



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

Thirteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council

Almaty, Kazakhstan, 21 September 2018

REPORT

I. Decisions.

1. The following decisions were adopted at the thirteenth session the Governing Council of the United Nations Special Programme of the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 21 September 2018:

Decision 1 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/1)

2. The Governing Council notes with satisfaction and adopts the Conclusions and Recommendations of the 2018 SPECA Economic Forum on “Twenty years of SPECA: A new stage in regional cooperation for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 20 and 21 September 2018. Annex I presents the conclusions and recommendations of the 2018 SPECA Economic Forum.

3. The Council calls upon the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), and other United Nations agencies and programmes, as well as its international development partners, to provide support to the efforts of the SPECA participating countries, undertaken on the national and regional levels, in (a) strengthening connectivity in trade, transport, energy and information and communication technologies, (b) accelerating structural economic transformation and (c) enhancing partnerships in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024 and other internationally agreed goals.

Decision 2 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/2)

4. The Council notes with appreciation the Progress Reports on the activities of the SPECA Thematic Working Groups since its last session and expresses satisfaction with the implementation of the activities covered in the reports.

5. The Governing Council also expresses its appreciation to the SPECA participating countries for supporting and hosting the Thematic Working Groups sessions, as well as to Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and the Islamic Development Bank for financial support to the activities by the Thematic Working Groups.

Decision 3 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/3)

6. The Governing Council welcomes “the Roadmap for Elaborating a SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development” and “the Draft Outline of a SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development” prepared by the Working Group on Knowledge-based Development and requests the SPECA countries, UNECE and ESCAP to finalize the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development.

Decision 4 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/4)

7. The Governing Council notes with appreciation the report of the Expert Group Meeting on SPECA, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 11 and 12 June 2018, as well as the final SPECA evaluation report submitted to the meeting.

Name of SPECA

8. Noting the proposal to change the name of SPECA, the Governing Council decides to consider this issue at its next session.

Focal points for SPECA

9. The Governing Council requests the SPECA participating countries to nominate focal points for SPECA in writing to the ESCAP and UNECE secretariats.

Thematic Working Groups

10. The Governing Council decides that the Thematic Working Groups on Water, Energy and Environment; on Sustainable Transport, Transit and Connectivity; and on Trade should continue and work towards supporting the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets that are “regional” and “cross border” in nature.

11. The Governing Council notes that the Working Group on Knowledge-based Development will consider its Terms of Reference at its next session and report to the next session of the Governing Council.

12. The Governing Council approves the recommendations of the last session of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and Economy held on 19 September 2018, in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and decides to change the Group’s name to “SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs”. The Governing Council decides that the Working Group on Gender and SDGs should continue to work in the area of gender mainstreaming and transformative policies as follows: (a) non-discriminatory labour market policies in the course of hiring and work environment free of discrimination and exploitation; (b) policies to promote the participation of women in public and private companies; (c) policies to prevent stereotypes in education and research to advance the participation of women in R&D sectors; and (d) policies for building support systems for women entrepreneurship development. In addition, the Working Group will contribute to the monitoring and reporting for the regional review process of Beijing +25 as well as the Sustainable Development Goals.

13. The Governing Council notes that the Working Group on Statistics has not yet met in 2018. The Governing Council decides that the Working Group at its next session in October 2018 should formulate, with support from the ESCAP and UNECE

secretariats, where regional coordination is needed in relation to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in its area (notably on monitoring and measuring progress in the implementation of SDGs and targets) and submits its conclusion to the next session of the Governing Council in 2019 for its consideration.

14. The Council decides that the Thematic Working Groups on Gender and SDGs as well as on Statistics should support the other Thematic Working Groups on cross-cutting issues.

15. The Council requests all Thematic Working Groups to submit their Terms of Reference to the next session of the Governing Council.

16. The Council agrees that sessions of the Thematic Working Groups should take place any time before or concurrent to the annual sessions of the Governing Council.

Focal points for the Thematic Working Groups

17. The Governing Council requests the SPECA participating countries to nominate focal points for each Working Group in writing to the ESCAP and UNECE secretariats.

Financing

18. The Governing Council invites SPECA participating countries to explore possibilities for financial and/or in-kind contributions for the activities of SPECA. The Council requests the ESCAP and UNECE secretariats to send an official letter with a calendar of SPECA events (date and venue) to the SPECA participating countries for their consideration for financial and/or in-kind support.

