

**5th High-Level Expert Group Meeting on Trade, Investment, and Other Related Matters in the
ECO Region
İstanbul, 24 November 2025**

Agenda Item 1: Opening Remarks by the Chair

Thank you, Deputy Secretary General Mr. Saberi,
Distinguished Delegates,

It is a great pleasure and privilege for me to address you on the occasion of 5th High-Level Expert Group (HLEG) Meeting on Trade, Investment, and Other Related Matters in the ECO Region. I would like to extend my warmest welcome to the esteemed high level experts, representing the ECO member states and the officials of the ECO Secretariat. Your participation is a strong sign of the commitment of the member states to the goals and the objectives of our organization. Discussions that we will hold today and tomorrow will guide our way through Ministerial Meeting.

Distinguished Delegates,

We are going through difficult times due to the conflicts prevailing across the globe and particularly in our region. Besides continuing fragile situation of the global trade environment has adversely affected all economies. Recent forecasts by the World Bank project global economic growth to slow to about 3.2 % in 2025, due in part to escalating trade tensions and policy uncertainty. Meanwhile, the World Trade Organization now forecasts global merchandise trade volume growth of 2.4 % in 2025, revising earlier projections. In this political and economic environment, the significance of this Ministerial Meeting has increased substantially as our ministers will gather to review ECO trade agenda and give fresh directions for the improvement of the trade and economic cooperation among member states.

Distinguished Delegates,

With a population of 500 million and a total income of 1.5 trillion dollars, ECO unquestionably holds an important position in global economy. On the other hand, it is worrying that the trade between the ECO members stands around just 85 billion dollars. I believe that this figure does not befit us. We should intensify our efforts to increase our trade volume to 100 billion dollars as a first step. This is in line with the commitment expressed by our leaders at the 17th Summit of the ECO which was held in Khankendi, the Republic of Azerbaijan on July 4, 2025. To achieve this commitment, we should boost our trade cooperation. This is why we volunteered to host the 5th Ministerial Meeting and the preceding series of meetings under the ECO trade agenda. Thanks to the valuable contribution of all member states, these meetings produced very concrete results that we will review throughout the meeting.

Distinguished Delegates,

We have a very busy schedule ahead of us. The first and foremost agenda is of course ECOTA. Regrettably, the years of efforts to develop a preferential trade agreement have not delivered the expected results. There are still many restrictions and problems to barrier-free trade. We must openly admit this and take a new perspective to turn the situation into a positive shift. We need to make sure that the agreement is operational and contributes to increased trade volumes among the participating

Member States.

The most concrete result of this Ministerial Meeting should be the announcement of the beginning to negotiations for amending ECOTA. I should praise the Secretariat here since they prepared a very comprehensive road map that would guide these negotiations. We will discuss this document under the related agenda item.

Distinguished Delegates,

Trade facilitation and customs cooperation are as crucial as trade liberalization is highly instrumental in improving overall trade performance and trade competitiveness in the ECO Region. Türkiye is ready to promote customs cooperation in our region.

This is why, we hosted second joint working group meeting on the Trade Facilitation Strategy and the 6th Customs Cooperation Committee Meeting this year. Those meetings were success for producing concrete results. We would like to stress that Trade Facilitation Strategy, Regional Customs Co-operation and Mutual Administrative Assistance Agreement and data exchange mechanism which are worked out by Member States' customs and trade officials are all key instruments for abolishing trade barriers among ECO and reaching goals set in ECO Vision 2025.

These outputs were also discussed and confirmed at the higher level at the Customs Heads Meeting in Tahan on 29th May 2025. Taking this opportunity, I would like to thank all members for their valuable contributions.

Distinguished Delegates,
Distinguished Representatives of the ECO Secretariat,

I hope that with your valuable contribution and support, the 5th Meeting of the ECO Trade Ministers will adopt key decisions that will give the impetus needed for our cooperation to move forward.

I wish you all a successful meeting and I thank you for your attention.

Thank you very much.