing the "**Strategic Objectives of Economic Cooperation-2035**". This conceptual document will define the

future priority areas of engagement for our Organization, building on a thorough analysis of the enormous and still untapped opportunities.

This important document will highlight the following main areas.

First. Promotion of mutual trade.

Last year, the trade turnover between our countries totaled \$85 billion.

This represents only 8% of the total foreign trade of the Organization's member-states.

Regrettably, the years of efforts to develop a preferential trade agreement have not delivered the expected results.

There are still many restrictions and problems to barrier-free trade.

We must openly admit this and take a new perspective to turn the situation into a positive shift.

In this regard, I would like to encourage for the adoption of the **ECO's Trade Facilitation Agreement** developed by our experts.

This document shall focus on the following:

- facilitation of trade in goods and services;
- removal of technical and non-tariff barriers;
- digitalization of customs, phytosanitary, and veterinary procedures;
- development of electronic commerce.

According to preliminary estimates, these measures will enable reaching at least a twofold growth in mutual trade by 2035.

Second. Strengthening transport and communication connectivity.

The majority of the member states are landlocked.

In addition, we need to fully utilize the potential of transcontinental transport corridors that pass through our territories and link us with major markets in the Asia-Pacific region, South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.

The launch of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan and Trans-Afghan multimodal roads in the coming future meets the interests of all member states.

I also encourage other members to join the document, adopted at the meeting of transport ministers held on November 2, 2023 in Tashkent on the development of **“Uzbekistan - Turkmenistan-Iran–Turkiye” Transport Corridor**, and optimize mutual tariffs and fees.

It is worth noting that Uzbekistan has digitized freight documents with Azerbaijan and Turkiye and is implementing similar projects with other countries.

I propose to establish ECO's **Digital Transport and Customs Office in Tashkent** in order to widely implement and effectively coordinate these modern systems.

Third. Promotion of industrial cooperation and business ties, forming industrial hubs.

We have developed the **Program of Joint Actions** to increase the flow of mutual investments, ensure their protection, and deepen industrial cooperation. The document has been submitted to the Secretariat of the Organization.

The Program seeks to promote new joint projects in the fields of chemistry, energy, geology, textiles, leather, footwear, food, pharmaceuticals, and construction.

We wish to expand our partnership with the **ECO Trade and Development Bank** for this noble cause.

The **Fifth Business Forum**, which was held yesterday in Tashkent and attended by heads of chambers of commerce and industry and many of our companies clearly demonstrated the great potential we have in the private sector.

We propose to establish within ECO an **Interregional Industrial Exhibition** and hold its first event in Uzbekistan in 2024.

Fourth. Ensuring guaranteed energy security.

The harmonization of national energy strategies, the development of interregional energy transmission networks, and the widespread introduction of “green” energy technologies are becoming increasingly important.

We are carrying out an extensive work on the development of renewable energy sources, which is one of the main directions of Organization’s Energy Cooperation Strategy.

By 2030, we seek to create 25 gigawatts of renewable energy sources and increase the share of renewables in our energy mix to 40%. This year alone, we are launching 2 gigawatts of large wind and solar power plants.

We are also taking the initial steps in green hydrogen production. We are ready for open dialogue and exchange of experience with all countries in these areas.

We propose to establish a new **Council of Ministers of Energy** within the Organization to thoroughly discuss issues of cooperation and conduct systemic work.

Fifth. The intensification of our contacts in addressing climate change and environmental protection.

Today, our countries are facing the serious consequences of these acute problems.

The melting of glaciers, water scarcity, desertification, dust storms, soil erosion and the loss of biodiversity are causing serious concerns.

I would like to extend my gratitude to all countries for supporting our initiative to establish a **High-level Dialogue Platform for Ecology** within the Organization.

We are ready to organize its first meeting as part of the Samarkand Climate Forum in 2024.

In addition, we invite your representatives to take an active part in the committee meeting to review the assessment of implementation of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification in our country the following week.

I urge you to support the Samarkand Declaration to combat sand and dust storms, which are becoming a growing problem.

Sixth. Enhancing cooperation in the tourism sector.

The General Assembly of the UN World Tourism Organization recently held in Samarkand with the participation of more than 140 countries has become a historic event in attracting the attention of the world to the tourism potential of our region.

Today, the countries of the Organization accommodate – 90 UNESCO World Heritage sites, and nearly 80 million tourists visit our countries annually. Given the fact that cross-border routes are becoming increasingly popular, I propose to introduce **Joint Tourist Routes** and increase **joint tourist programs within the “Silk Road” Tourism Brand**.

I would like to propose to establish a new **Consultative Committee on Tourism** under the Secretariat of the Organization, consisting of tourism departments and leading specialists of the member states. We are ready to host its first meeting next year in the city of Shakhrisabz, declared the tourism capital of our Organization.

Furthermore, I invite member states to take advantage of the opportunities of the **International Tourism Academy** of the World Tourism Organization, opened in Samarkand.

Seventh. Bringing our peoples together through deepening cultural and humanitarian cooperation.

The annual organization of **Culture, Arts and Cinema Weeks** in our countries, the establishment of **Creative Youth Festivals** and **Innovative Cooperation Platform**, and the strengthening of mutual cooperation in fundamental scientific areas will effectively promote our relations.

Distinguished participants of the summit!

The Israeli-Palestinian war in the Middle East, which poses a serious threat to global peace and security, is of great concern to all of us.

Regrettably, it is the civilian population, particularly women, children, and the elderly, who suffer the most and become victims of these violent conflicts.

The risk of war spreading throughout the region is becoming increasingly real.

The conflict must not be allowed to escalate into a large-scale war.

We urge both sides to cease fire, start peace negotiations and come to a reasonable compromise.

We once again reiterate our firm position on the Palestinian people's right to have their own state, as confirmed by the UN resolutions.

In addition, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that Afghanistan, which is a member of our Organization, is absent in today's summit.

In the face of complex challenges, we cannot abandon the multiethnic people of Afghanistan, who have been our close neighbors for centuries.

It is imperative that we actively engage this country in the process of regional integration as a necessary condition for our sustainable development.

I urge you all to increase humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people and address the profound social and economic problems through collective responsibility and effective mechanisms.

Dear colleagues!

In conclusion, I would like to underline my confidence that today's historic summit and its outcomes will transform our Organization into an efficient and impactful structure and raise our multilateral partnership to new heights.

Thank you for your attention.