

**Draft Report
of the
9th ECO Minerals Experts Group Meeting
(MEGM-9)**

**12 February 2025
(Hybrid mode)**

DRAFT REPORT

1. The 9th ECO Minerals Experts Group Meeting (MEGM-9), hosted by the Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division) of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, was held in hybrid mode at the ECO Secretariat and online on 12 February 2025. The Meeting was attended by the delegations of nine Member States, namely the Republic of **Azerbaijan**, Islamic Republic of **Iran** (in person), Republic of **Kazakhstan**, **Kyrgyz Republic**, Islamic Republic of **Pakistan**, Republic of **Tajikistan**, Republic of **Türkiye**, **Turkmenistan** and Republic of **Uzbekistan**. The officials of the ECO Secretariat also participated at MEGM-9. *The list of participants is attached as Annex-I.*

Agenda Item No. 1

Inauguration of the Meeting

2. The meeting was inaugurated by Dr. Nawaz Ahmed Virk, Director General of Minerals, Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division) (hereinafter referred to as “The Chair”), and Dr. Fuad Farzalibeyov, Director for Energy, Minerals & Environment of ECO Secretariat (hereinafter referred to as “ECO Director”). Dr. Virk emphasized the importance of regional collaboration among ECO Member States in advancement of mineral sector development, and the critical role of mineral exploration and its optimal utilization in economic growth and technological progress. He encouraged the participants to share expertise, best practices, and policy insights to enhance capabilities, attract responsible investments, and add value to the sector. He added that Pakistan, with its extensive experience in earth sciences and engineering, reaffirmed its commitment to supporting ECO mineral initiatives. The meeting thus aimed to foster dialogue and strategies for sustainable and cooperative mineral development in the region. *A copy of the Welcoming Remarks is attached as Annex-II.*

3. In his opening speech, ECO Director characterized MEGM-9 as a timely opportunity to advance the minerals sector agenda amid rising global demand for minerals and emerging commodity markets. While the ECO region is a key center for mineral production, the pace of regional cooperation needs to be more impactful. He noted the importance of leveraging the existing full-fledged ECO platforms in minerals to streamline and trigger the project-oriented cooperation. ECO Director highlighted the need in promoting the sustainable management of mineral resources and responsible mining practices, as well as the role of the Regional Initiative on Resource Efficiency, Sustainability, and Circular Economy in the ECO Region (RESCUE) in accomplishment of this goal. Key priorities also include establishing a regional mineral database, enhancing capacity-building, and engaging international development partners for resource mobilization. Dr. Farzalibeyov further briefed about the draft "ECO Five-Year Roadmap on Minerals Cooperation (2026-2030)", mapped out by ECO Secretariat as the first ever long-term, overarching and inclusive framework document for ECO cooperation in the minerals sector. *(Copy of the Opening Speech is attached as Annex-III).*

Agenda Item No.2
Election of the Chairman

4. As per ECO Rules of Procedure, the Head of the host country's delegation, Dr. Nawaz Ahmed Virk, Director General of Minerals, Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division) was unanimously elected as the Chairman of the Meeting.

Agenda Item No.3
Adoption of the Agenda

5. The proposed Agenda of the Meeting was considered and approved with the consensus of all ECO Member States. The adopted Agenda of the Meeting is attached as *Annex- IV*.

Agenda Item No.4
Appointment of Drafting Committee

6. It was agreed that the report of the meeting will be drafted by the ECO Secretariat and conveyed to the Member States through official channels. Following the official circulation, the subject draft will be adopted after two weeks silence procedure.

Agenda Item No.5
Speeches and Presentations by the Member States

7. The Chair of the meeting gave the floor to the representatives of the Member States under this agenda item to deliver their presentations/speeches in alphabetical order;

8. Ms. Ramila Nazarova and Mr. Amal Alisharli, representing the State Agency for the Use of Mineral Resources of the Republic of **Azerbaijan**, emphasized the importance of the event in advancing the mining industry. They outlined the government's commitment to prioritizing mining development and the agency's role in ensuring the efficient use of land resources. While acknowledging the international cooperation as satisfactory over the past three years, Ms. Nazarova highlighted the need for increased efforts to keep pace with rapid global changes. The agency is currently focusing on modernizing legal standards, transitioning to green energy, and fostering international cooperation, particularly with the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), to enhance the mining sector's development and explore collaboration opportunities.

