I. Introduction

The eleventh session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) was held on 23 November 2016 in Ganja, Azerbaijan. The 2016 SPECA Economic Forum entitled “Enhanced Implementation of SDGs through Cooperation” was held on 22 and 23 November 2016 prior to the session of the SPECA Governing Council.

II. Participants

Representatives of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan as well as the Executive Secretary of UNECE and the Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP participated in the session. Representatives from other United Nations agencies and programmes, international and regional organizations, as well as the academic community, private sector and the civil society participated as observers. The list of participants of the eleventh session of the SPECA Governing Council and the 2016 SPECA Economic Forum is attached (Annex I).

III. Opening of the session

The session was chaired by Dr. Sahil Babayev, Deputy Minister of Economy of Azerbaijan, the Chair country of SPECA in 2016.

The Chairperson of the annual session of the SPECA Governing Council stressed that “in the context of globalization, multilateral economic cooperation and integration processes have become increasingly important. Regional and interregional cooperation is one of the key components of modern international economic relations, as well as an important factor on achieving prosperity, sustainable development and economic growth.”

The opening statement of Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), was delivered by Mr. Kaveh Zahedi, Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP. In her opening statement, Dr. Shamshad Akhtar emphasized that “the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development has presented a window of opportunity for SPECA countries to shift their development trajectory. This year SPECA events enabled the countries to take stock of progress on implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and areas where strengthened regional cooperation and integration in North and Central Asia can deliver major gains, including on trade, connectivity, development of statistical capacities, and enhancing resilience to natural disasters.”
In his opening statement, Mr. Christian Friis Bach, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), stressed “the need for a comprehensive approach to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda that responds to today’s urgent social, economic and environmental challenges; a response which is based on peaceful co-existence and the rule of law, and leaves no one behind.”

IV. Adoption of the agenda

The Governing Council adopted the agenda of its eleventh session (Annex II).

V. Outcomes of the 2016 SPECA Economic Forum. Adoption of the Ganja Declaration on “Enhanced Implementation of SDGs through Cooperation”

The 2016 SPECA Economic Forum aimed to take stock of how the subregion is positioning itself in the implementation of SDGs, to assess national SDG strategies and institutional frameworks, and to examine practical approaches and modalities. Especially, participants of the 2016 SPECA Economic Forum reviewed and discussed:

- Reviving and rebalancing economic growth: review of economic performance and priority policy reforms;
- Implementation of the sustainable development goals at national level;
- Statistical assessment and statistical capacity-building needs;
- Environmental sustainability and resource-use efficiencies;
- Rebalancing development for equality, inclusion and social justice; and
- Evaluation of SPECA.

The Chairperson presented the draft Declaration on “Enhanced Implementation of SDGs through Cooperation” (Annex III).

The Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decisions under item 3 of the agenda:

“The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the outcomes of the 2016 SPECA Economic Forum on “Enhanced Implementation of SDGs through Cooperation” held in Ganja on 22-23 November 2016. The Governing Council calls upon ESCAP and UNECE, as well as other United Nations agencies and programmes, to provide active support to regional efforts by SPECA participating countries to implement the Sustainable Developments Goals through cooperation.”

and

“The Governing Council adopts the Ganja Declaration on “Enhanced Implementation of SDGs through Cooperation.””

The proposed draft decisions were adopted (see Annex IV - Decisions 1 and 2).

VI. Evaluation of SPECA

The Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decisions under item 4 of the agenda:

“The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the work done by the SPECA participating countries and the SPECA Thematic Working Groups on
implementing the provision of the Declaration of the tenth session of the Governing Council (Dushanbe, 11 November 2015), suggesting to make the SPECA framework an important platform for supporting progress towards many of the SDGs through the exchange of best practice, capacity-building, joint development and implementation of regional projects and sharing of experiences on the use of new financial mechanisms and partnerships.”

and

“The Governing Council welcomes the forward looking SPECA evaluation on strengthening its role as a mechanism for cooperation in implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development in line with the Ganja Declaration.”

The proposed draft decisions were adopted (see Annex IV – Decisions 3 and 4).