Decision 5 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/5)

19. The Council notes the offer by the Government of Kazakhstan to host the secretariat of SPECA in the new United Nations common premises in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The Council requests the Government of Kazakhstan to send an official letter proposing the function and financing of the secretariat of SPECA for further consideration by the SPECA participating countries. The Council also decides to consider this issue further at its next session in 2019.

Decision 6 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/6)

20. The Council welcomes the offer by the Government of Turkmenistan to assume the Chairmanship of SPECA in 2019, and elects Turkmenistan as the Chair country of SPECA for 2019. The Council also welcomes the Concept of Turkmenistan's Chairmanship of SPECA in 2019.

Decision 7 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/7)

21. The Council decides that the fourteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council and the 2019 SPECA Economic Forum will be held in Ashgabat in November 2019. The exact dates, venue and theme of these events will be agreed upon and communicated through the diplomatic channels.

Decision 8 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/8)

22. The Council welcomes the proposal by the Government of Kyrgyzstan to assume the Chairmanship of SPECA in 2020 and host the Economic Forum and session of the Governing Council in 2020.

Decision 9 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/9)

23. In light of its decisions at the thirteenth session in 2018, the Council decides to consider the Terms of Reference of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia at its fourteenth session in 2019.

Decision 10 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/10)

24. The Council expresses its sincere gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the chairmanship and excellent organization of the 2018 SPECA Economic Forum and the thirteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council, as well as the hospitality offered to the participants.

Decision 11 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/11)

25. The Council expresses its deep appreciation to the ESCAP and UNECE secretariats for their continued support to the implementation of the SPECA activities.

II. Proceedings.

A. Outcome of the 2018 SPECA Economic Forum.

26. The delegation of Afghanistan proposed to include the banking system and capital markets issues and strengthening financial integration in the SPECA region into the programme of the 2019 Economic Forum.

B. Activities of the SPECA Thematic Working Groups since the twelfth session Governing Council.

27. The secretariat of UNECE presented (a) the Progress Reports on the activities of the SPECA Thematic Working Groups (SPECA/GC/13/2); (b) the Roadmap for elaborating a SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development (SPECA/GC/13/INF/2); and (c) the Draft Outline of a SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development (SPECA/GC/13/INF/3) for consideration.

28. Each SPECA Working Group (WG) was invited to present its activities:

(a) The representative of the Working Group on Water, Energy and Environment highlighted its achievements over 20 years, focusing on the interlinkage among its three areas of work.

(b) The representative of the Working Group on Sustainable Transport, Transit and Connectivity requested more active participation and nomination of a focal point for the WG from each SPECA participating country.

(c) The Chairperson of the last session of the Working Group on Trade reported on its review of four studies on (a) SPECA regional strategy for trade facilitation; (b) regional cooperation for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals related to trade; (c) link between water management, trade and environment in the SPECA region; and (d) non-tariff measures in trade in the SPECA region. The SPECA participating countries were invited to comment the studies for finalization.

(d) The representative of the Working Group on Statistics from the delegation of Kazakhstan suggested that the Working Group on Statistics should work with the other Thematic Working Groups to address the demand for data and measurement.

(e) The representative of the Working Group on Knowledge-based Development from the delegation of Azerbaijan reported that the Working Group on Knowledge-based Development held the discussion to promote regional coordination in its areas of work and agreed to review its Terms of Reference at its next session.

(f) The representative of the Working Group on Gender and Economy from the delegation of Azerbaijan presented recommendations from the meeting of the Working Group on Gender and Economy as recorded in SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/4. The Group proposed its new name – Working Group on Gender and SDGs – in order to include the gender dimension as a cross-cutting issue in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and asked the Governing Council to approve this proposal.

29. The delegation of Afghanistan suggested the nomination of national focal points for each Working Group for coordination among different ministries engaged in the activities of the Group at the national level.

30. Each Working Group was invited to review its Terms of Reference at its next session and prepare the updated Terms of Reference by using a template to be shared by the UNECE secretariat.