9. Mr. Omid Ardebili, Director General for the National Geosciences Database (NGDIR-ECO) representing the Islamic Republic of **Iran**, expressed appreciation to the Ministry of Energy in Pakistan for hosting MEGM-9. He emphasized the crucial role of this platform in enhancing regional mineral cooperation, and facilitating

geological and mineral exploration projects. The Geological Survey of Iran, as the MEGM's focal point, organized different sessions for the heads of geological surveys from ECO Member States and meetings of the Minerals Experts Group, showcasing various projects aimed at fostering collaboration and addressing key challenges within the minerals sector.

10. Furthermore, Mr. Ardebili highlighted the intention to operationalize digital transformation and smart technologies in mining and geology. He introduced proposals, including a "Practical Roadmap for Digital Transformation" and "Smartization of Geology and Mineral Exploration," aimed at leveraging the mineral and geological potential of ECO Member States. The initiatives as the feasibility study for the ECO Geo-science Database and the development of environmental quality index maps, are part of broader efforts to achieve sustainable economic development in the ECO Region through enhanced cooperation and knowledge sharing (*detailed statement is attached as Annex-V*).

11. The Representative of the National Geological Survey of **Kazakhstan** emphasized the country's commitment to enhancing international cooperation in geological activities, recognizing its significance for economic growth. He underlined the importance of collaboration with global institutions to introduce advanced technologies, share geological data, and attract investment in exploration, reaffirming Kazakhstan's readiness to actively contribute to joint initiatives aimed at developing the geological industry.

12. Dr. Sajjad, representing the Directorate General of Geological Survey of **Pakistan**, commended the ECO's collaborative vision for the mineral sector and its dedication to enhancing the mineral industries of the Member States. He stressed that such partnerships are crucial for unlocking the region's potential and fostering regional cooperation, particularly through joint research initiatives with Geological Surveys across the Member States.

13. Dr. Sajjad further highlighted the Pakistan's strategic position at the crossroads of the Southern and Central Asia. He expressed the government's commitment to transforming the mineral sector into a key driver of economic growth efforts to revitalize institutions and reform the mineral laboratory framework aimed at creating more robust, transparent, and investor-friendly environment. He emphasized the essential role of collaboration with ECO Member States and global organizations in developing the skills and infrastructure needed to realize the region's true potential.

14. Dr. Pınar Şen from **Türkiye**, while expressing her pleasure in participating in the meeting, stated that she was attending on behalf of the Turkish Geological Survey (MTA), which serves as the ECO mining focal point. Celebrating its 90th anniversary, the MTA is recognized as a leading institution in earth sciences and mining, conducting significant studies and surveys, while closely monitoring national and international scientific advancements. The representative affirmed Turkey's interest in the projects presented during the meeting and assured that

relevant information would be compiled and communicated to the appropriate directorates for further action.

15. The Representative of **Turkmenistan** welcomed the convening of MEGM-9 as a favourable opportunity to bring the Member States together and discuss avenues for regional cooperation. They briefed about recent policies and activities being undertaken and developments taking place in Turkmenistan in the fields of geology and mining. They further stated the interest in and readiness to support and enhance the regional collaboration within ECO in minerals.

Agenda Item No.6

Follow-up of the decisions and recommendations of the previous ECO Minerals Experts Group Meetings: deliberation on the status of pending projects/activities and a way forward:

16. Under this agenda item, ECO Director provided an update on the progress made since the last MEGM in November 2022 in Isfahan, Iran. During that period, ECO cooperation in minerals sector focused on certain capacity-building and advocacy activities. An international roundtable on new horizons for enhanced regional cooperation and two training courses on geomatics were organized. ECO Director highlighted the role of capacity-building and awareness-raising initiatives in fostering knowledge exchange and networking.

