

12th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport

2 November 2023

Tashkent, Republic of Uzbekistan

Tashkent Declaration

Tashkent Declaration

We the Ministers/Heads of delegations of the ECO Member States, gathering on November 2, 2023 in Tashkent to join this Ministerial meeting on Transport and while:

Highlighting our resolve and aspiration to materialize the bright goal of “*Green Transition and Interconnectivity*” through enhanced transportation in the ECO Region;

Being guided by the relevant decisions related to the field of transport and connectivity adopted within the Shusha Declaration of the ECO Council of Ministers (COM) held in Shusha, the Republic of Azerbaijan on October 10, 2023 and emphasizing the importance of its follow up actions;

Realizing the important role of transport sector including multimodal and intermodal transportation, especially under current geopolitical environment, to support the sustainable socio-economic progress, secure supply chains and development in the ECO region;

Being cognizant of the urgency to ensure accelerated implementation of the long-term priorities of ECO for development of transport and connectivity infrastructure to promote ECO's intra-regional and inter-regional connectivity as well as to support global trend;

Underscoring the urgency of removal of procedural bottlenecks of transportation including permits, visa and quotas, where applicable, to speed up transport cooperation;

Reiterating its strong call for facilitation of transit procedures at the Border Crossing Points including through digitalization and relocation of Customs formalities from borders to inland customs offices;

Commending the establishment of the High-Level Working Groups for development of two new corridors namely Kyrgyz Republic-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Türkiye (KUTIT) and Tajikistan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Türkiye (TUTIT) multimodal corridors and inviting ECO neighboring countries including China to join and develop those new routes;

Welcoming expansion of the ECO corridors to the international networks and neighboring regions;

Underlining the strategic importance of Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) railway and road corridors and welcoming extension of ITI Train services to Europe;

Reiterating its call to all remaining Member States accede/ratify to the Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA),

Recognizing the importance of digitalizing transport, customs and border crossing documents and procedures with a view to creating digital transport corridors among the interested Member States;

Highlighting the role of private sector and the freight forwarders and transport operators in development and strengthening connectivity in the Region and commending the establishment of ECO-TIR Associations Consultative Group (ECO-TIRACG);

Realizing the important role of regional maritime and civil aviation cooperation in maintaining the supply chain and people-to-people connectivity for the Member States;

Encouraging establishment of Air Hubs in the ECO Region that will improve intra-ECO connections and promote cooperation in civil aviation for enhancing regional connectivity and economic integration;

Commending the supportive role of the Islamic Development Bank for financial contributions to the ECO transport projects;

Recognizing the necessity for engagement of the ECO-Trade and Development Bank in financing, co-financing and attraction of possible investor to the transport projects of the ECO;

Highlighting the role of the ECO\UNECE Coordination Council on Almaty-Tehran- Istanbul and Trans Caspian Corridors in development of regional and international connectivity;

Underpinning the significant role of the international partnership with the relevant international organizations, IFIs and development agencies in development, facilitation and financing the ECO regional connectivity projects;

Have decided to:

1. **Invite** Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to accede to the Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) and stressed the necessity of its full implementation by all the Member States for the economic development of the ECO Region;
2. **Emphasize** on an early organization of the fund-raising event by the Economic Cooperation Organization-Trade and Development Bank (ECO-TDB) as envisaged in the midterm review of the ECO Vision 2025 to seek finances for supporting the regional connectivity projects in the areas of rail and road networks;
3. **Request** the ECO Trade and Development Bank (ECO-TDB) to finance the connectivity projects of the ECO and also contribute in facilitation of payments of the projects;
4. **Commend** the efforts on regularization and extension of the services of the ITI Train to Europe and call upon the stakeholders to further utilize the cargo train service for enhancing regional trade;
5. **Express** desire for removal of permit system for road transport in order to help revitalize the economies of the region and enhance smooth transportation;
6. **Call** upon interested Member States to accede to the ECO Visa Scheme to facilitate visa issuance for drivers/train crew while minimizing the risks;
7. **Encourage** the Member States to optimize border crossing capacity through application of joint or coordinated border control, establishing ‘Green lanes’, and transferring custom formalities relating to import, export and transit from borders to inland customs offices;

