

Deputy Minister Rovshan Rustamovs speech at Ministerial Transport Conference of Landlocked Developing Countries

*National Tourist Zone Avaza, Turkmenistan
15 - 16 August 2022*

**Dear colleagues,
Dear participants, ladies and gentlemen!**

It is great pleasure to be among such an esteemed audience. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to host country and the United Nation team for the tremendous effort put for the excellent organization of this event.

Over the past decades, considerable efforts have been put into development of sustainable transportation and transit corridors in the region. Many initiatives such as Lapis Lazuli transit route, TransCaspian International Transit Route, Caspian Sea - Black Sea International Transport Route, TRACECA have aimed at increasing regional transport connectivity and integration.

However, we have witnessed how the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the vulnerabilities of the existing supply chain models and forced government and businesses to look for less costly and time-consuming alternatives.

The pandemic has also magnified the lack of integration in the regional transportation system and has driven the countries and the organizations to make their supply chain more resilient, collaborative and networked.

The post-COVID era require closer regional cooperation, and in this context, regional integration mechanisms can play an important role. We must to keep working together bilaterally and multilaterally to work towards improving cross-border connectivity through integrated transport corridors. It is therefore important to intensify our efforts to facilitate transit, digitalize transactions and remove regulatory and procedural barriers to transport and trade, which are essential to achieve targets of Vienna Program of Action and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

On the background of complex geopolitical processes and rising economic tension in the world, this Conference platform will help our countries uncover new opportunities for cooperation in transport field.

Over the past few years alone, Azerbaijan has invested billions of dollars in its transport infrastructure.

As an example, I would like to mention the new Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line, which is connecting the Trans-European and Trans-Asian railway networks, the construction of the Baku International Sea Trade Port, which boosts the importance the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (Middle Corridor), as well as the commissioning of new airports, implementation of the large-scale projects related to the renewal of the transport fleet and infrastructure and etc.

Azerbaijan has recently started massive reconstruction in Garabagh – the area liberated from Armenian occupation. Restoring the transport infrastructure and rebuilding railroad corridors will not only help widen railroad

network integration in South Caucasus but also will ensure the shortest route from Western China to Europe.

Three international airports were planned to be constructed in the liberated territory of Azerbaijan. One airport has been already put into operation and actively managing flights from and to Azerbaijan. Rest, out of the other two airports, first one will be put into operation before the end of this year, and second one in 2023.

Of course, the transit potential of our countries is determined not only by the physical capacity of infrastructure, but – even more importantly – by its operational effectiveness. The latter requires the application of modern technologies in transport and logistics processes both on national and international levels.

Therefore, for better connectivity we have to finance not just to transport infrastructure, but also consider the benefits of both in-country and cross-border digitalization. This could potentially change the way cargo and traffic flows are organized and managed, generate business opportunities and pave the way for innovation. The single digital platform can contribute to increasing our transit-trade volume and attracting the attention of international companies to the transit routes passing through our countries.

In this context, I am confident that the Ministerial Conference will come up with positive decisions and pragmatic recommendations for sustainable development and connectivity in our regions.

Thank you!