

14th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport

Astana, 15 October 2026,
15:00-16:00- Almaty Hall

Opening Statement by

H.E. Dr. Asad M. Khan, ECO Secretary General

**Honourable Ministers, Heads of Delegation,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to the 14th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport in Astana. I wish to express my sincere appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Nurlan Sauranbaev, Minister of Transport of Kazakhstan, and his for hosting this important event and for the excellent arrangements and warm hospitality extended to us.

Given the paucity of time today, let me come straight to the following seven key messages that I would like to relay to the Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegation at this ministerial.

First: We are meeting for the second consecutive year, following our Ministerial Meeting in Tehran in June 2025. This regularity of engagement at the ministerial level is both, welcome and needed for sustaining momentum, reviewing progress and advancing our shared regional connectivity agenda. This 14th Ministerial Meeting is also symbolically significant as ECO started

its transport connectivity journey in Kazakhstan 33 years ago at the 1st ECO Transport Ministerial Meeting with the adoption of the Almaty Outline Plan for Development of Transport Sector in the ECO Region. ECO really has come around full circle.

Second: Despite the prevailing geopolitical challenges and uncertainties, ECO Secretariat, with the support of the member states, remained firmly committed to implementing the decisions and priorities set out in the Tehran Declaration, and would do the same now for the Astana Declaration once adopted.

Third: We clearly recognize that promoting connectivity is not limited to the development of physical infrastructure alone but also entails a meticulous nurturing of mutually reinforcing linkages between trade and transport, as well as investment and tourism sectors. Without adequate trade and investment flows, commercially viable transport operations and movement of people across borders, even the most developed infrastructure will not be able to deliver its full potential. Our approach must therefore be comprehensive, combining investment in transport infrastructure with trade promotion and facilitation, tourism enhancement and harmonization of systems and procedures that yield a more integrated region. This is, in essence, what we are working on, as an organization, in terms of creating an “ecosystem for regional connectivity, addressing both its hard infrastructure needs and the soft regulatory, institutional and commercial conditions necessary for the creation and effective utilization of such ecosystem. Our

efforts to promote early finalization of revised ECOTA through the TNC process, development of cross-border trade zones, and well-coordinated regional tourism promotion initiatives, form an important part of this approach.

Fourth: Against this backdrop, the proposed ECO Sustainable and Resilient Transport Strategy for 2026–2035 assumes particular significance. It complements the broader Strategic Goals of Economic Cooperation 2035, where transport connectivity occupies a central place. Together, these frameworks will provide clearer direction for our collective efforts over the coming decade. Moreover, the Astana Declaration, building on the Tehran Declaration, together with the new Transport Strategy, will provide further clarity and impetus to our collective efforts.

Fifth: Another important priority remains the connectivity needs of our seven landlocked Member States. In this regard, ECO is working closely with its regional and international partners to support implementation of the Awaza Programme of Action, with particular emphasis on strengthening transit links and facilitating access to regional and international markets. In this context, the IRU–UN–OHRLLS side event held yesterday here in Astana, as well as the proposed regional meeting in Bangkok on November 18, 2026, represent important steps towards advancing the implementation of the Awaza Programme of Action.

Sixth: Financing remains one of the principal challenges confronting our transport agenda. While we continue preparations for an international financing conference on ECO transport corridors and projects, we must also move beyond general discussions of connectivity towards concrete, economically viable and bankable projects.

In this regard, I wish to appreciate Kazakhstan's valuable contribution through two ECO studies on transforming the KTI Corridor into an Economic Corridor and developing a Digital Track Modelling for Railways Construction and Maintenance. These studies provide a useful foundation for full feasibility studies, and I would request the Member States to support the Secretariat in securing the assistance of regional and international financial institutions in realizing these projects.

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Ministers,**

Seventh: For the first time, our Ministerial Meeting is complemented by a dedicated dialogue with the private sector and the reflection of its outcomes in the Astana Ministerial Declaration. I commend Kazakhstan for facilitating this important engagement, which we hope to institutionalize in our future cooperation. The participation of businesses, transport operators and potential investors is essential for translating our regional priorities into practical outcomes.

Excellencies,

Our task now is to translate the decisions, taken today into real action and tangible results. I give you my firm commitment to pursue these with single minded determination, with your continued support and guidance.

I also invite the distinguished Ministers and Heads of Delegation to join us in the dialogue with the private sector following our Meeting.

Thank you.
