

Summary
**First Meeting of the ECO High-Level Dialogue Platform on
Environmental Cooperation (HLDPE)**

Astana, 23 April 2026

The First Meeting of the High-Level Dialogue Platform on Environmental Cooperation (HLDPE) of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) was held on 23 April 2026 in Astana. The meeting was chaired by the Republic of Uzbekistan and **marked the formal launch of the HLDPE as a structured and inclusive regional mechanism** aimed at advancing environmental cooperation across the ECO region.

The meeting was attended by ministers and senior officials from **ECO Member States**, including **Mr. Yerlan Nyssanbayev**, Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan; **Mr. Akyl Toktobaev**, Minister of Natural Resources, Ecology and Technical Supervision of the Kyrgyz Republic; **Mr. Bakhodur Sheralizoda**, Chairman of the Committee on Environmental Protection under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan; **Mr. Ovezgeldi Goshdzhanov**, Minister of Environmental Protection of Turkmenistan and **Mr. Aziz Abdukhakimov**, Advisor to the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and Chairman of the National Committee on Ecology and Climate Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The meeting was also attended by **Dr. Asad M. Khan**, Secretary-General of the Economic Cooperation Organization, as well as representatives of the ECO Secretariat.

Statements were delivered by the above dignitaries and international partners, including **Mr. Viorel Gutu**, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Europe and Central Asia of the FAO, **Ms. Aidai Kurmanova**, Head of the Central Asia Office of the UNEP, and **Ms. Akiko Fujii**, Resident Representative of the UNDP. Representatives of the scientific community, including Green University, also participated in the meeting.

Participants recognized that the ECO region faces **a range of complex, interrelated and predominantly transboundary environmental challenges**, including air, water and soil pollution, sand and dust storms, land degradation, biodiversity loss and the impacts of climate change. These challenges were noted to have **significant implications for public health, ecosystems, economic development and regional stability**, underscoring the need for **enhanced regional cooperation and coordinated responses**.

The HLDPE was broadly positioned as **a platform to facilitate strategic dialogue, promote exchange of national experiences and best**

practices and support policy alignment. Participants emphasized its role as **an intellectual and policy-oriented forum contributing to the ECO ministerial process.**

There was general convergence on the importance of **strengthening science-based and data-driven approaches**, including enhanced monitoring systems, integration of research and development of regional analytical tools. Particular attention was given to **improving early warning systems for sand and dust storms through joint monitoring and data sharing.**

Participants highlighted the importance of **moving from dialogue towards practical cooperation.** In this regard, proposals were noted regarding **the establishment of thematic working groups, development of joint programmes and mobilization of financial and technical resources.**

Air quality and sand and dust storms were identified as a **central regional priority**, with proposals to develop a region-wide air quality monitoring system and an **integrated sand and dust storms early warning system**, potentially extending beyond Central Asia to the wider ECO region.

The meeting included the announcement and recognition of emerging practical cooperation initiatives, including the **Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan clean air consortium** as a model for addressing transboundary pollution and scaling regional action.

Key thematic areas for continued cooperation include **pollution control, climate change mitigation and adaptation, land degradation and desertification, sustainable land and water management, biodiversity and ecosystems** (*Aral Sea, Caspian Sea, mountain systems*) **and circular economy approaches.**

The discussion also highlighted emerging regional initiatives, including proposals related to **transboundary afforestation programmes** such as “Green Shield of Central Asia,” **cooperation on desert ecosystem management** and the use of scientific and educational platforms as hubs for research, innovation and capacity building.

In this context, participants noted proposals to **strengthen regional scientific and innovation cooperation** by leveraging existing institutions, including the Research Institute for Combating Desertification and Desert Economy in Tashkent, as a shared platform for research, data exchange and capacity building in addressing desertification and land degradation. Opportunities to promote **academic and scientific exchange** were also

noted, including through research residencies, engagement of international researchers and educational programmes, including at Green University.

Participants emphasized the importance of **linking environmental sustainability with socio-economic priorities**, including agriculture, food security, employment and resilience.

The role of international partners (UNEP, FAO, UNDP and others) was recognized as **critical for providing data, expertise, capacity building and access to global best practices**.

There was general agreement on the need to **develop an indicative roadmap for the HLDPE**, including priorities, modalities, and follow-up mechanisms.

Participants noted the importance of **enhancing coordination of the ECO region's engagement in global environmental processes and platforms**.

The meeting confirmed strong interest among Member States in further developing practical cooperation under the HLDPE framework. In this regard, participants noted the forthcoming **6th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Environment**, to be held on **3rd June 2026 in Samarkand**, as an important opportunity to advance agreed priorities and translate the outcomes of the present dialogue into concrete initiatives.