VII. Review of SPECA activities since the 10th session of the Governing Council

The Progress Reports on the work carried out by the SPECA Thematic Working Groups since the last session of the Governing Council were presented by the United Nations secretariat. After discussion, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decisions under item 5 of the agenda:

“The Governing Council notes with appreciation the Progress Reports on the work carried out by the SPECA Thematic Working Groups since its last session. The Governing Council expresses satisfaction with the scope of activities and the stability of extrabudgetary funding received by SPECA projects.”

and

“The Governing Council welcomes the strengthening cooperation between SPECA, the Regional UN Development Group, UN Country Teams in the SPECA countries, and UN and other international organizations, supporting progress towards the achievement of SDGs through enhanced subregional cooperation and towards enhanced economic cooperation in the SPECA subregion. The Governing Council underscores the importance of such partnerships for the success of assistance provided to SPECA countries on the SDGs. The Governing Council invites ESCAP and UNECE and their partner organizations to continue developing close cooperation, including further development and implementation of joint projects.”

The proposed draft decisions were adopted (see Annex IV - Decisions 5 and 6).

VIII. Election of the next Chair (country), date and venue for the 2017 SPECA Economic Forum and 12th session of the SPECA Governing Council

Several representatives from the SPECA countries expressed sincere gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan for the excellent chairmanship of the Programme in 2016 and proposed the adoption of the following decision under item 6 of the agenda:

“The Governing Council expresses its sincere gratitude to Azerbaijan for its active work as the Chair country of SPECA between 2015 and 2016.”
The proposed draft decision was adopted (see Annex IV – Decision 7).

With regard to the Chairmanship of SPECA in 2017 and the exact dates and venue of the 2017 SPECA meetings, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decisions under item 6 of the agenda:

“The Governing Council noted that the Government of Turkmenistan is considering to assume the Chairmanship of SPECA in 2017. The decision of the Government of Turkmenistan will be confirmed through diplomatic channels.”

and

“The exact dates and venue of the 2017 SPECA Economic Forum and the 12th session of the SPECA Governing Council will be agreed upon and communicated through diplomatic channels.”

The proposed draft decisions were adopted (see Annex IV – Decisions 8 and 9).

IX. Other business

The Heads of Delegation thanked the Government of Azerbaijan for the excellent organization of the SPECA events and hospitality. They also expressed their gratitude to the two United Nations Regional Commissions for their devoted support to the Programme as a whole. The Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following additional decisions under item 8 of the agenda:

“The Governing Council expresses its sincere gratitude to the Government of Azerbaijan for the excellent organization and generous hospitality offered to the participants of the 2016 SPECA Economic Forum and the eleventh session of the SPECA Governing Council.”

and

“The Governing Council expresses its deep appreciation to the secretariats of ESCAP and UNECE and their Executive Secretaries for their efforts to organize these important annual events and also expresses its special appreciation for their active work aimed at strengthening SPECA and their continued support to Programme implementation.”

The proposed draft decisions were adopted (see Annex IV – Decisions 10 and 11).

X. Closing of the session

The Chairperson of the session, the Executive Secretary of UNECE and the Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP in their closing statements called on SPECA participating countries, the United Nations and development partners to work together on the implementation of the decisions of the Governing Council.

The Chairperson closed the eleventh session of the SPECA Governing Council.
2016 SPECA ECONOMIC FORUM
“Enhanced Implementation of SDGs through Cooperation”

and

ELEVENTH SESSION OF THE SPECA GOVERNING COUNCIL

(Ganja, Azerbaijan, 22-23 November 2016)

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ANNEX II

UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL PROGRAMME FOR THE ECONOMIES OF CENTRAL ASIA (SPECA)

Eleventh Session of the SPECA Governing Council

(Ganja, Azerbaijan, 23 November 2016)

AGENDA

1. Opening of the session

Opening of the session by the representative of the Government of Azerbaijan, the Chair country of SPECA, followed by the opening statements of the Executive Secretaries of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), and the Heads of Delegation of the SPECA countries.

