

Welcoming Remarks
for the 7th Meeting of the Working Group on Tourism Standardization
17 September 2025 (Virtual Mode)

*Distinguished Representatives of the ECO Member States,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

On behalf of the Secretariat, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the Seventh Meeting of the Working Group on Tourism Standardization. We hope this meeting will serve as a meaningful step toward advancing sustainable and green tourism practices across the ECO region. I would like to express our sincere appreciation for your continued commitment and active participation.

Dear Colleagues,

As you are aware, the 6th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism was successfully hosted by the Republic of Türkiye on 26 April 2025 in Erzurum, in conjunction with the Official Inauguration Ceremony of Erzurum as the ECO Tourism Capital for 2025. In preparation for the Ministerial segment, a High-Level Expert Group Meeting was also convened to finalize key elements of the agenda and documentation.

One of the key objectives of the Secretariat at the Ministerial Meeting was the adoption of the “ECO Sustainable Tourism - Common Criteria for Tourism Accommodation Facilities”, which represents the first tangible output of this Working Group and serves as a foundational element of the evolving ECO Sustainable Tourism brand.

Following valuable feedback from Member States, it was agreed that the draft document required further consideration to ensure alignment with national contexts and practices. As reflected in the Erzurum Declaration, adopted at the conclusion of the Ministerial Meeting, Member States expressed strong support for finalizing the work on this document without delay. Accordingly, we have received a clear mandate from our Ministers to complete the remaining consultations and finalize the text.

Distinguished Delegates,

We would like to once again clarify that this document is not intended to impose any binding obligations and extra workload on accommodation establishments or national tourism administrations. Rather, it aims to provide a voluntary framework of incentive-based sustainability criteria, which can be adapted by Member States in line with their existing policies, development priorities and future strategies.

During our discussions in Erzurum, it was explicitly noted that the draft standardization document could be transformed into a voluntary, non-binding award scheme, rather than a formal regulatory mechanism. As the Secretariat, we are fully supportive of this approach and see no impediment to implementing it in this format, should there be consensus among the Member States.

Esteemed Participants,

Furthermore, we would like to propose the possibility of launching a pilot program based on this document after its adoption. This would allow us to gather practical feedback from the field and where necessary, refine both the sustainability criteria and the accompanying processes for application, evaluation and recognition in future phases.

Allow me to also highlight that ECO has prior experience in administering awards, particularly in the cultural and scientific fields. In recent years, distinguished individuals have been recognized with ECO Awards, subject to the endorsement of Member States. This sets a useful precedent that can guide the development of a voluntary recognition system in the tourism sector as well.

Dear Colleagues,

As you know this year marks the completion of the ECO Vision 2025, and preparations are currently underway to adopt a new long-term roadmap under the title "Strategic Goals of Economic Cooperation 2035." This forward-looking document outlines specific objectives and policy measures in various sectors, including tourism.

Among the key priorities highlighted is the expansion of sustainable tourism practices across the ECO region. We hope that this Working Group will, in the coming years, extend its scope to cover additional tourism-related segments, such as the food and beverage industry, tour guiding, and visitor services, ensuring a more comprehensive approach to standardization and quality improvement.

With your continued support and collaboration, we are confident in our ability to accelerate progress and deliver tangible results that contribute to sustainable tourism development in our region.

Please do not hesitate to share your views, questions or suggestions throughout the course of this meeting.

Thank you once again for your valuable presence and contributions.