

**STATEMENT BY H.E. PROF BURHANETTİN DURAN, DEPUTY
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF TÜRKİYE**

28th ECO Council of Ministers, 3 December 2024, Mashhad

Distinguished Chairman,
Esteemed Ministers,
Dear Participants,

Let me start by thanking H.E. Minister Abbas Arakçi for organizing this meeting in the holy city of Mashhad and for his warm hospitality.

I am pleased to convey greetings and best wishes of H.E. Minister Fidan, who could not participate in this meeting due to a previously confirmed engagement.

Dear Ministers,

At a time of great transformations, where multilateralism become more needed than ever, where concepts like “near-shoring” and “friend-shoring” turn into stark realities, regional economic organizations like ECO (“Eko”) are becoming more and more relevant.

In addition to global trends, the challenges that we face collectively in our region yield our cooperation more valuable and place a heavier responsibility on our shoulders for taking concrete action.

Representing approximately 6% of the world population and covering a key geography, ECO has a suitable structure for bringing our cooperation to higher levels, especially in economy, trade, energy, transport and connectivity.

However, we are unfortunately lagging behind our common vision.

With roughly 4% share in global trade, ECO’s intra-regional trade was recorded at 81.9 billion US Dollars last year.

These figures demonstrate that we are still far below the real potential of our Organization.

Let me share with you some of our observations on this matter.

First of all, devising result-oriented and concrete projects aligned with the noble objectives of ECO and member countries' common development challenges are essential.

To provide broader support, these projects should be in harmony with the international development agenda.

Second, in order to use scarce resources effectively, we need to avoid duplications in the efforts of the ECO Secretariat and its affiliated bodies.

We have to demonstrate regional ownership and interaction, realize the meetings as scheduled, make greater efforts to continue fulfilling our responsibilities for the efficient functioning of the Organization.

I take this opportunity to invite all member states to support ECO Education Institute which we proudly host in Ankara in its new premises.

Third, we must further the implementation of the ECO Vision 2025 targets, Ashgabat Consensus for Action and the reform process well towards 2035.

In this regard, we are looking forward to the meeting of the High Level Committee and will be sharing our suggestions there broadly.

Last but not least, focusing on economic and commercial cooperation and development priorities, rather than spending our energy on secondary areas, will help us implement effective programs and projects.

Let us also remember that ECO Vision 2025 has set targets for the trade sector, focusing on trade expansion, where ECOTA and trade facilitation enjoy a special place.

In this instance, we consider the convening of the 9th ECOTA Cooperation Council last July as a turning point.

We believe that the 5th ECO Trade Ministers Meeting to be held in Türkiye in the first half of 2025 will serve the interests of all member states through the initialization of the implementation process.

We hope that decisions to be taken at this meeting shall bring us closer to the common goal of trade liberalization.

Similarly, we believe that the selection of Erzurum as the ECO Tourism Capital for 2025 will contribute to sustainable tourism in the region.

We are confident that the ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism expected to be held in Erzurum in April will be beneficial.

Dear Ministers,

I am particularly glad to see increased contributions of our observers.

The long-awaited 4th Experts Group Meeting on Ecotourism was successfully held in Girne city of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus on 25-26 November 2024 in hybrid format.

I congratulate Minister Ertuğruloğlu for hosting the event and believe that TRNC's contributions to ECO will continue to increase.

Dear Ministers,

It is particularly important that we show a united stance on our common denominators such as the situation in Gaza. This approach will strengthen regional solidarity.

We welcome the 60-day ceasefire in Lebanon. We expect this to be a first step to secure a permanent ceasefire in Lebanon.

A permanent and comprehensive ceasefire in Gaza is still a top priority to stop Israel's aggression. Without a ceasefire, it does not seem feasible to address the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Also, the threat of regional spillover will not subside.

It is with this understanding that we hosted the Extraordinary Meeting of the D-8 Council of Foreign Ministers on the situation in Gaza last June in Istanbul.

Esteemed participants,

On the occasion of this meeting, I would also like to congratulate and wish success to Mr. Çağatay Emrah Öngüt, who joined the Secretariat as the new Deputy Secretary General.

I am confident that as an experienced and able government official, he will contribute to the work of ECO extensively.

Before concluding, I would like to express heartfelt congratulations to Minister Arakçi for Iran's successful chairmanship and wish success to Kazakhstan and Minister Nurtleu for taking the chairmanship over.

Thank you for your kind attention.