31. The delegation of Turkmenistan requested the ESCAP and UNECE secretariats to submit background papers for the Thematic Working Groups well in advance before meetings in order to have enough time for the SPECA participating countries to review and comment the papers.

C. Evaluation of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia.

32. The report of the Expert Group Meeting on SPECA (SPECA/GC/13/5) and the final report on the Evaluation of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA/GC/13/INF/5) were considered by the Governing Council. All decisions were presented under Decision 4 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/4).

33. The representative of Afghanistan emphasized that SPECA should focus on strengthening subregional economic cooperation, capacity-building activities and realization of joint projects to assist SPECA countries to achieve Sustainable Development Goals.

34. The delegation of Tajikistan requested clarification regarding the timing of sessions of each Working Group. After discussion, the Council agreed that sessions of the Thematic Working Groups should take place any time before or concurrent to the annual sessions of the Governing Council.

D. Election of the next Chair country of SPECA.

35. The Government of Turkmenistan expressed its willingness to assume the Chairmanship of SPECA in 2019 and host the fourteenth session of the Governing Council and the 2019 SPECA Economic Forum. In his presentation of the Concept Note on Turkmenistan's Chairmanship Priorities in SPECA, the representative of Turkmenistan stated that the Government of Turkmenistan viewed SPECA as a unique platform for international cooperation and proposed that the 2019 Economic Forum should focus on expansion of transport infrastructure and simplification of procedures for the movement of goods, services and people across state borders in the SPECA region. Furthermore, the Government of Turkmenistan suggested to organize two expert meetings on improving the work of SPECA.

E. Date, venue and theme of the 2019 SPECA Economic Forum and fourteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council.

36. The Council decided that the fourteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council and the 2019 SPECA Economic Forum would be convened in Ashgabat in November 2019.

F. Other matters.

37. The Government of Kyrgyzstan expressed its willingness to assume the Chairmanship of SPECA in 2020 and host the fifteenth session of the Governing Council and the 2020 SPECA Economic Forum.

38. The Council expressed its gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the Chairmanship and excellent organization of the 2018 SPECA Economic Forum and the thirteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council.

III. Organization.

A. Opening and organization of the session.

39. The thirteenth session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 21

September 2018. The session was chaired by Mr. Kairat Torebayev, Director of the International Cooperation Department, Ministry of National Economy of Kazakhstan.

B. Participants.

40. Representatives of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as well as the ESCAP and UNECE secretariats participated in the session. Representatives from other countries interested in supporting the Programme, United Nations agencies and programmes, international and regional organizations, international financial institutions and academia took part in the session as observers. The list of participants of the 2018 SPECA Economic Forum and the thirteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council is enclosed (Annex II).

C. Agenda.

41. The agenda of the thirteenth session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA/GC/13/1) was as follows.

1. Opening of the session.
 - (a) Opening addresses.
 - (b) Adoption of the agenda
2. Outcome of the 2018 SPECA Economic Forum.
3. Activities of the SPECA Thematic Working Groups since the twelfth session of the Governing Council.
4. Evaluation of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia.
5. Election of the next Chair country of SPECA.
6. Date, venue and theme of the 2019 SPECA Economic Forum and fourteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council.
7. Other matters.
8. Adoption of decisions.
9. Closing of the session.

Annex I

2018 SPECA ECONOMIC FORUM **“Twenty years of SPECA:** **A new stage in regional cooperation for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”**

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Economic Forum invites Governments of the SPECA countries, relevant stakeholders and development partners to consider the following conclusions and recommendations taking into account their specific needs.

- 1. Achieved progress within the last 20 years by SPECA participating countries and the commitment of all stakeholders in joint implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1).**
 - a. All SPECA participating countries made substantial progress towards strengthening regional cooperation and integration, connectivity and economic development within the last 20 years.
 - b. All SPECA participating countries have implemented reforms to restructure their economic systems, prudently manage public finances and monetary systems.
 - c. SPECA Thematic Working Groups have made progress in such areas as trade, knowledge-based development, sustainable transport, transit, connectivity, water, energy, environment, women’s empowerment and statistics.
 - d. Strengthening of economic cooperation and integration into the regional and global economies and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development require close coordination in social and economic policies of the SPECA countries.
- 2. Strengthening cooperation in the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action (VPoA) for Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) for the Decade 2014-2024 (A/RES/69/137), which overarching goal is to overcome the structural challenges faced by LLDCs in order to achieve internationally agreed development goals.**
 - a. **The Economic Forum noted that SPECA participating countries achieved a progress** during the implementation of the VPoA in a number of areas, such as:
 - Investment in infrastructure development has been given priority during this period.
 - LLDCs have made important progress in transport, trade, energy, and ICT connectivity.

