

**The 5th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Commerce and Foreign Trade
İstanbul, 26 November 2025**

Opening Speech by Prof. Dr. Ömer Bolat, Honorable Minister of Trade of the Republic
of Türkiye

Assalamu alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu
Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

Distinguished Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Diplomatic Representatives, Ambassadors,
and Esteemed Delegation Members from the member countries of the Economic
Cooperation Organization,

Welcome to Türkiye, welcome to Istanbul; I once again greet you all with love, respect,
and affection.

It is a great honor and pleasure for me to host you here today as the Minister of Trade on
behalf of our country and our government. Today has truly become a peak moment for
integration efforts among Islamic countries. This morning, with your participation, we
inaugurated the 11th World Halal Summit with a magnificent opening. During the three-
day World Halal Summit, businesspeople, experts, and academics will conduct
significant work and consultations.

At the same time, we inaugurated the 2025 World Halal Expo together. The World Halal
Expo has become an important fair organized annually under the COMCEC of the
Organization of Islamic Cooperation, growing exponentially each year. Our efforts to
promote the very important concept of halal—central to our faith—and to make it more
widely known and valued among our citizens and consumers will continue.

On this occasion, we also wanted to hold the Fifth Ministerial Meeting on Trade of our
Economic Cooperation Organization on the same day. This has been a fortunate
coincidence, allowing your participation and contributions to both the Halal Summit and
the Halal Expo. As I said, today, 26 November 2025, has become a very meaningful and
important day for halal trade worldwide and for trade cooperation among ECO member
countries. This Fifth Ministerial Meeting is convening after a 14-year break, which also
makes this gathering particularly significant. I extend my gratitude to you for honoring
our invitation and participating.

I would also like to extend my deep thanks, in your presence, to the distinguished
Secretary General of the Economic Cooperation Organization, Ambassador Asad Khan,
and his valuable team for their efforts to expand and advance ECO's work, as well as for
their close cooperation and coordination with our colleagues at the Ministry of Trade
during the preparations for this Meeting.

As we conduct this meeting today, as I mentioned in my speech this morning, unfortunately fragilities in global trade and global economic growth continue to increase. Political uncertainties and trade restrictions negatively affect both global trade and economic growth. Nevertheless, as founding and valuable members of the Economic Cooperation Organization, we believed it is very important to hold this meeting among Trade Ministers, and we are holding it with significant agenda items. Inshallah, by the end of this meeting toward the evening, we will sign two important memorandums of understanding together.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Economic Cooperation Organization is a very important institution for all of us and has been active for many years. In 2017, we adopted the ECO Vision 2025 document, which set a goal to double trade among ECO member countries by 2025. In 2017, intra-ECO trade was 59 billion dollars; in 2023, we exceeded 100 billion dollars, meaning we are very close to achieving the Vision's target of doubling intra-regional trade. Additionally, when the Vision was adopted in 2017, the share of intra-ECO trade in our total foreign trade was around 8%; now this ratio has risen to 8.8%. Türkiye's trade with ECO member countries has also shown a steady increase over the last five years. In 2020, Türkiye's trade with ECO members was 13.2 billion dollars; in 2024 it reached 26.5 billion dollars—nearly doubling in five years.

Furthermore, we are pleased to see that our countries have grown above the global economic growth average over the last three years. This fact is confirmed by IMF World Economic Outlook data. With its population of more than 500 million, its rich energy resources, and its strategic geographical location, the Economic Cooperation Organization is a highly important regional organization with strong potential. The share of our member countries in the world's population is 6.8%, in global production 2.4%, and in world trade 2.5%. Following the signing ceremony we will hold today, we expect significant increases both in total trade and in intra-regional trade among ECO member countries.

One of our most important initiatives under the ECO umbrella is the ECO Trade Agreement, known as ECOTA. The entry into force of this agreement has become a necessity. At the 9th Meeting of the ECOTA Cooperation Council held in July last year in brotherly Pakistan, our member countries reached a technical-level consensus that the agreement needs to be amended. We extend our gratitude to the Government of Pakistan for hosting this important meeting. Today, as Trade Ministers, we will endorse the technical consensus reached in Pakistan, inshallah. Our technical teams worked intensively the previous two days and prepared a document that will guide the negotiations on updating ECOTA. We will discuss the details under the relevant agenda item.

Distinguished Ministers, Esteemed Deputy Ministers, and Heads of Delegation,

Especially in recent years, with the rapid increase in technological advancements and digital commerce, and the fact that information spreads very quickly between countries, we believe that trade must also keep pace. Both the public and private sectors emphasized in many platforms that cooperation among customs administrations has become crucial to enhance our trade and international competitiveness. Simplifying, digitalizing, and harmonizing customs procedures; sharing information and data; and providing technical assistance and capacity building are very important areas of work. Cooperation in these areas will contribute significantly to both intra-regional trade and the overall foreign trade volumes and economic development of our countries.

Indeed, we have cooperation mechanisms in the field of customs under the ECO umbrella. One of these is trade facilitation, which Türkiye placed on the agenda 14 years ago at the 4th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Trade. We are very pleased that the ECO Trade Facilitation Strategy has been completed through negotiations held in our country, and we thank you for this. We believe that in later stages we will be able to implement more binding trade facilitation rules as part of ECOTA.

Another project in the customs field is the Agreement on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters among ECO member countries. We are very pleased that rapid progress has been achieved in the meeting we hosted and that this agreement is now ready for signature. We extend our thanks to each member country for their constructive and positive approach and contributions during the negotiations. We hope that all member countries will complete their internal approval procedures and sign this Agreement as soon as possible, if not today.

Distinguished Ministers, Esteemed Deputy Ministers, and Heads of Delegation,

As you know, today we will also sign a memorandum of understanding formally titled “Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Joint Trade Promotion Activities Among Economic Cooperation Organization Member States”. We invite all our members to complete their necessary internal procedures for this arrangement as soon as possible. We believe this Memorandum of Understanding will greatly contribute to strengthening linkages among our private sectors and increasing information and experience sharing among our countries. Inshallah, we will evaluate each subject in more detail under the relevant agenda items. At this stage, I will hand over the floor to my dear brother, His Excellency Ambassador Asad Majeed Khan, Secretary General of the Economic Cooperation Organization, to deliver his opening remarks.

The remainder of our meeting will be closed to the press. After the meeting, we will hold a separate press conference. Therefore, I sincerely thank the members of the press for their attention and kindly invite them to leave the hall.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Ambassador Asad Majeed Khan, Secretary General of the Economic Cooperation Organization. Please, Mr. Ambassador.