



Report on the Initiative to Set Up a SPECA Network of Economic Research Institutes

(for consideration by the SPECA Coordinating Committee Meeting
Baku, Azerbaijan, 7 December 2005)

Background

SPECA member countries have an impressive analytical and research capacity in the economic field. This capacity is under-utilized due to a variety of reasons: scarcity of funds, insufficient links with partner institutions in neighbouring countries and worldwide and a gap between research on the one hand and policy-making and business on the other. Several governments and the research community of the SPECA member countries as well as international organizations, multilateral financial institutions and NGOs have repeatedly signalled the need to reinvigorate and strengthen local research and channel its results more effectively into the policy-making process and make it available both to local business and foreign investors.

The Delegation of Azerbaijan proposed to set up a regional network of economic research institutes at the expert meeting organized by OECD FIAS and the Turkish Government on 16 February 2004 in Istanbul. The Institute of World Economy and Policy at the First Kazakhstan President Foundation presented a similar initiative.

CAARN – the Applied Research Network of Central Asia – supported by the Economics Education and Research Consortium, OSCE and several other donor aims among others at strengthening applied research at universities and make its results more readily available for local governments.

The UNDP Regional Centre in Bratislava launched the EPIN initiative, which supports links between Central Asian think tanks and partner institutions in developed countries. During recent consultations with UNDP a number of important complementarities were found between the SNERI and EPIN initiatives, which provide a solid ground for close cooperation between the Regional Commissions and UNDP.

UNECE will conduct consultations on possible cooperation and synergies between SNERI and the Central Asia – Europe Forum, organized in mid-December by the Polish Institute of Eastern Studies with the support of the European Union.

Objective

SNERI aims at supporting policy-oriented research on key issues of sub-regional economic cooperation in the SPECA region by harnessing the research capacity already available and strengthening this capacity through regional team research projects, enhanced research dissemination mechanisms, increased interaction between policy-makers and researchers and

specific capacity building activities catering to the needs of researchers and research institutions. SNERI is expected to take full advantage of the SPECA Economic Forum for intensive dialogue with policy makers, the business community and dissemination of research.

Strategy

To achieve the long-term goal of enabling government policy makers to more effectively formulate and implement policies aimed at strengthening sub-regional economic cooperation, SNERI is going to engage in the following activities:

- **Research**

SNERI and its members are expected to produce high quality research and analysis on selected issues of sub-regional economic cooperation. The SNERI research programme, approved by policy makers (the SPECA Governing Council or the Coordinating Committee) on an annual basis, is expected to consist of short and long-term studies on topics of key importance for sub-regional economic cooperation.

- **Dissemination**

Research by SNERI and its members is expected to be disseminated through various means, including a dedicated website, an electronic newsletter, policy briefs and publications. The annual sessions of the SPECA Economic Forum are expected to provide researchers and policy makers as well as representatives of private business with an opportunity to exchange information, share ideas, review and refine research findings.

- **Capacity Building**

SNERI is to strive to strengthen research capacity in the SPECA member countries through the implementation of regional team-based research studies, organization of technical training workshops for researchers from member institutes and facilitating their participation in conferences, seminars and workshops organized by the UNECE, UNESCAP, their partner organizations and institutions as well as academies and economic research institutes of neighbouring countries or other member countries of UNECE and UNESCAP.

Structure

UNECE – working closely with UNESCAP – would provide professional backstopping and serve as the Secretariat of SNERI. SPECA would provide the link between research institutions (members of the Network) and policy makers at regional level through its Governing Council and Coordinating Committee. The Network should take full advantage of the existing partnerships of UNECE and UNESCAP with other organizations and institutions, in particular members of the CAREC group, WTO and UNCTAD. It would adhere to the universally recognized principle of neutrality embodied in the UN rules.

To provide the expertise required for the development of SNERI and formulation of its research programme an Advisory Board is going to be set up from representatives of seven leading economic research institutes of the sub-region (one from each SPECA member country). Members of SNERI from each country are expected to nominate one research institute to represent them in the Advisory Board.

SNERI membership

Research and academic institutions from the SPECA member countries with an interest in sub-regional economic cooperation would be invited to apply for SNERI membership. Potential benefits of being a SNERI member include: 1) improved regional dissemination of own research 2) access to other member's research 3) enhanced opportunity to participate in sub-regional research programmes and technical training workshops 4) opportunity for a direct dialogue with policy makers of the sub-region.

Cooperation with other programmes and projects

SNERI is expected to take full advantage and build on the experience of ARTNeT, a network of Asian research institutes focusing on trade, supported by UNESCAP.

It will work very closely, in a mutually supportive fashion with the other initiatives mentioned earlier in order to create the maximum synergy and avoid any overlap or duplication.

UNECE and UNESCAP plan to invite interested partner organizations, multilateral financial institutions and bilateral donors to support the initiative, including funding of certain activities.

Official launching of the Network

The Network could be officially inaugurated at the first meeting of the SPECA Economic Forum in June 2005 in Baku. A project proposal – worked out in cooperation with top researchers from the region as well as representatives of interested international and regional organizations and multilateral financial institutions – will be circulated for comments to members of the Coordinating Committee a few weeks before the Forum.

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