- b. **LLDCs continue to face structural challenges to accessing to international markets but the solutions could be different.** The challenges are the following:
 - access to sea ports;
 - transportation costs;
 - weakly developed infrastructure;
 - weaknesses in regulatory framework;
 - limited capacity-building;
 - lack of financial resources; and
 - other challenges including transportation safety and security issues.

 - c. **To reduce trade costs, increase competitiveness of LLDCs' economies and promote growth the SPECA countries need to take steps in the following areas:**
 - **Infrastructure Development:** Explore innovative means to mobilize additional funds to build new and maintain existing transport infrastructure.
 - **Trade Facilitation: Implement the measures of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement** to assist LLDCs that rely on transit through third countries to access sea ports and consider accession and active participation in the Framework on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific. Trade facilitation could become a strong vehicle to provide access to the regional markets.
 - **Reform of the Trucking Sector and Harmonization of Regulatory Regimes:** Remove trade barriers further for international trucking and promoting incentives for quality and compliance. In this connection regional transport agreements of ESCAP (Asian Highway Network, Trans-Asian Railway Network, Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports) and UNECE Transport Conventions will facilitate these reforms.
 - **Improve access to financial resources within the available sources.** The Governing Council invites ESCAP, UNECE, SPECA countries and other development partners to continue close cooperation on joint projects and activities to implement priorities of the SPECA countries.
- 3. Acceleration of structural economic transformation is a fundamental condition to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and increasing shared prosperity in the SPECA participating countries.**
- a. The Economic Forum agreed that efforts on industrialization, diversification, export enhancement, improvement of statistics, digitalization, infrastructure and knowledge-based development, good governance, regional and global integration of SPECA participating countries are important conditions for structural economic transformation.
 - b. To facilitate structural economic transformation of the SPECA participating countries could develop of non-commodity sectors, such as ICT, finance, e-commerce, tourism, venture business and green economy.
 - c. Fostering inclusive growth that is broad based, equitable and promotes women empowerment. SPECA countries agreed that job-creating inclusive economic

growth is important for the development of national strategies. To achieve these objectives, SPECA participating countries agreed that they will need to further develop competitive and vibrant private sector well integrated into the regional and global economies.

4. Fostering global and regional economic integration and cross-border cooperation within the SPECA region and beyond.

- a. Integration of SPECA participating countries into the regional and global economies is important to achieve inclusive growth by offering new markets and improving competitiveness and productivity intra SPECA and international trade, transport, transit connectivity, water and energy cooperation. SPECA provides the opportunity to share good practices and exchange experience on the economic cooperation within the SPECA region and beyond.
- b. SPECA participating countries have potential to develop their land-link connections, to tap deeper regional and subregional markets, which will provide a major impetus to economic and trade diversification. There are equally good prospects for the SPECA participating countries to serve as transit land bridge for the movement of goods and services, from South to North and from East to West. Developing regional connectivity and transport route diversification will be crucial for the SPECA participating countries to become land-linked. Moving forward, effectively leveraging the opportunities offered by regional integration initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, Eurasian Economic Union as well as intergovernmental agreements on trade corridors, could enhance connectivity in the SPECA region.

5. An enhancement of subregional infrastructure, energy, transport, ICT connectivity, trade facilitation, and investment competitiveness

- a. Investing in the modernization of infrastructure related to transport, power generation, green economy, innovations and ICT framework is an essential component of a pro-growth strategy. It is essential for economic competitiveness, sustainability and inclusiveness.

6. The Economic Forum recommended to include banking system and capital markets issues and relatively weak regional financial interlinkages among SPECA countries in the Programme of the next SPECA Economic Forum.

**2018 SPECA ECONOMIC FORUM AND
THE 13TH SESSION OF THE SPECA GOVERNING COUNCIL**

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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- H.E. Mr. Humayoon RASAW, Minister, Ministry of Trade and Industry
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