2. Adoption of the Agenda


4. Evaluation of SPECA

5. Review of SPECA activities since the 10th session of the Governing Council

Progress reports of the SPECA Thematic Working Groups will be circulated in advance of the session. Progress reports of the SPECA Thematic Working Groups followed by a discussion:

- WG on Water, Energy and Environment
- WG on Sustainable Transport, Transit and Connectivity
- WG on Trade
- WG on Statistics
- WG on Knowledge-based Development
- WG on Gender and Economy

6. Election of the next Chair (country), date and venue for the 2017 SPECA Economic Forum and 12th session of the SPECA Governing Council

7. Adoption of decisions

8. Other business

9. Closing of the session

Closing statements by the Heads of Delegation of the SPECA participating countries, the Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP and the Executive Secretary of UNECE.
Ganja Declaration
“Enhanced Implementation of SDGs through Cooperation”

We, the high-level representatives of the countries participating in the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, Afghanistan and Azerbaijan (SPECA),

Having met in Ganja, on 22-23 November 2016, on the 11th session of the SPECA Governing Council and the 2016 SPECA Economic Forum,

Recalling the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1) and the commitment of all stakeholders to implement it in collaboration,

Recalling the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) for the Decade 2014-2024 (A/RES/69/137), whose overarching goal is to overcome the structural challenges faced by LLDCs in order to achieve internationally agreed development goals,

Recalling the Asia Regional Plan for Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, which was adopted by the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held in New Delhi on 3-5 November 2016,

Reaffirming the Baku Ministerial Declaration on “Ministerial Conference on the Aid-for-Trade Road Map for SPECA” held in Baku on 2 December 2010,

Reaffirming the Dushanbe Declaration “Paving the way for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the SPECA region” adopted in Dushanbe on 11 November 2015,

Welcoming the achievements of SPECA participating countries in implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and targets, particularly in poverty reduction, education, maternal and infant health,

Noting further that the MDG gains were not distributed equitably among and within countries, and that the unfinished aspects of the MDG agenda need to be addressed in the new SDG framework,

Emphasizing the need for a more comprehensive approach in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda that responds to the urgent economic, social and environmental challenges, based on a peaceful co-existence and the rule of law, with no one left behind,

Adopt the following Declaration:
1. We welcome the progress that SPECA participating countries have made in mainstreaming SDGs into their national development strategies and in establishing national coordination mechanisms for coherent implementation of SDGs at the national level.

2. We support a subregional consolidation of national assessments in SDG implementation as part of the SPECA programme of work, with SPECA serving as a bridge to the regional and global follow-up and review mechanisms for the 2030 Agenda. Notably, these subregional assessments should feed into ESCAP’s and UNECE’s Regional Fora for Sustainable Development, respectively.

3. We welcome convening of the 8th International Forum on Energy for Sustainable Development scheduled from 11 to 14 June 2017 in Astana, including the holding of an energy ministerial meeting at its opening, which represents an opportunity for the countries of Central Asia, Afghanistan and Azerbaijan to deepen their collaboration on energy issues through SPECA.

4. We welcome the positive impact of infrastructure development on the achievement of SDGs, noting in particular the recent launch of large energy infrastructure projects, and note further that with our landlocked status the development of: seamless cross-border transit transport; information and communications technology; and energy infrastructure, are crucial for supporting sustainable growth, improving social well-being and enhancing international cooperation and trade.

5. While reaffirming the great transport, trade and transit potential of the SPECA region, we emphasize the development of cooperation in the fields of border crossing and customs procedures, as well as, facilitation of transit procedures by using internationally recognised tools and best practises that will serve to enhance the trade in the region.

6. We support SPECA as a platform for reinforcing progress towards achieving SDGs on infrastructure, innovation, and diversification as crucial drivers of economic growth and sustainable development. Transboundary cooperation efforts under the SPECA framework aiming to achieve Goal 9, and targets 6.5, 7.1 and 7.2 are highly relevant and should guide further work on regional infrastructure connectivity in transport, energy and ICT (Goal 9) as well as the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in the SPECA subregion (Goals 6 and 7).

7. We note further with concern that SPECA countries are increasingly vulnerable to disasters and we welcome ESCAP’s newly established Asia-Pacific Centre for Disaster Information Management (APDIM), hosted by the Islamic Republic of Iran. We support its planned strategic direction as an information and knowledge hub on transboundary and multi-hazard disasters. We support its first planned initiative on sand and dust storms.

8. We welcome the organization of the EXPO-2017 on “Future Energy” in Astana which will be a catalyst for a new approach for the green economy in SPECA participating countries based on the principle of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the sake of our planet. We further support the establishment of the International Centre on development of green technologies and investment with the support of the UN as a legacy of EXPO-2017. We reaffirm our full support for objectives to promote clean and sustainable energy.

