

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mahmud Mammad-Guliyev,
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**High-Level Segment of Ministerial Session
7th Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan
(RECCA VII)**

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Excellencies,
Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan I would like to greet all participants and express our appreciation to the host of this event – the Government of Turkmenistan for its warm hospitality and excellent organization of this important Conference.

We believe that the support to Afghanistan's economic development during crucial transformation decade of 2015 - 2025 is vitally important for helping to sustain the positive results of stabilization efforts, which were achieved over the past decade. To that effect, I believe that the RECCA process should target its contribution in a regional context through building on that experience and accomplishment.

In this regard, Azerbaijan remains committed to supporting the stabilization, peaceful reconstruction and development of Afghanistan through bilateral efforts, as well as active participation within multilateral platforms. Apart from

the United Nations and its regional commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP), we are members of some regional political and economic organisations and initiatives such as Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process. The membership in those organizations and platforms helps us to address the issues of common interest and challenge.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Azerbaijan is engaged in cooperation frameworks on Afghanistan with a view to support this country's efforts towards integrating into global system of economic relations and to assist in unlocking its trade potential within regional and inter-regional perspectives. This region requires strong friends, politically solid and commercially viable regional connectivity. Therefore, Azerbaijan is ready to offer its partnership, its transit and logistics capacities.

As the co-lead country together with Turkmenistan in the Regional Infrastructure Confidence Building Measures of the Istanbul process, Azerbaijan will continue working with Afghanistan and other partners in this field.

In particular, I would like to emphasize that the ongoing inter-regional connectivity projects, initiated by Azerbaijan, include such strategic backbone components as:

First, the recently launched strategic Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad with its ability to facilitate trade flows to Turkish, European, and other markets through a consolidated chain of railways or through multi-modal logistics;

Second, East-West and North-South trans-regional railway corridors. In the East-West corridor, Azerbaijan and its partners also pursue the development of Lapis Lazuli transport and trade route, and Afghanistan sits in the heart of it. We strongly welcome its signature during this Conference;

Third, the expansion of the Baku International Sea Trade Port facilities with a projected first phase cargo flow equal to 15 million tonnes annually and a multi-cluster international logistics center;

Fourth, the development of a Free Economic Zone on the shores of the Caspian Sea with ability of a value-added processing of goods and extensive regional distribution capacities;

Fifth, 2 broadband internet highway connectivity projects. One of them is the Trans-Eurasian Information Super Highway (TASIM), whose target is to digitalise trade through creating a real potential for e-trade. The other project is the Asian-Pacific Super Information Highway, which is the project promoted within UN-ESCAP.

All those projects are about trade facilitation and tapping into a potential which is bigger than just that of Azerbaijan or the Caspian Sea region. Being components of our connectivity strategy, those projects will allow many countries in the region and beyond it an access to global markets through shorter, more efficient and cost-effective ways of handling logistics operations. This is exactly about trade facilitation and removing bottlenecks in trade.

But a trade opportunity itself is not enough. Well-being and prosperity of Afghanistan, its economic growth very much depends on producing a generation of well-educated professionals. It is crucial to invest into a human capital. Here too, Azerbaijan has rendered its assistance by allocating scholarships for students from Afghanistan at the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy University. We are pleased that we can build not only infrastructure projects but also knowledge.

Furthermore, in order to help Afghanistan to attract the best standards for its social and economic reforms, Azerbaijan decided to share with its innovation Azerbaijan Service and Assessment Network ASAN, which means “easy” or “simple”. With help of ASAN in my country, we promote a single-window open-doors strategy on registry, social or economic licenses, and other cross-cutting public services to citizens and business community without their need to apply to different government institutions. Such direct interface creates an atmosphere of trust and empowers the society with a rule of law. We are pleased with Afghanistan’s decision to explore and learn about this innovative knowledge and experience from us.

Dear colleagues,

Supporting Afghanistan is not only a matter of human solidarity. It is also about unlocking the huge potential of this country in terms of regional cooperation for the benefit of the entire region. We do believe that with its suitable geographic location, abundance with natural resources, determination of its people, and tireless efforts of its Government, Afghanistan will soon be transformed into an important player of regional trade and connectivity.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our support for Afghanistan’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence and wish the Government of National Unity every success in its efforts towards achieving a unified, peaceful and prosperous future for the brotherly and friendly people of Afghanistan.

Thank you for your attention.