



REPORT

**of the 7th ECO Working Group
Meeting on the Environment**

20 November 2023
ECO Secretariat (Hybrid Mode)

Report

1. The 7th ECO Working Group Meeting on the Environment was held in hybrid mode under the Chairmanship of the Republic of Türkiye on 20 November 2023 in ECO Secretariat, Tehran. The meeting was attended by the delegates from the Republic of Azerbaijan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Tajikistan, Republic of Türkiye, Turkmenistan and Republic of Uzbekistan, as well as ECO Secretariat and ECO Institute of Environmental Science and Technology (ECO-IEST). *The List of Participants is attached as Annex-I.*

Agenda Item No. 1

Inauguration of the Meeting

2. ECO Director for Energy, Minerals and Environment (EME), Dr. Fuad Farzalibeyov made an opening statement. In his address, he expressed his confidence that the Working Group would revive the momentum of cooperation within ECO in the field of environment after a long gap in view of ever-increasing importance of environment and climate change in global agenda, which should proactively be grasped by ECO. He briefed the audience about the recent developments and a follow-up of decisions and recommendations of the previous sectoral ECO meetings on environment. Most notably, EME Director highlighted the announcement of 2023 as the ECO Year of Green Transition and Interconnectivity, elaboration and consideration of the ECO Cooperation Framework on the Environment and its annexes, establishment of the ECO High-Level Dialogue Platform on Environmental Cooperation, as well as the progress in outreach engagements of the Secretariat. The Director further emphasized the importance of the Regional Initiative on Resource Efficiency, Sustainability, and Circular Economy in the ECO Region (RESCUE), initiated by the ECO Secretariat in partnership with the Chairmanship of Azerbaijan in ECO. He stressed that ECO Secretariat had been resolved to assist Member States as a platform for information exchange and networking for program support. *A copy of the statement is enclosed as Annex-II.*

Agenda Item No. 2

Election of the Chairman

3. Mr. Ali Küçümen, Head of Section of the General Directorate of Combating Desertification of the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change of the Republic of Türkiye was unanimously elected as the Chairperson of the meeting.

Agenda Item No. 3

Adoption of the Agenda

4. The Meeting considered and unanimously adopted its agenda.

Agenda Item No. 4

Preparation for the Informal Ministerial Meeting on Environment, to be held on 9 December 2023 on the sidelines of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 28 of UNFCCC)

5. EME Director emphasized the significance of convening the Informal Ministerial Meeting on Environment at a critical moment of negative consequences of multiple complex global crises. In this vein, Azerbaijan's initiative to host this meeting under the title "Accelerating the Transition Towards a Resource Efficient, Sustainable and Circular ECO Region" is more than pertinent and highly appreciated. The meeting is expected to galvanize ambitious plans and speed up actions on regional environmental and climate action. The meeting may review and endorse the "ECO Cooperation Framework on Environment" and its work programs for the new multi-annual period till 2030. It can also collectively reaffirm that addressing climate change and overcoming its impacts remains a top priority on our regional agenda.

6. EME Director further pointed out that the meeting will provide an opportunity for open exchanges between Ministers and other stakeholders. The engagement of the UN System, major international organizations, entities and conventions with environmental profile as well as other international partners attending COP28 will help to secure tangible and more ambitious outcomes. While emphasizing the significance of the active participation of the Member States at the Informal Ministerial Meeting on the Environment, he also stated that ECO Secretariat has so far received two official confirmations of participation and requested other Member States to expedite this process.

7. Head of Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan highlighted the need in revisiting the regional cooperation in environment and transforming it into a more fruitful platform for addressing environment, climate change, resource-efficiency, sustainable circular practices and other related issues. She expressed hope that the topic of sustainable circular practices would be acceptable for all stakeholders and encourage international partners to be involved in these endeavours as well. She further apprised the participants of the details of the initiative of Azerbaijan to host the Informal Ministerial Meeting on 9 December 2023 on the sidelines of COP28 in Dubai. While briefing the meeting on the preparatory activities for this Informal Ministerial Meeting, she called upon all Member States to speed up their confirmation process to ensure the success of this event.

8. The representative from the Islamic Republic of Iran while appreciating the efforts for revitalizing environmental cooperation within ECO through sectoral events, inquired additional organizational and logistical details about the Informal Ministerial Meeting on Environment, notably its exact time, venue and agenda. He requested to communicate this information to the Member States as early as possible so that they can participate in this important event.

9. The Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan recalled that the meeting will tentatively be held in the Pavilion of Azerbaijan in COP28 venue on 9 December from 11:00 to 13:00. She also stated that Azerbaijan was finalizing the agenda and other details of the meeting, which will be circulated to all Member States in due course.