17. ECO Director further briefed about the status of six pending project proposals, including initiatives from Iran and Pakistan related to geological mapping and environmental quality assessment. Particular attention was given to the Eco-Environmental Quality Index Map (ECO-EQI), which has garnered notable interest. Following the validation of those projects in 2022, the importance of resource allocation and financial planning for effective project implementation was recalled, with suggestions to prioritize one or two key initiatives. Looking ahead, the ECO Secretariat called upon the Member States to actively participate in the upcoming ECO Regional Planning Council (RPC) meeting to shape the 2025 Work Programme and Calendar of Events, encouraging bold ideas and event proposals to strengthen regional cooperation in the minerals sector.

18. The Chair noted that the ECO Secretariat has highlighted various proposals and progress made so far in implementing the outcomes. Then he invited the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to provide a further briefing and update, as the majority of the key proposals originate from Iran.

19. The representative of **Iran** delivered a detailed presentation on the ECO-EQI project, designed to assess environmental quality across ECO Member States by analyzing natural, man-made, and socioeconomic factors. She stated that initially proposed in 2016 and accepted in 2018, the project encountered delays due to the administrative challenges. By utilizing Geographic Information System (GIS)

modeling techniques, the EQI aims to evaluate geo-hazards such as landslides, flooding, and soil erosion, alongside the environmental impacts of mining activities, which have caused significant pollution and degradation. The ECO region, one of the most disaster-prone globally, faces substantial economic losses from these hazards, estimated at over \$10 billion in the last decade particularly in such countries as Iran, Pakistan and Türkiye.

20. Furthermore, the EQI project follows a multi-phase methodology, beginning with data collection from sources such as satellite imagery and geological maps, followed by the creation of thematic maps using GIS and the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP). These maps will be integrated to produce an EQI map classifying regions based on environmental risk. The project's objectives include developing country-specific risk maps, standardizing regional ecological assessments, and enabling periodic monitoring. The Iranian delegation emphasized the need in collaboration, inviting the Member States to appoint national focal points and share data to ensure its launching and effective implementation. They concluded by highlighting the project's potential to address environmental challenges and enhance regional sustainability (*The detailed presentation is attached as Annex-VI*).

21. ECO Director also emphasized the critical importance of the ECO-EQI project for ECO region, which was endorsed during the validation meeting in April 2022. He underscored the necessity of resource allocation, proposing Iran, as the initiating country, to announce a pledge for financing the subject project to enable its launching. He also emphasized the importance of designating national focal points from the Member States to ensure the successful implementation of the ECO-EQI project, while the sophisticated and specialized ECO map can only be carried out with close collaboration of all countries in terms of sharing necessary data and information during implementation process.

22. The Representative of **Pakistan** expressed appreciation for the Geological Survey of Iran's initiative in generating Environmental Quality Index maps, highlighting the importance of this project. He confirmed that the Geological Survey of Pakistan is fully supportive and ready to cooperate, particularly in the generation of spiral tectonic maps, given Pakistan's location on an active plate boundary and the presence of the Himalayas.

23. The Representative of Pakistan also mentioned ongoing efforts in creating landslide susceptibility prediction maps and called on the Geological Survey of Iran to include a comprehensive study of Pakistan, particularly concerning the potential threat of glacier lake outburst floods. He referenced the previous experience with Atabad Lake as a significant concern, emphasizing the need for collaboration in addressing those environmental challenges.

24. The Chair proposed that the Member States interested in participating in ECO-EQI project nominate their focal persons before its launching and execution. This step aims to enhance collaboration by enabling the Member States to develop their human resources and technical capacities in partnership with the Islamic

Republic of Iran, the project's lead partner. The Chair also encouraged physical participation and suggested seeking ECO Secretariat endorsement to facilitate involvement. He emphasized the importance of collective engagement and timely participation, requesting the Member States to nominate their representatives within 15 days from the final report's circulation to facilitate effective planning.

