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TURKIC SPEAKING STATES
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It is an honour to be here at the 23rd Annual session of Crans Montana Forum and address such a distinguished audience. I would like to thank the Government of Azerbaijan and Crans Montana Forum organizers for their kind invitation.

At the outset, I would like to give you brief information about our organization. The Turkic Council is a very young and dynamic organization. It was established in 2009 in Nakhchivan by Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey. The permanent Secretariat is operational in İstanbul. Turkic Council is also the umbrella organization for other cooperation mechanisms in place among the Turkic States, such as the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic States (TURKPA), the Business Council of Turkic States, the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY) and the Turkic Academy.

The main objective of the Turkic Council is to further deepen comprehensive cooperation amongst Turkic states, at the same time try to seek and foster common interests and in this way build the capacity to jointly contribute to peace and stability in the region and in the world as a whole.

From a geographical viewpoint, the Turkic Council is a new formation **at the heart of Eurasian continent** linking Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Middle East. Being situated between the eastern and western sides of the

Caspian Sea as well as between the Black Sea and Mediterranean basins, the organization is located at the epicenter of strategic routes.

In this sense, it is a movement of integration that visibly carries a Eurasian identity. While the organization can be defined best as regional cooperation, it can also be described as interregional cooperation. Due to its geographical reach into three major regions, it carries a big transport corridor potential not only for the member states but also to the whole Eurasian continent.

In this context, I will try to highlight the role of Turkic Council which I represent in the foundation and implementation of a Regional Transportation Strategy. **Here we should start with a syllogism:**

- **Central Asian countries are land-locked.**
- **They have right to free and secure access to the world.**
- **Therefore, they should develop multiple transport links with the world.**

Taking into account the fact that 12 of the 30 landlocked countries of the world are located on the Asian continent the pressing issue of today is to provide the most efficient and cheap transport link across the Eurasia. At present, the sea journey from China to Europe takes 20 to 40 days, while the new links utilizing the Caspian Sea connection could cut transport time to 11 days.

First we should eliminate the obstacles to free and secure access. In these areas, economic connections face tougher restrictions. If these countries fail to develop the necessary physical and **administrative** infrastructure, they may not fully benefit from international cooperation.

At the moment, because of **mainly** non-physical barriers such as lengthy procedures at border crossings, the average speed of a commercial truck between Central Asia and Turkey is lowered down to 17.5 km per hour.

On the other hand, the Caspian Sea crossing, which is the central transport corridor linking Turkic states, is not used efficiently.

As to how to remove these obstacles, Turkic Council has established Working Groups with respect to alleviation of physical barriers.

As a result, Groups came with various proposals to overcome the transportation barriers. Initially, a mechanism to facilitate and expedite the Caspian Sea crossings should be established. This new mechanism, in the form of a company or a consortium, will introduce regular schedules, reasonable prices and suitable **means of conveyance** for land transport operators. The project is becoming more attractive **with the expectation Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project's completion.**

Besides improving Caspian Sea crossings, we have been considering other projects that serve the purpose of building the **land-bridge between Asia and Europe.** One of these projects is the UN-backed Trans-Asian Railway.

Its significance is that with the completion of the remaining segments and the completion of the railway connection under the Istanbul Strait, namely the Marmaray, uninterrupted shipping of goods and passengers between China and Europe will be possible.

Direct rail service is faster and cheaper than both ships and trucks and much cheaper than airplanes. In some destination points, railway is faster and cheaper than maritime transport. For example, railway transit time from Leipzig in Germany to Shenyang in North-eastern China is twice as fast as maritime transport. Considering the plans for near future to build a new high-speed railway in Kazakhstan, the time efficiency of railway transport will be undisputable.

In brief we propose creation of new links to the multimodal transportation system in this region, to decrease the time of logistics.

On the other hand, these countries possess an impressive reserve of energy resources that also need diversified supply routes to deliver it more efficiently and reasonably to the world market.

Currently, there are many discussions about the interest of the energy consumer countries to diversify the routes of energy supply. Nevertheless, the Supplier states also need to diversify their supply routes in order to survive in this competitive world environment. Hence, it is crucial to develop alternative energy supply routes, for both Consumers and Suppliers.

By this time, there are examples of alternative routes that are already in operation. These are Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, which introduced significant changes to the South Caucasus status quo by changing the relationship vis-a-vis external actors. However, there is a need for more projects.

In addition, there is a project of Trans-Caspian Gas pipeline, which can actually diversify the energy supply chain of Central Asia significantly and serve to strengthen the linkages created by BTC and BTE in South Caucasus.

This is of course with the assumption that non-physical barriers to trade are also eliminated. Thus our aim is to shorten the distance and save time by eliminating the border procedures and formalities including customs and visa related issues. This will involve introducing unified border regimes and single visa practices within the Turkic world.

In conclusion, the development of a modern, integrated and inclusive transport system, and the integration of transportation, sea and land use, is important components in achieving sustainable development in the Region.

It is obvious that such a system that would exploit new economic linkages between China, other emerging economics of Asia and Europe will bring massive gains to all actors concerned. Central Asia and the Caucasus are increasingly becoming transport hubs in this sense.

Here it will be pertinent to recall a conclusion reached at the World Economic Forum on Europe and Central Asia organized in Vienna in June 2011 which was as follows: *“Opening a land route connecting the Pacific, China and East Asia with Western Europe – the “Silk Road” – promises to cut transport times to less than one-fourth of their current cost. Some countries along the route could increase their GDP by more than 40% as a result of increased business and services.”*

Hence, it can safely be asserted that development of the regional transportation corridors is a crucial factor for the sustainable development not only of the Turkic Council region but also the entire Eurasian space.

It was a great pleasure to address such a distinguished audience on an issue that is of great importance not only for the development of the Region but also for revitalization of the Silk Road as a link of prosperity spanning the entire Eurasian continent. Turkic Council, as a new regional cooperation mechanism, is willing to present its unique contribution to this process, together with relevant international partners. **In that respect, I hope that the prospect of Asian economic boom will consolidate all efforts towards this goal.**

Taking advantage of this opportunity, I would like to once again express my gratitude for the Republic of Azerbaijan and Crans Montana Forum as organizers of this conference.

Thank you for your kind attention!