

**OPENING SPEECH**  
**by Dr. Fuad Farzalibeyov,**  
**ECO Director of Energy, Minerals and Environment**  
**at the 9<sup>th</sup> ECO MINERALS EXPERTS GROUP MEETING**  
**(MEGM-9)**

**12 February 2025**  
**ECO Secretariat (hybrid mode)**

**Dear Participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am privileged to warmly welcome all participants of our meeting on behalf of the ECO Secretariat and wish them fruitful proceedings today. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division) of I.R. Pakistan for initiating and hosting this important event in a hybrid mode.

Our meeting provides a timely opportunity for the stocktaking and advancement of our agenda in the minerals sector through finding optimal solutions for a way forward. This is more pertinent now, as the long-term global forecasts highlight the growing demand in minerals and new commodity markets. Needless to say, ECO region stands as a key current and future demand centre for minerals production, while this sector represents one of the major contributors to the economies and industrial growth of our Member States. ECO thus needs to take advantage of these ample opportunities through stronger regional cooperation.

Our full-fledged regional platforms, including the ECO Heads of Surveying and Mapping Organizations (HSMO), ECO Minerals Experts Group Meeting (MEGM), and the ECO Geomatics Committee (GC) could trigger mutually beneficial regional cooperation in the field of minerals. Over the past period, the meetings of these platforms, as well as certain capacity-building events paved the way for a number of joint activities and specialized regional maps. We have so far held eight meetings of MEGM, three meetings of GC and two meetings of HSMO. Having said that, we trust collective and concerted actions by our ECO Member States are required beyond and above creating new bodies and platforms with a view to deliver on the minerals cooperation.

Despite certain developments and progress achieved, we admit that the pace and dynamics of cooperation in minerals could be steadier and more impactful for the region. Indeed, the mineral sector is one of the unnoticed promising areas, which can play a crucial role in the enhancement of economic cooperation in the region through tangible projects and activities. ECO Member States are yet to unlock new avenues for regional cooperation in the minerals sector. To achieve this goal, there is a dire need for the ECO to consolidate political will, enhance ownership and streamline project-oriented cooperation based on its comparative advantages in this field.

As its prerequisite, we need a framework and clear roadmap to define and make our regional priorities as concrete as possible. We must confess that ECO is not quite a homogeneous entity; however the Member States can define common grounds or niches in the areas where they really strive to make progress and strengthen regional capacities. In this particular context, the ECO Secretariat wishes to make a proposal to consider the possibility for adoption of a long-term, inclusive cooperation framework document of ECO in the minerals sector. With this in mind, we mapped out the draft “ECO Five-Year Roadmap on Minerals Cooperation for 2026-2030” as an overarching and guiding framework document for cooperation in this field. ECO lacked such a concept document in minerals in the past and the Roadmap therefore seeks to fill this gap. This issue will be on our agenda today.

Streamlining the project-oriented cooperation and facilitating the implementation of decisions in minerals will inevitably keep our cooperation intact. We wish to recall that during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> MEGMs, totally four project proposals in the minerals sector were proposed. We organized the Validation Meeting in April 2022, which generally supported the subject proposals for implementation. Later on, two additional project proposals were made at the 8<sup>th</sup> MEGM, held in November 2022. Currently, we are expected to follow up the outcomes of the previous MEGMs and facilitate implementation of their decisions. We particularly need to prioritize one or two most remarkable project proposals on our agenda, and define the practical and measurable steps for their implementation.

We are confident that the sustainable management of mineral resources and sustainable mining practices should be focused in the ECO region. This endeavour should go hand in hand with the recent global trends in the minerals sector evolving towards a more sustainable and responsible industry. Promoting environmentally sound and socially responsible mineral development practices in the sustainable management and optimum utilization of mineral resources are the major deliverables for the success of this pivotal component of regional cooperation. To this end, ECO has to identify new mechanisms and solutions for the strong focus on just, resource-efficient and sustainable transition.

The implementation of the Regional Initiative on Resource Efficiency, Sustainability, and Circular Economy in the ECO Region (RESCUE), launched in November 2024 could be instrumental to accomplish this goal, while this initiative advocates for a just transition to a resource-efficient, circular and regenerative economy and sustainable mineral development.

This initiative will enable us to adopt more efficient and sustainable mining practices, optimize resource utilization and reduce environmental impacts. The establishment of a regional mineral database and information-sharing platform could also be a valuable tool in this regard. We need to find effective mechanisms for collecting, updating and managing minerals data and information.

Capacity Building activities in the minerals sector are underway. Over the past three years, four training courses on cartography and geomatics were organized by the National Cartographic Centre (NCC) of I.R. Iran, and the Geological Survey of Pakistan. ECO should continue attaching due importance to the capacity-building and awareness-raising activities as they also lead to the closer interaction, networking and launching of possible partnerships.

We are also convinced that ECO should proactively engage in building strong collaboration with potential international development partners for the advancement of its minerals agenda. This is crucial in terms of exchanging the best practices and lessons learned, as well as mobilizing resources for our relevant activities.

The ECO region's potential is huge, and we are barely scratching the surface. Together, we can smartly harness the existing capabilities. ECO Secretariat will exert its utmost efforts to support our Member States in laying the ground for enhanced regional cooperation. But without an appropriate, functioning policy or enabling environment at the national level, there are huge limits to this support that a regional organization can provide. We do hope that our collective action will heavily contribute to the overall success of this cooperation.

Thank you.