25. Additionally, the Chair requested the ECO Secretariat to provide a recap of the Work Programme and Calendar of Events to ensure participants have a refreshed perspective ahead of the 35th ECO Regional Planning Council (RPC) meeting.

26. ECO Director supported the Chair's proposal on designating national focal points for ECO-EQI project as a critical first step, followed by addressing procedural matters as the budget allocation and engagement with ECO decision-making bodies. Dr. Farzalibayov emphasized that this approach could significantly benefit the project's progress.

27. He also noted that the next ECO Regional Planning Council (RPC) meeting, originally scheduled for January 20-23 in Tehran, was postponed due to a lack of quorum, delaying the ECO Work Programme 2025 on Minerals. While there is a possibility of convening the meeting in the late February, it will be subject to confirmations. He invited the Member States to actively engage in fostering regional cooperation by volunteering to host and attending events in the minerals sector, as well as proposing some bold paragraphs on minerals to be reflected in the draft Work Programme 2025. Updates on the RPC meeting's rescheduling will be shared through official channels once confirmed.

Agenda Item No.7

Review of new proposals with regional impact and mechanisms for cooperation: consideration of a possibility of mapping out a framework document for ECO cooperation in minerals sectors

28. ECO Director presented a proposal on an overarching framework document capturing mid- and long-term perspective cooperation in the minerals sector within the ECO region. He stated that ECO lacked such a strategy document and to fill this gap the ECO Secretariat mapped out the draft **"ECO Five-Year Roadmap on Minerals Cooperation for 2026-2030"** as the first ever inclusive and guiding framework document for regional cooperation within ECO in the field of minerals. This draft document was recently submitted to the Member States through official channels, aiming to gauge the necessity and relevance of such a guiding framework (*The subject Roadmap is attached at Annex-VII*).

29. ECO Director briefed that the subject Roadmap was designed to focus on key action areas, such as sustainable management of mineral resources, data

management, mapping and surveying, capacity-building and awareness-raising, and international cooperation. He further invited the Member States to share their initial thoughts on the subject draft, encouraging them to enrich it with their ideas and proposals in the coming period. He highlighted the importance of the Member States' active engagement and positive responses to refine the framework, which will ultimately guide future discussions and endorsements.

30. The Chair commended the ECO Secretariat for developing a conceptual document outlining medium to long-term plans for the minerals sector in the ECO Region and emphasized the importance of its highlighted action points for sustainable development. He encouraged the Member States to review the document upon availability and provide timely feedback to enhance its effectiveness to streamline the process. The Chair proposed to establish a sub-working group or expert group with one focal person from each Member State to expedite discussions and finalize the document collaboratively. This approach would ensure the document reflects the needs of all member states and guides future cooperation effectively. The Chair also proposed a reasonable timeframe of one to two months for the Member States to submit their feedback. He sought clarity on whether the document would be finalized through the sub-working group or by consolidating feedback directly from the Member States, ensuring an inclusive and comprehensive review process.

31. Dr. Fuad Farzalibeyov responded, indicating that the ECO Secretariat is open to establishing an ad hoc task force/sub-working group to facilitate ongoing consultations to refine the text of the roadmap. He outlined the importance of setting a timeline so that the document could be finalized by the end of the year, and approved by the decision-making bodies of ECO. This approval would enable the implementation of the roadmap to commence in 2026, marking a significant step forward in enhancing cooperation in the minerals sector within the ECO region.

32. The Chair expressed appreciation for the agreement on the creation of the relevant sub-working group/task force. He urged all the Member States to actively engage and participate in this task force. The Chair emphasized the importance of the Member States communicating their specific comments and suggestions for improving the subject document. The goal is to finalize the roadmap within 2025, paving the way for its implementation starting in 2026. This collaborative effort is crucial for ensuring that the roadmap effectively addresses the needs and priorities of all member states in the ECO region.

