

**Opening Speech of H.E. Mr. Mikayil Jabbarov,  
Minister of Economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan  
Virtual CAREC High-Level Session during the Annual General Meeting  
“CAREC at 20: Reimagining Regional Cooperation through Digital Transformation”  
4 may 2021**

**Your Excellency ADB Vice-President Mr. Shixin Chen!**

**Honorable guests!**

**Dear participants!**

First of all, I would like to extend my appreciation to Asian Development Bank and CAREC Secretariat for organizing this virtual high-level session during ADB Annual Meeting.

Despite COVID-19 pandemic, ADB, CAREC member countries and its development partners undertake efficient activity towards further strengthening of regional cooperation in the CAREC region. As a CAREC chair in 2021 I want to clearly express Azerbaijan’s commitment to continue to promote stronger regional cooperation and integration.

CAREC Program has been actively contributing to the region’s development for two decades, and no doubt that it will remain crucial to its post-pandemic recovery. Program supports further strengthening of the regional connectivity by investing in high-quality projects in various clusters, including activities in new priority areas and enhancing its role as a catalyst for regional cooperation in the fields of research, knowledge and best practices sharing.

Today we are discussing very important milestone devoted to 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of CAREC: “Reimagining Regional Cooperation through Digital Transformation”. Our country pays great attention to increasing role and necessity of the digitalization and related transformation of economy, which will certainly serve as a tool to further boost cooperation in the CAREC region. The Government of Azerbaijan has adopted and currently developing a number of programs aimed at digital transformation of country’s economy.

In February 2021 “Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities on Socio-Economic Development” Strategy was endorsed, which includes five main directions, namely:

1. sustainably growing competitive economy;
2. dynamic and inclusive society based on social justice;
3. competitive human capital and land for modern innovations;
4. great return to the liberated territories;
5. clean environment and “green growth” country.

The above-mentioned national priorities are of particular importance to the fulfilment of our commitments arising from “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” of the United Nations.

Besides, by the recent Presidential decrees the Government has been tasked to develop “Smart City” and “Smart Village” Concept as well as to draft the Digital Transformation Concept.

Worthwhile to mention that in January 2021 Centre for Analysis and Coordination of the Fourth Industrial Revolution was established under the Ministry of Economy with major aim to coordinate efforts related to adoption of the Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies and digital economy in our country. Pursuant to the founding documents signed between the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and WEF on March 30 the mentioned Centre is also hosting the Azerbaijani Affiliate (The C4IR Azerbaijan) of the World Economic Forum’s Network of the Centres for Industrial Revolution. The C4IR Azerbaijan has already become operational on April 1 and it is planned that the Affiliate Centre will be mostly concentrating on Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, Digital Economy and Trade related issues and projects.

In the meantime, we were delighted to hear about joint initiative of the World Economic Forum and CAREC Institute called “Digital CAREC”. We hope that this initiative will be further supported and developed to promote digital trade and investments among CAREC member countries and to unleash full potential of the Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies in the Region.

Within CAREC Program we often discuss the regional connectivity. Being an important transportation hub in the region, Azerbaijan is continuously improving cross-border and transit procedures and logistics, digitalizing logistics system and trade processes.

### **Dear friends!**

You may know that the new era has arrived for the region and particularly for Azerbaijan. The rehabilitation and development of the territories liberated from almost 30 years occupation by neighbouring Armenia, including establishment of the necessary infrastructure, enabling incentive for business development and implementation of new transport and economic corridors, especially Zangezur corridor are among the list of priorities on our economic agenda for years to come. These activities will certainly contribute to the enhancement of regional cooperation.

We are currently intensively working to fight against pandemic. In January 2021 “Vaccination Strategy against COVID-19 for 2021-2022 in Azerbaijan” was adopted and since 18 January 2021 vaccination process of population against COVID-19 was launched and is being

successfully implemented. As of 2 May 2021 1.516.923 persons in Azerbaijan have been vaccinated, which consist 15,2% of country population, from which fully vaccinated 541.715 persons - 5,4% of population.

In the view of pandemic and complicated global economic processes, undoubtedly, digitalization will have practical value in post-pandemic environment and efficient transformation will support and speed up achieving program's objectives, contributing to prosperity in the whole CAREC region.

**Thank you for your attention!**