Agenda Item No. 5

Consideration of the draft ECO Cooperation Framework on the Environment (2023-2030) and its annexes:

- I. Work Program on Climate Change in ECO Region (2023-2030)**
- II. Work Program on Biodiversity in ECO Region (2023-2030)**
- III. Draft Roadmap for implementation of the first phase of ECO Landcare Initiative**

10. Under this agenda item, the Head of the Institute for Environmental Science and Technology (ECO-IEST), Dr. Asghar Fazel provided a briefing on the ECO Cooperation Framework on the Environment (2023-2030) and its annexes. He reiterated that the framework was developed to pave the way for strengthening environmental cooperation in the ECO region. He further highlighted the complexity of the framework, which led to some constructive ambiguity in objectives and activities. The framework was divided into different parts, including environmental management, human and natural environment, resources, air pollution, water quality, forest ecosystem observation, environmental economy, and sustainable natural resources. There were nine sub-items under the global warming climate change sector. The financial resources for implementation were missing from the original version of the work program. The annexes of the framework provide a general roadmap for the human environment without going into technical details.

11. The meeting was then focused on discussing the draft ECO Cooperation Framework on the Environment and its Annexes, and participants shared their perspectives on the matter. The Iranian delegate specifically referred to the second annex on biodiversity and pointed out that her delegation had some views on this draft and needed a few days to share them.

12. The ECO Secretariat clarified that the subject documents have been submitted to the Member States in 2022 for seeking their views and comments, when the 6th Ministerial Meeting on Environment was due to be held in the Kyrgyz Republic. At that stage, the

Republic of Türkiye was the only Member State that shared some views specifically on the third annex on Landcare Initiative. Since the 6th Ministerial Meeting was not held at the scheduled venue and time, the ECO Secretariat expressed hope that after consideration of those documents by this Working Group, they could be submitted to the Informal Ministerial Meeting on 9 December for possible endorsement or adoption by the Honourable Ministers.

13. The representative of Azerbaijan emphasized the importance of the ECO Cooperation Framework, which could serve as a long-term strategy in the ECO Region in terms of environmental concerns and cooperation. She added that its endorsement by all ECO Members would be appropriate, as it envisages the promotion of environmental cooperation and covers key indicators and issues including climate change. There are relevant platforms as UNFCCC, UNCCD, and CBD Secretariats that can be further approached and interacted with in future with the aim of promoting the implementation of this document. She therefore recommended that this document be endorsed at the Informal Ministerial Meeting on Environment.

14. The representatives from the Member States have not expressed any objection with respect to endorsement of the ECO Cooperation Framework at the Informal Ministerial Meeting on Environment on 9 December 2023.

Agenda Item No. 6

High-Level Dialogue Platform on Environmental Cooperation: deliberation on the way forward

15. The participants engaged in a detailed discussion with respect to the recently established High-Level Dialogue Platform on Environmental Cooperation, initiated by the Republic of Uzbekistan. The Representatives of the Republic of Uzbekistan informed the participants that the platform is open to all stakeholders, primarily scientists and scholars who are specialized in environmental ecology, combating desertification, climate and other related fields. They requested ECO Member Countries to nominate their representative for this Platform. The goal of the Platform is to find solutions to environmental problems, particularly desertification, by collaborating and sharing knowledge, to explore ways to enhance cooperation on environmental issues in the ECO region, identify the priority areas for action, and determine the scope of regional collaboration. They pointed out that the initiator would welcome any feedback or comments regarding the Platform. They further informed the participants that the Government of Uzbekistan was considering to convene the first meeting of the High-Level Dialogue Platform on Environmental Cooperation within the framework of the upcoming Samarkand Climate Forum in March/April 2024. In this regard, EME Director requested the Delegation of Uzbekistan to reflect/include the aforementioned meeting in the Calendar of Events for 2024, to be adopted in the forthcoming Regional Planning Council Meeting, to be held on 18-21 December 2023 in ECO Secretariat

16. In the course of discussions, the Representatives of Uzbekistan shed light on certain questions by the hall. It was clarified that in order to refrain from any overlapping or duplication, this platform will play an advisory role to the decision-making bodies and sectoral platforms of the Organization in the field of the environment. Overall, it is considered as a constructive scientific forum for exploring ways to promote environmental sustainability in the ECO Region.