33. Furthermore, the Representative of Iran delivered the presentation titled "**A Practical Roadmap for Digital and Smart Geological Exploration States**," focusing on the digital transformation and AI integration within the geology sector. This initiative aims to foster multilateral cooperation among ECO Member States, ultimately leading to the development of a comprehensive and intelligent platform for geological data analysis and modeling. The presentation highlighted significant challenges in geological exploration, particularly the vast volumes of high-frequency data that contribute to slow standardization and analysis processes. The reliance on

low-frequency data limits the accuracy and comprehensiveness of geological assessments. The speaker pointed out that the complexities, heterogeneity, and noise levels in geological data management are the shared challenges across ECO countries and globally to address these issues effectively, and thus cross-border collaboration is essential by developing a unified solution, through which the substantial benefits can be achieved for all stakeholders involved (*The detailed presentation is attached as Annex-VIII*).

34. The Chair proposed the establishment of an **ECO Centre for Excellence in Mines and Mineral Sector** in Pakistan, aligning with the roadmap for sustainable development presented by the ECO Secretariat, which includes six relevant action items for the sustainable management of mineral assets in the ECO region. The Chair indicated that a strategic agenda, scope of work, and terms of reference (ToR) of this Centre would be shared within one to two months for the consideration of the ECO Secretariat and Member States. The vision for this centre for mines sector aims to support various scientific and applied research initiatives that directly benefit the mining and mineral sector, encompassing exploration, geological investigations, planning, development, exploitation, processing, and validation.

35. Additionally, the proposed centre will serve as a comprehensive resource for the Member States, particularly those facing challenges in knowledge, technology, and human resource capabilities. It will provide guidance on policy and regulatory frameworks, inform member states on international standards, and conduct studies to promote sustainable mineral sector development. The centre will be staffed by a team of research fellows and experts in the mining and mineral sector, based in Pakistan and supported by all Member States. The Chair requested comments from each member states on this proposal and expressed optimism that the ECO Secretariat would positively handle the initiative.

36. ECO Director expressed deep appreciation to the Chair for the proposal on the establishment of the relevant ECO centre in Pakistan, and stated that ECO Secretariat welcomes any tangible proposal that advance the regional agenda in minerals. He requested that the relevant documents/concepts for this proposal be shared with the Member States and ECO Secretariat, allowing it to be included in the draft report's index. This would enable a thorough review and consideration of the proposal. He suggested reflecting the subject proposal in the report with the understanding that Pakistan may kindly submit a detailed concept in due course for further consideration by the ECO Member States.

37. The meeting took note of the project proposal put forward by the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and invited Pakistan to provide a comprehensive Concept Note and other related documents within two months. Upon receipt, this Concept Note will be circulated among ECO Member States to facilitate the proposed feasible projects.

Agenda Item No.8

Any Other Business

38. Under this agenda item, the Geological Survey of Iran (GSI) proposed organizing a **Mineral Ministerial Summit** for ECO Member States, proposing to present this initiative to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Iran and circulate it among the Member States through the ECO Secretariat. GSI highlighted its previous experience hosting the Heads of Geological Surveys from ECO Member States in 2007 and expressed enthusiasm for reconvening at a high level to discuss mineral-related issues. This initiative aims to address existing gaps and challenges in the mineral sector while leveraging existing frameworks for more effective collaboration among ECO Member States. They solicited comments from the Member States on this proposal.

39. The Chair acknowledged the initiative, stating that it presents a positive opportunity for the Member States to come together and discuss critical mineral matters. He expressed appreciation for Iran's vision and initiative, emphasizing its potential to strengthen regional cooperation. Pakistan voiced strong support for the proposal from the Islamic Republic of Iran, he added. Additionally, the Chair requested the ECO Secretariat and member states to review and provide feedback on the proposal.