9. We support the work of the Regional Hub of Civil Service in Astana in increasing effectiveness of the public service by building institutional and human capacity of the civil service of governments.

10. We support the UN Global Sustainable Transport Conference in Ashgabat, on 26-27 November 2016, and call for SPECA countries to reinforce the Eurasian Transport Links
programme to further develop trade and transport in the region, and in this regard, we pledge to fully support the third session of ESCAP’s Ministerial Conference on Transport in Moscow on 5-9 December 2016.

11. We recognize the seriousness of the road safety situation in the subregion, and we urge SPECA participating countries to take all necessary actions to stop and reverse the current negative road safety trends and to implement road safety strategic goals based on the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020, which will lead to achieving SDG target 3.6, and call for SPECA countries to accede to the UN Road Safety Conventions and legal agreements.

12. We reaffirm the importance of trade, finance, investment and technology in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and support the High-Level Follow-up Dialogue on Financing for Development in Asia and the Pacific. In particular, we consider public-private partnerships as an important tool for the mobilization of necessary resources.

13. We note that despite recent improvements, non-physical barriers, delays and inefficiencies at border crossings and ports, including issues related to customs procedures and documentation requirements, uncertainty in logistical services and weak institutions, impose exceptionally high trade and transport transaction costs that continue to impose a burden on development.

14. We support the need of preparation of the regional research on technical and procedural barriers in trade.

15. While recognizing the real or potential role of remittances as a source of financing development, and the large share of gross domestic product they account for in the lower-income SPECA participating countries, we note with concern the sharp decline of such remittances experienced since 2014 and the significant impact such declines have had, especially on household disposable income.

16. We emphasize the importance of regional cooperation and integration among SPECA participating countries and with the wider Eurasian region. Hence, we urge actions that will promote our potential role as a Eurasian transit hub through the coherent development of regional infrastructure, trade facilitation, and investment promotion measures, in order to help overcome constraints resulting from being landlocked.

17. We note that there is an urgent need to address the data gaps and improve the statistical capacity of SPECA participating countries, to ensure readiness to meet the requirements of the emerging SDG monitoring architecture. Particularly, we emphasize the need for all countries to have the capability to provide an agreed basic range of population, economic, social and environmental statistics, and, in parallel, to streamline the work of national statistics offices in order to promote adaptability and cost-effectiveness.

18. We welcome the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, adopted on 12 December 2015. In this context, we underscore the importance of cooperation among governments and other stakeholders for addressing cross-border environmental challenges including climate change and disaster risk reduction.

19. We reaffirm the important role of gender equality and the empowerment of women in catalyzing progress across all SDGs. Systematically mainstreaming a gender perspective requires accelerated and coordinated actions at national and regional levels, and we pledge increased
investments and support to institutions that promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, the further development of gender-disaggregated data, as well as monitoring and review.

20. We are encouraged by improvements in education and health while recognizing that many challenges remain to raise the skills and well-being of women, men and children in an inclusive drive to achieve the economic, human and social development. This will not only ensure that the educational and health-related Sustainable Development Goals and targets are met, but it will also contribute to reaching the other objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

21. We are concerned that inequality and environmental degradation continue to raise significant challenges among and within our countries. In this context, the comprehensive 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides an overarching framework to effectively address these issues.

22. We also recognize that protecting the rights of migrant workers and well managed migration policies are a specific focus of SDGs 8 and 10. To this end, we will make our best efforts to ensure that the rules governing international migration are effective in maximizing their contributions to the development of countries of destination and origin, while in line with international standards.

23. We call on ESCAP and UNECE to continue their efforts to revitalize and strengthen SPECA so that SPECA participating countries will be in a position to implement, review, measure, and adapt implementation of SDGs on a cooperative basis, annually, until the year 2030.

24. We encourage the Secretariats of ESCAP and UNECE to continue providing analytical work and technical cooperation to assist our efforts to achieve the SDGs through building productive capacities, diversifying our economies, undergoing structural transformation and promoting regional economic cooperation and integration. In this respect, we stress the importance and value of the annual meetings of the SPECA Thematic working groups to enhance cooperation and facilitate exchanges of best practices on the means and methods to achieve the SDGs.