8. **Call upon** the Member States to enhance their efforts for adoption of technological and smart solutions to ensure the smooth flow of goods in transit and **mandate** the ECO Secretariat to pro-actively conceive and implement related projects and capacity building initiatives on transport technologies, smart transport and digitalization in collaboration with international partners;
9. **Appreciate** the ECO Secretariat for jointly establishing the Geographic Information System (ITIO-GIS) platform and request the Member States to continuously update their national data on the platform and in this context called for establishment of GIS section under Transport & Communication Directorate (T&C) for mapping of regional connectivity networks in the fields of transport (road, rail, air and maritime) and other regional connectivity initiatives of the Organization;
10. **Emphasize** on commercialization of the ITI, KTI, TUTIT, KUTIT, KTAI, Pakistan-Central Asia, Almaty- Tehran–Istanbul, Trans-Caspian East-West and North-South Corridors, Bandar Abbas-Almaty railway and road corridors and acknowledge their capacity to serve as key transit corridors in the region and **take** note of the interest expressed by some of the Member States to accede to these networks;
11. **Stress** on the importance and the need for construction of missing links between Rasht-Astara (Iran) and improvement of Quetta – Taftan Rail Routes, establishment of TIR Parks at Border Crossing Points (BCPs), expansion of transit capacity of Gurbulakh\Bazargan BCP and other regional missing rail i.e. UAP, UKC and road links and **mandate** the Secretariat to conduct technical meetings in this regard;
12. **Welcome** the developments to establish transport and communication links in the region and in this regard; Commend the signing of the Protocol of Intent between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Iran on the construction of a new railway line and railway bridges between the Eastern Zangezur Economic Region of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic passing through the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran signed on October 6, 2023 in Baku and subsequent ground breaking ceremony of a highway bridge, customs and border infrastructure held in Aghband settlement of Azerbaijan’s Zangilan district;

13. **Underscore** the importance of providing the ECO Land Locked Countries with uninterrupted access to transport infrastructure, within the framework of national legislation and international agreements to which ECO Member States are party to, especially to seaports;
14. **Support** promotion of maritime cooperation particularly in establishing Ro-Ro Lines in the Caspian Sea and organizing technical training courses on maritime issues and further involvement of ECO Maritime Network in the activities of the Organization;
15. **Express interest** to increase collaboration for developing regional tourism by enhancing land, rail, sea and air connectivity to tourism destinations in the region;
16. **Encourage** the Member States to consider establishing regular and chartered flights to facilitate air connectivity, travel and tourism;
17. **Welcome** the interest of the of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Azerbaijan to designate the Samarkand Airport and the Gabala Airport as ECO Regional Air Hubs to contribute to the air-connectivity of the ECO region.
18. **Acknowledge** the contribution and supportive role of the private sector in promotion of transit and trade in our region and support the establishment of “ECO Forwarders Association” and mandates the ECO Secretariat to prepare the relevant legal instruments of the Association;
19. **Assign** the ECO Secretariat to involve “the Consultative Group of ECO TIR Issuing and Guaranteeing Associations” in the meetings of the TTCC and other relevant meetings on transport;
20. **Acknowledge** the pro-active approach of the Secretariat in implementing decisions of the Ministerial Meeting and in particular in establishing and enhancing relations with various international organization including UNOHRLLS, OTIF, UNECE, UNESCAP, IRU and other relevant agencies.

21. **Encourage** organization of joint projects, programs, training courses and workshops between ECO Secretariat and IsDB, UNESCAP, UNECE, IRU, IMO, OTIF, OSJD, ICAO, UNOHRLLS, UNCTAD, TRACECA and other international organizations and, in this framework, **call** upon the Secretariat to further strengthen its relations with the interested international organizations;
22. **Express** sincere gratitude and appreciation to the substantive contributions and inputs from ECO Member States and International Organizations to secure practical outcome of the Ministerial Meeting on Transport and the preceding Senior Officials' Meeting.
23. **Recognize** the constructive role of the ECO Secretary General and his team in materializing the objectives and mandates of the Organization, particularly in the transport sector, and fully support any such programs, projects and future initiatives for enhancing regional connectivity and economic growth of the Region;
24. **Thank** the Republic of Uzbekistan for excellent hosting of this important meeting and welcome the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran to host the 13th Ministerial Meeting on Transport in 2024.