40. While welcoming the subject proposal, ECO Director suggested considering setting up a dedicated platform of heads of mineral authorities instead of titling it a summit/ministerial-level meeting for minerals within the ECO. He noted the absence of such a platform despite the existence of some other regional platforms as the ECO Heads of Surveying and Mapping Organizations (HSMO), Geomatics Committee (GC) and the ECO Minerals Experts Group. By drawing comparisons to existing ministerial platforms for environment and energy, he highlighted the potential benefits of having a similar format for minerals and engaging the high-level officials for maintaining political momentum in discussions and fostering regional cooperation. He suggested that this proposal be included in the meeting report, arguing its value added to the comprehensive agenda of the organization.

Overall conclusions

41. The participation of the representatives of nine ECO Member States in MEGM-9 and a number of proposals discussed at the meeting manifested the interest in regional cooperation and growing ECO agenda in minerals. In light of the recent discussions held at MEGM-9, it is recommended that Member States prioritize collaborative initiatives to enhance the mining sector's development. The focus should be on modernizing legal frameworks and transitioning to green energy, as emphasized by the representatives from Azerbaijan and Iran. "ECO Five-Year Roadmap on Minerals Cooperation for 2026-2030" could be grasped as the first ever

inclusive and guiding framework document for regional cooperation within ECO in the field of minerals. Additionally, fostering international cooperation through promising projects as ECO-EQI will be instrumental for addressing the environmental challenges and promoting sustainable practices. It is essential for the Member States to nominate national focal points for the ECO-EQI project to facilitate effective data sharing and collaboration. The establishment of an ECO Center of Excellence for Mines and the Mineral Sector in Pakistan presents an opportunity to support knowledge transfer and technological advancements. Overall, a strategic roadmap for minerals cooperation should be developed, ensuring that all member states actively participate and contribute to achieving these goals.

Agenda Item No.9

Date and Venue of the next Meeting

42. The Chair proposed that the next meeting may be held in alphabetical order and suggested that a Note Verbale to be sent to the Member States in this regard. The ECO Secretariat will coordinate and follow up with the interested Member States willing to host the 10th ECO Minerals Experts Group Meeting the date, venue and the format of hospitality, to be extended to the participants.

Agenda Item No.10

Adoption of the Report

43. The Member States decided that the Draft Report of the meeting would be circulated among the Member States with the adoption of two-week silence procedure. In case, the no objection received within stipulated period, the report will be considered as approved by the esteemed Member States.

Agenda Item No. 11

Closing Remarks

44. The Meeting was concluded with a vote of thanks and the Chair of the meeting, Dr. Nawaz Ahmed Virk, Director General of Minerals, Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division) expressed gratitude to all participants and the ECO Secretariat for organizing MEGM-9, highlighting the honour for Pakistan to chair the session. He appreciated the insightful contributions and presentations that enhanced understanding of the region's mineral potential and emphasized the need for collective efforts to address challenges such as investment policies, technology transfer, and infrastructure gaps. The Chair stressed the importance of regional cooperation to unlock the sector's full potential through technological development, capacity building, and institutional strengthening. He called for a unified approach to drive economic growth and industrialization. The meeting was deemed fruitful in fostering collaboration and laying the groundwork for future partnerships. The Chair concluded by thanking all participants for their constructive feedback and commitment to advancing the mineral sector.

45. The participants of the meeting also expressed appreciation to the ECO Secretariat for preparing relevant documents and other valuable services in facilitating successful proceedings of the Meeting.

46. Dr. Fuad Farzalibayov, ECO Director for Energy, Minerals and Environment, expressed gratitude on behalf of the ECO Secretariat to the Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division) of Pakistan for hosting that hybrid meeting and to participants for the fruitful deliberations. He highlighted the need for regional solutions to global challenges and hoped the meeting streamlined mechanisms to advance the regional minerals agenda. Special thanks were extended to the Chair, Dr. Virk, for his able guidance and brilliant moderation. ECO Director also thanked ECO Secretariat colleagues for facilitating the event and reaffirmed commitment to supporting follow-up activities and fostering result-oriented cooperation. He wished success to all participants and looked forward to future engagements.