25. We commit to seeking all ways and means of strengthening cooperation and collaboration among SPECA participating countries.

26. We express our sincere appreciation and gratitude to the people and the Government of Azerbaijan for their warm hospitality, generous support and for the excellent arrangements made for the organization of the 2016 SPECA Economic Forum and the 11th session of the SPECA Governing Council held in Ganja.

27. We also express our appreciation to ESCAP, UNECE and their respective Executive Secretaries, for their continued support for the development of our countries.

28. We recognise the supportive role of funds, agencies, programmes of the United Nations system in the region, the Regional UN Development Group, the Regional Coordination Mechanism of the United Nations, UNDP and the United Nations Country Teams, as well as development banks, foundations, bilateral donors, research centres and other partners of SPECA in supporting sustainable development. We encourage closer collaboration to support the efforts of governments to achieve the SDGs, and to use SPECA as a framework for further consolidation of activities in support of subregional aspects of the 2030 Agenda in Central Asia among relevant UN organizations and development partners.
UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL PROGRAMME FOR THE ECONOMIES OF CENTRAL ASIA (SPECA)

Eleventh Session of the SPECA Governing Council

(Ganja, Azerbaijan, 23 November 2016)

DECISIONS

Decision 1 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2016/1)

The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the outcomes of the 2016 SPECA Economic Forum on “Enhanced Implementation of SDGs through Cooperation” held in Ganja on 22-23 November 2016. The Governing Council calls upon ESCAP and UNECE, as well as other United Nations agencies and programmes, to provide active support to regional efforts by SPECA participating countries to implement the Sustainable Developments Goals through cooperation.

Decision 2 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2016/2)

The Governing Council adopts the Ganja Declaration on “Enhanced Implementation of SDGs through Cooperation”.

Decision 3 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2016/3)

The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the work done by the SPECA participating countries and the SPECA Thematic Working Groups on implementing the provision of the Declaration of the tenth session of the Governing Council (Dushanbe, 11 November 2015), suggesting to make the SPECA framework an important platform for supporting progress towards many of the SDGs through the exchange of best practice, capacity-building, joint development and implementation of regional projects and sharing of experiences on the use of new financial mechanisms and partnerships.

Decision 4 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2016/4)

The Governing Council welcomes the forward looking SPECA evaluation on strengthening its role as a mechanism for cooperation in implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development in line with the Ganja Declaration.

Decision 5 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2016/5)

The Governing Council notes with appreciation the Progress Reports on the work carried out by the SPECA Thematic Working Groups since its last session. The Governing Council expresses satisfaction with the scope of activities and the stability of extrabudgetary funding received by SPECA projects.
Decision 6 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2016/6)

The Governing Council welcomes the strengthening cooperation between SPECA, the Regional UN Development Group, UN Country Teams in the SPECA countries, and UN and other international organizations, supporting progress towards the achievement of SDGs through enhanced subregional cooperation and towards enhanced economic cooperation in the SPECA subregion. The Governing Council underscores the importance of such partnerships for the success of assistance provided to SPECA countries on the SDGs. The Governing Council invites ESCAP and UNECE and their partner organizations to continue developing close cooperation, including further development and implementation of joint projects.

Decision 7 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2016/7)

The Governing Council expresses its sincere gratitude to Azerbaijan for its active work as the Chair country of SPECA between 2015 and 2016.

Decision 8 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2016/8)

The Governing Council noted that the Government of Turkmenistan is considering to assume the Chairmanship of SPECA in 2017. The decision of the Government of Turkmenistan will be confirmed through diplomatic channels.

Decision 9 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2016/9)

The exact dates and venue of the 2017 SPECA Economic Forum and the 12th session of the SPECA Governing Council will be agreed upon and communicated through diplomatic channels.

Decision 10 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2016/10)

The Governing Council expresses its sincere gratitude to the Government of Azerbaijan for the excellent organization and generous hospitality offered to the participants of the 2016 SPECA Economic Forum and the eleventh session of the SPECA Governing Council.

Decision 11 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2016/11)

The Governing Council expresses its deep appreciation to the secretariats of ESCAP and UNECE and their Executive Secretaries for their efforts to organize these important annual events and also expresses its special appreciation for their active work aimed at strengthening SPECA and their continued support to Programme implementation.