

Statement by H.E. Mr. Jeyhun Bayramov
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan
28th Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers
3 December 2024, Mashhad, Iran

Mr. Chairman,
Honorable Ministers,
Distinguished Secretary General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I extend my sincere gratitude to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and His Excellency Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Seyed Abbas Araghchi for their able guidance during their Chairmanship and for the warm hospitality extended to us.

This meeting provides us with a valuable opportunity to reflect on the progress we have made since our last gathering, which Azerbaijan was privileged to host on 10 October 2023 in the historic city of Shusha. It also allows us to assess our current needs within the Organization and to plan joint activities that will strengthen cooperation among ECO Member States.

Dear colleagues,

The countries of the ECO region are bound with deep cultural ties and possess immense economic potential, creating a strong foundation for developing cooperation in various areas of mutual interest. To achieve tangible results that meets the needs of our Member States, we must focus on priority areas of cooperation, taking into account the unique advantages of our region.

Effective implementation of the ECO Vision 2025 is crucial for reaching our shared objectives. We reaffirm our commitment to the goals outlined in ECO Vision 2025 and look forward to developing a new strategic document that will set fresh targets for addressing the current and emerging challenges our region faces. This will align us with the global agenda and advance our progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

We also attach high importance to institutional development of the ECO to better facilitate cooperation among the member states in areas of mutual interest. ECO Secretariat plays an indispensable role in promoting interaction among Member States and their respective authorities.

We welcome the establishment of the ECO High-Level Committee at the level of deputy foreign ministers. This new cooperation mechanism is expected to enhance the effectiveness of the Organization, enabling it to better respond to the needs of the Member States.

Partnerships within ECO specialized agencies are essential for developing sector-specific dialogue in line with the Organization's cooperation agenda.

We are proud that Azerbaijan will host two ECO Specialized Agencies—the ECO Research Center and the ECO Clean Energy Center. These institutions will provide additional impetus for achieving the goals set forth in ECO Vision 2025. We invite all members to sign and ratify the statutory documents of these centers to make them operational as soon as possible.

There is also a need for exploring the possibilities for strengthening the ECO's specialized agencies in such areas as education, culture and science to foster linkages among Member States.

Distinguished Ministers,

Cooperation within the ECO in areas such as intra-regional trade and investment, transport, energy industry, agriculture, ICT, tourism, mining and environmental protection is the key to accelerate economic growth and ensure sustainable development in our region.

Given the fact that seven ECO member states are landlocked developing countries, it is of vital importance to promote connectivity in the region through developing robust regional transport, energy, and ICT infrastructure to realize untapped cooperation potential within ECO region.

While taking consistent steps at the national level to boost country's role as a bridge between countries and regions, Azerbaijan promotes regional connectivity through realization of numerous landmark projects in partnership with regional countries, among them several ECO member states.

Building upon decades of positive and fruitful interaction, we attach high importance to timely realization of agreements with respect to the International North-South Transport Corridor, and modernization and expansion of Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad as an indispensable element of development of the East-West Trans-Caspian Middle Corridor. Its further extension to the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan will significantly enhance our trade and transport capacities.

We look forward to the earliest finalization of transport communications between the Eastern Zangezur economic region of Azerbaijan and its Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic through the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Ongoing infrastructural projects to operationalize this route will serve to mutually beneficial cooperation, and add a new artery of connectivity to boost the transport and transit potential in wider Eurasia.

"Digital Silk Way" project is another important initiative that aims to create a telecommunications corridor connecting Europe and Asia via Azerbaijan, significantly contributing to the development of digitalization and connectivity in the wider region, including the Caucasus, Central Asia, and South Asia.

In addition to transport and digital connectivity, Azerbaijan is also cooperating with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan on a project to export green energy from the Central Asian region to Europe. A historic milestone has been achieved with the signing of the "Agreement on Strategic Partnership in the Development and Transmission of Green Energy" by the Heads of State of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan on 13 November, in the margins of COP29.

This is a landmark project opening new opportunities for enhanced and sustainable cooperation in green energy, not only between Central Asia and the Caucasus but also on a broader scale. Its practical implementation will contribute to developing the Middle Corridor as a green bridge connecting our economies and further strengthening our energy security.

Beyond its economic benefits, it will also make a substantial contribution to the global energy transition.

In this context, it is noteworthy to recall that during Azerbaijan's ECO Chairmanship, we declared 2023 as the "Year of Green Transition and Interconnectivity" in line with the ECO Vision 2025. This reflects the priority our country places on economic sustainability and resilience, with a special emphasis on green energy and enhancing regional efforts in this field.

Distinguished Colleagues,

Addressing the climate change and associated serious challenges is of vital importance in terms of sustainable development globally and at the regional level. In this regard, the 29th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP29) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, successfully held in Baku from 11 to 22 November 2024 — the first time such an event has taken place in the ECO region- proved to be historic.

It was a triumph of multilateral diplomacy, with parties reaching historic agreements on several long-awaited issues, including the Baku Finance Goal. This groundbreaking initiative sets a target of \$1.3 trillion in climate finance for developing countries by 2035, including a \$300 billion core finance goal, tripling the previous \$100 billion target. We believe that the decisions made during COP29 will play a crucial role in addressing the climate crisis and safeguarding our planet for future generations.

It is also important to highlight that COP29 provided a platform for promoting ECO's international visibility and standing with the soft launch of the Clean Energy Centre for the ECO region in collaboration with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Distinguished Ministers,

The Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan has officially proposed, through the ECO Secretariat, to host the 17th ECO Summit on 3–4 July 2025 in Azerbaijan. We count on support and cooperation of all fellow ECO member states and look forward to your active participation at the upcoming Summit.

In conclusion, I wish every success to the Republic of Kazakhstan in its upcoming Chairmanship of the ECO in 2025. We look forward to continued collaboration and progress under Kazakhstani Chairmanship.

Thank you.