Agenda Item No. 7

Exchange of views on the Regional Initiative on Resource Efficiency, Sustainability and Circular Economy in the ECO Region (RESCUE)

21. The consideration of the Regional Initiative on Resource Efficiency, Sustainability, and Circular Economy in the ECO Region (RESCUE) is sought to be one of the key agenda items of the Informal Ministerial Meeting on Environment, to be held on 9 December 2023. Under this agenda item, the EME Director delivered a comprehensive presentation on RESCUE, jointly initiated by the ECO Secretariat and the Chairmanship of Azerbaijan in ECO. He briefed that this Regional Initiative is aimed at contributing to a just transition to a resource-efficient, circular, and regenerative economy, and at advocacy for more sustainable management of natural resources.

22. EME Director stressed that given the ever-increasing prioritization of the subject thematic in the global agenda, its regional uptake could gain strong support by the relevant international stakeholders. This ambition may demonstrate the solidarity of countries of ECO Region, which predominantly endowed with hydrocarbon or other mineral resources and traditionally pursue linear economic model policies to change the established stereotypes. These countries may thus position themselves as proponents of just and innovative transition to circularity in international arena. The Concept Paper of the initiative, which was submitted to the Member States on 8 October 2023 is open for enrichment by them. The Member States welcomed the initiative and uptake of the relevant topics on ECO's agenda. *A copy of the presentation is attached at Annex-III.*

Agenda Item No. 8

Exchange of views on the National Progress Reports on Environment

23. Under this agenda item, the significance of the National Progress Reports (NPRs) was highlighted by the ECO Secretariat for having a reliable image of state of environment in the region and identifying opportunities and challenges for environmental cooperation in the region. Driven by the mandate received from the ECO Regional Planning Council (RPC), the Secretariat requested all Member States in 2023 to submit their NPRs for the year 2022. So far, only the Republic of Azerbaijan has shared

this report with the ECO Secretariat. The Secretariat thus requested other Member States to submit their NPRs as well, emphasizing the importance of these reports on an annual basis. These reports can facilitate and contribute to providing all stakeholders with a comprehensive image of the latest environmental status in the ECO Region, and determining priority areas for action and regional collaboration. ECO Secretariat can support the Member States in submission of the NPRs in a unified format/template.

Agenda Item No. 9

Date and venue of the 8th ECO Working Group Meeting on Environment

24. It was proposed that the ECO Secretariat would ascertain the consent of Member States for hosting the 8th Meeting of Working Group for Environment through diplomatic channels.

Agenda Item No. 10

Any other business

25. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran highlighted the importance of organizing sectoral events on environment on a regular basis. He emphasized the significance of addressing issues related to the environment and climate change and called upon all participants of the meeting to work towards this goal. The proposal put forth by the Iranian side was unanimously shared by all participants, including the ECO Secretariat. It was reiterated that more concerted efforts are required to effectively tackle the challenges posed by climate change and protect the environment.

26. The ECO Secretariat briefed the meeting participants on some of its recent communications and interactions with different environmental agencies and entities, including the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat (UNFFS), and the Executive Secretariats of the three Rio Convention including on the sidelines of COP27 in Sharm el Sheikh. Taking into account the observer status of the ECO Secretariat within these international entities, it was clarified that further involvement and engagement of the ECO Member States that are Parties to these entities are key to paving the way for a robust regional partnership on the environment. A strong and unitary voice from the ECO region is required to enhance environmental cooperation, particularly with the United Nations environmental agencies and entities.

Agenda Item No. 11

Closing Remarks

27. The Chairman and ECO Secretariat delivered their closing remarks and vote of thanks. The EME Director expressed his hope that the Working Group meeting could streamline ways and mechanisms for regional cooperation. The engagement of participants contributed to the meeting's success, and the chairman was thanked for his leadership. Lastly, appreciation was expressed to the ECO colleagues, translators, and all those who attended the meeting.

Annex-I

List of Participants

Republic of Azerbaijan

- Ms. Aysel Rzayeva, Head of Section, International Cooperation Department, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources
- Mr. Orkhan Bayramov, Consultant, International Cooperation Department, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan

Islamic Republic of Iran

- Ms. Maryam Rohani, Advisor to the Deputy for Natural Environment, Department of Environment
- Mr. Behzad Azarsa, Senior Expert, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Mr. Ali Ansari, Head, International Environmental Organizations, Department of Environment
- Mr. Asghar Mobaraki, Expert, Department of Environment
- Ms. Shokoufeh Shadi, Expert, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Republic of Kazakhstan

- Ms. Shattyk Tastemirova, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Kyrgyz Republic

- Ms. Aizhan Sharshenaliyeva, Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology and Technical Supervision of the Kyrgyz Republic

Republic of Tajikistan

- Mr. Sukhrob Irgashev, Head of Department, Implementation of CBD Convention and Protocols, National Biodiversity and Biosafety Centre
- Mr. Khisravshokh Shermatov, Director of the National Centre on Environmental Protection Actions, Committee for Environmental Protection under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan

