

**Text of the Statement by
H.E. Dr. Farzaneh Sadegh
Minister of Roads and Urban Development
of the Islamic Republic of Iran
at the 14th Meeting of ECO Ministers of
Transport
(15 October 2026)**

H.E. Mr. Asad Majeed Khan, Secretary General of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO);

H.E. Mr. Nurlan Sauranbayev, Minister of Transport of the Republic of Kazakhstan;

**Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

At the outset, I would like to thank the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan for hosting and excellently organizing the 14th Meeting of ECO Ministers of Transport, and the ECO Secretariat for its coordination efforts.

Distinguished colleagues,

By virtue of its exceptional geographical position, the ECO region has the potential to become an integrated and efficient network of road, rail and

maritime routes — a network that can strengthen connectivity between Central Asia, West Asia, the Caucasus and the open seas, and contribute to the development of trade and transit in the region.

We therefore expect this meeting to go beyond reaffirming existing potential and to produce concrete, time-bound and measurable decisions for the development of transport cooperation.

The 13th Meeting of ECO Ministers of Transport was held in Tehran in June 2025, and important decisions were adopted to advance regional cooperation.

This is now an opportune moment to review the extent to which those decisions have been implemented, to identify the remaining obstacles, and to set the operational priorities for the next stage.

Excellencies,

Over the past year and a half, the Islamic Republic of Iran has faced the far-reaching consequences of war and insecurity, including attacks by the United States and the Zionist regime on its road, rail, airport and port infrastructure, threats to its transport routes, and restrictions resulting from a naval blockade. Beyond inflicting damage and disrupting the country's transport operations, these developments have had — and continue to have — a direct impact on the continuity of transit networks and on economic connectivity across the region.

We must bear in mind that the region's transport networks are interdependent. A disruption in any one link of this network, regardless of the country in whose territory it occurs, can increase the time and cost

of moving goods, reduce the reliability of routes, and affect the security of the supply chains of other countries in the region.

From this perspective, damage to Iran's transport infrastructure is not merely a national issue, as it can also disrupt the access of regional countries to one another and to trade routes and ports. We therefore believe that protecting civilian infrastructure, ensuring the security of transport routes, and maintaining the uninterrupted flow of transport and transit should be recognized as shared interests of all ECO Member States.

We expect the Ministers of Transport at this meeting to underline the need to shield civilian infrastructure and transport corridors from conflict, and to request the ECO Secretariat to assess the impact of war and security disruptions on the region's transport networks and to put forward

practical proposals for enhancing the resilience and continuity of corridor operations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

One area that can deliver tangible results for regional trade in the short term is road transport and border-crossing facilitation. Developing this sector is not limited to expanding road and fleet capacity.

Rather, reducing truck waiting times, simplifying customs formalities, harmonizing transport documents and exchanging information between border agencies play a decisive role in enhancing the competitiveness of transit routes.

In this context, we propose that the ECO Secretariat, in cooperation with Member States, prioritize three actions in its work programme: first, identifying the main obstacles to fleet movement and transit at border

crossings; second, setting common priorities for harmonizing customs procedures, exchanging documents and information, and reducing vehicle stoppages; and third, drawing up a time-bound action plan to remove the identified obstacles.

Distinguished colleagues,

Rail transport is also one of the main pillars of ECO's economic and transit cooperation. The revival of the ECO train after years of suspension, and its successful run along the Türkiye-Iran-Turkmenistan route, is a valuable demonstration that practical cooperation among Member States is achievable. During the aggression by the United States and Israel against Iran, many bridges along this rail route were damaged in an attempt to sever the region's connectivity and the civilizational ties among its countries; however, Iranian engineers carried out the necessary

repairs and reopened the route within 72 hours, ensuring uninterrupted traffic.

This shows the importance of technical preparedness and the need to maintain the continuity of the region's rail connections, even under difficult conditions.

The revival of this route should, however, be regarded as a starting point for broader rail cooperation within ECO. The prospect of an Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul rail link, together with existing routes and the capacities of Member States' rail networks, can create new opportunities for the growth of regional trade; realizing this vision, however, requires completing technical, operational and commercial coordination along the various sections of the route.

We therefore propose that the ECO Secretariat, together with the railways of Member States, identify priority rail routes and examine the tariff, customs, technical and operational barriers facing freight train services.

It is also necessary to establish a mechanism to coordinate train schedules, facilitate information exchange, and move gradually from ad hoc services to regular, predictable and competitive services.

The Islamic Republic of Iran stands ready to contribute to these efforts within the framework of regional cooperation and to make use of its rail network to strengthen connectivity among Member States.

Excellencies,

Another key priority for ECO cooperation is facilitating the access of landlocked countries to the open seas through the transport networks of coastal states.

Achieving this goal requires that ports, railways, roads and logistics services be treated not in isolation but as components of a single integrated transport chain. In this regard, the port of Chabahar and the other southern ports of the Islamic Republic of Iran offer significant potential for expanding regional cooperation. Connecting Chabahar to the national rail network can also strengthen the link between land and maritime routes and facilitate the movement of goods.

We believe that making effective use of these capacities, in addition to facilitating access to the open seas, can help diversify trade routes, lower transport costs and strengthen economic ties among Member States.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In following up on the decisions of the Tehran meeting and the outcomes of this meeting, I propose that the ECO Secretariat focus on three concrete deliverables:

First, a comprehensive report on the status of implementation of previous decisions, the remaining obstacles and the actions required;

Second, a time-bound action plan for facilitating road transport, border and customs coordination, and the development of regular rail and multimodal services;

And third, an assessment of the impact of security disruptions on regional corridors, together with practical proposals for protecting civilian infrastructure and enhancing the resilience of the transport network.

We expect responsibility for following up on these actions to be assigned in cooperation between the Secretariat and Member States, and a progress report to be presented at the next Ministerial Meeting.

Such an approach can build mutual trust, make ECO decisions more effective, and turn agreements into tangible economic results.

Distinguished colleagues,

The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that the development of transport and transit in the ECO region not only paves the way for increased trade and economic growth among Member States, but also plays a fundamental role in strengthening regional ties and enhancing their economic resilience.

We hope that, by making use of the opportunity offered by this meeting in Astana and with the active participation of all Member States, we can

take three concrete steps: effective implementation of past decisions, agreement on operational, time-bound actions, and the establishment of a clear mechanism for following up on results.

The Islamic Republic of Iran stands ready to cooperate with all Member States and the ECO Secretariat along this path.

Thank you for your attention.