Republic of Türkiye

- Mr. Ali Küçümen, Head of Section, General Directorate of Combating Desertification and Erosion, Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change of the Republic of Türkiye,

Turkmenistan

- Mr. Mergen Yusupov, Deputy Head, Department on Coordination of the International Environmental Cooperation and Projects, Ministry of Environment Protection of Turkmenistan

Republic of Uzbekistan

- Mr. Farrukh Sattarov, Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan
- Mr. Bobur Mahmudov
- Ms. Sayyora Abdullaeva

Institute for Environmental Sciences and Technology

- Dr. Ali Asghar Mohammadi Fazel, Head of Institute

ECO Secretariat

- Dr. Fuad Farzalibeyov, ECO Director for Energy, Minerals and Environment
- Mr. Morteza Khansari Bozorgi, Program Officer
- Mr. Naimat Ullah, Desk Officer

**Statement by Dr. Fuad Farzalibeyov,
Director for Energy, Minerals and Environment of the ECO Secretariat
at the 7th ECO Working Group Meeting on Environment**

(20 November 2023, ECO Secretariat (hybrid mode))

**Dear Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Today, environmental cooperation is a necessity rather than a choice for the ECO Region. Needless to say, our region is prone to environmental challenges and extreme climate conditions more than ever before. These challenges negatively affect the economic and social welfare of our people.

The ECO has declared 2023 as the year of “Green Transition and Interconnectivity” in the region. The ECO High-Level Dialogue Platform on Environmental Cooperation has recently been established. We had certain proactive engagements with our international partners in the field of environment to expand our outreach. Furthermore, we expect the ECO Ministerial Meeting on Environment in December on the sidelines of the UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai.

Notwithstanding all these positive developments, we must confess that in order to deliver on the environment, collective and concerted actions by all the ECO Member States are required beyond and above creating new bodies and platforms. We need a whole-of-government approach rooted in a solid political will, as well as a whole-of-society approach combined with adequate means of implementation, including proportionate financial and technical resources for such a purpose, which are missing at the current stage. It is quite significant that the ECO Member States pave the way to further mainstream the environment and climate resilience in development planning, programming, and budgeting nationally and across the region.

The resource-intensive growth has caused serious damage to many natural ecosystems in our region leading to environmental degradation and climate disruption. This pattern will probably lead us sooner or later to reconsider policies that decouple economic growth from environmental degradation at some point. With this in mind, the ECO Secretariat in partnership with the Chairmanship of Azerbaijan in ECO has elaborated the Regional Initiative on Resource Efficiency, Sustainability and Circular Economy in the ECO Region. This initiative aims at contributing to a just transition to a resource-efficient, circular and regenerative economy, and advocacy for more sustainable management of natural resources.

It is obvious that stronger regional cooperation and solidarity are imperative to protect our common environment, for which we really need to collectively reflect on where the region stands in terms of addressing environmental issues. In other words, we need the National Progress Reports (NPRs) provided by the Member States on an annual basis with a view to design and regularly reshape our regional roadmap. Meanwhile, we encourage more active involvement of the related institutions of our Member States in the ECO network. This is needed even for working closely with relevant international partners to find better solutions for shared environmental concerns and improve our environmental performance.

As you are well aware, the environment and impacts of climate change have been designated as a cross-sectoral priority of the Organization. We may scale up investments in environmental education and capacity building in our countries. Our region can be at the heart of a renewable future. We have to promote investment and innovative technologies in order to position our region as a forerunner in the global transition to green development.

As a prerequisite, we need a framework and clear road map to define and make our regional priorities as concrete as possible. We know that ECO is not quite a homogeneous coalition, so it cannot be expected to put together common positions on a wide range of environmental issues. However, Member States can define common grounds or niches in the areas where they really strive to make progress and strengthen regional capacities. They may reach consensus on priorities for climate action, biodiversity conservation, and addressing land degradation. This is why the new ECO Cooperation Framework on the Environment and its annexes are quite significant.

Driven by such consensus, we can develop a more networked, inclusive, and effective ECO for environmental action and SDG acceleration. In such a context, we can further work together to accelerate the energy transition, green the rides, adapt to a riskier future, make finance available where it matters the most, and lock in higher ambition.

ECO Secretariat can assist Member States as a platform for information exchange and networking for program support that could serve to motivate further scaling up on the ground. But without an appropriate, functioning policy or enabling environment at the national level, there are huge limits to the environmental support that a regional organization can provide.

The ECO Secretariat reiterates its resolve to facilitate environmental cooperation among the Member States so as to enhance the resilience of our region and promote the regional and global environmental agenda.

Thank you for your attention.