



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

2023 SPECA Economic Forum
*"Transforming the SPECA Region into a Connectivity Hub
with Global Outreach"*

(Baku, Azerbaijan, 21-22 November 2023)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Session I: Digital Transformation of Data and Document Exchange in Supply Chains Using UN Standards

- a. Encourage economic operators and authorities in SPECA countries to adopt an exchange of **electronic freight transport data in line with relevant United Nations standards, including the UN/CEFACT package of standards**, and legal instruments, ensuring interoperability and efficiency across the trans-Caspian trade and transport corridor.
- b. Use existing regional and global **best practices** which use the UN/CEFACT standards, aiming for digital interoperability in supply chains.
- c. **Invite regulatory agencies, sectorial organizations, and the business community to use international standards for digitalization projects**, enhancing interoperability of multimodal data and document exchange in the trans-Caspian corridor exchange.
- d. **Reinforce pilot implementation projects** for operational supply chain data exchanges based on the UN/CEFACT standards. Particularly, SPECA countries are invited to join the railway agencies of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Türkiye, and Ukraine in the **pilot project led by TRACECA** for digitalization of railway consignment notes using the UN standards.
- e. **Collaborate with development partners and national digitalization programmes** to achieve the outlined digital transformation goals. Enhance training and advisory services for national and international experts on the customization and use of the UN/CEFACT standards; form a regional group of experts to advance this work. Create an excellence centre on data interchange between countries, which can organize training.
- f. Enhance regional **digital policy cooperation and capacity-building**, noting with appreciation the initiatives of the Government of Kazakhstan to organize in collaboration with ESCAP a Ministerial Conference on Digital Transformation in Asia and the Pacific and set up a digital solutions centre for sustainable development for SPECA and beyond to promote understanding and use of international digitalization tools.

Session II: Transport Connectivity for More Efficient Euro-Asian Transport Links

- a. **Develop a strategy for the development of the Middle (trans-Caspian) corridor until 2040**; introduce measures and mechanisms to increase the share of transport in the GDP of the SPECA participating States.
- b. **Recognize the strides in implementing the TIR procedure** and the interconnection of national customs systems to the eTIR International System in the SPECA region.

- c. **Commend Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan** for performing the first eTIR in December 2022, and for completing the interconnection of their national customs systems with the eTIR International System hosted by UNECE.
- d. **Welcome** the start of the interconnection project by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Encourage Turkmenistan to take positive steps to start their interconnection project.
- e. Urge SPECA participating States to **expedite the interconnection project for the implementation of the full eTIR procedure along the Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor (Middle Corridor)**, to enhance Euro-Asian transport and trade links.
- f. Advocate for continued development of transport infrastructure and connectivity across the SPECA region.

Session III: Green Energy Connectivity in the SPECA Region

- a. Acknowledge the **region's diverse fossil and renewable energy resources** and **promote their strategic low- and zero-carbon energy development and cross-regional low- and zero-carbon energy trade** for emission reduction and an affordable and sustainable energy transition.
- b. Emphasize the importance of regional energy connectivity and trade, advocating for an **integrated and interconnected energy system**, including electricity and gas grids, and compatibility for transport and trade of electricity and low-carbon and zero-carbon hydrogen.
- c. Encourage the adoption of the **UNECE Framework for Building Resilient Energy Systems** and support the **UNECE initiative: Platform on Resilient Energy Systems**, to ensure energy security, affordability, and environmental sustainability.
- d. Encourage the adoption of the **ESCAP Green Power Corridor Framework** to align power system connectivity efforts with sustainable development and to support the scaling and integration of additional renewable energy power generation through low- and zero-carbon interplay into the current energy systems to enhance the resilience of the region's energy system.
- e. UNECE and UN ESCAP to provide technical support through a series of capacity building projects on energy connectivity tailored for the SPECA region. Specific technical recommendations are included in the report of the [Almaty Energy Forum](#).

Session IV: SPECA at 25 and Vision for the 25 Years to Come

- a. Urge SPECA countries to adopt a **strategic foresight perspective in planning for the future of the region**, which will be shaped by the rise of new technologies, increased importance of knowledge-based industries, and the growing demand for sustainable products and services due to climate constraints. Focus on "horizon" issues for (including but not limited to) hydrogen energy, artificial intelligence, carbon capture, circular economy, etc.
- b. Prioritize **water conservation, renewable energy, and climate-resilient agriculture** in response to over 90% utilization of water resources and increased climate change-induced droughts in Central Asia.
- c. Embrace an integrated approach to managing the **water, land, and energy nexus**, fostering regional and transboundary cooperation to address water, food, and energy security holistically; pay **special attention to migration caused by climate change effects** and water stress.
- d. Explore partnerships to ensure SPECA can serve as a useful platform for sectoral and cross-sectoral cooperation on the **Climate Change agenda** in the region including as an input

- towards the **Regional Climate Summit in 2026 in Kazakhstan**. Explore developing a regional platform for climate action, similar to country platforms for climate transition.
- e. Recognize the **pivotal role of private sector finance and investment** in fostering innovation, enhancing regional connectivity, and contributing to job creation, poverty reduction, and improved living standards.
 - f. Emphasize **investments in education, upskilling, research, and innovation**, aligning with technological advancements and sustainable development trends. This may include work on national Innovation for Sustainable Development (I4SD) Reviews; capacity building to empower innovative start-ups and high-growth enterprises; work on skills for the future. Also, as proposed by Azerbaijan:
 - i. Develop a **network of Economic Universities** and Open Digital University in the SPECA region.
 - ii. Establish a **SPECA regional research centre on sustainable development and green economy** at the Azerbaijan State University of Economics. The Center for Sustainable Development and Green Economy named after Nizami Ganjavi of the Azerbaijan State University of Economics will take leading coordinating role.
 - g. Consider establishing a **SPECA Forum of Cities**.
 - h. **Foster collaboration with development partners and other regional organizations and initiatives** for access to expertise, resources, and best practices, enhancing the region's sustainable development. Specifically:
 - i. Strengthen partnership with the ADB-led **CAREC programme** on a broad set of issues,
 - ii. Build cooperation between **SPECA and the Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE)**,
 - iii. Develop **partnership between SPECA and international financial institutions on gender and SDGs**,
 - iv. **Strengthen the partnership with the International Fund for the Aral Sea (IFAS)**.
 - i. Focus on **environmental standards and conventions**, and proactively address emerging climate issues to ensure long-term resilience and sustainable practices. In particular, **strengthen Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) capabilities**, incorporating climate change considerations to foster regional environmental cooperation and sustainable development.

Cross-cutting focus on enhancing gender equality and connectivity

- a. **Emphasize the acceleration of gender equality and the economic empowerment of women** as transformative forces within the SPECA region.
- b. Utilize **the facilitating power of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs** as a collaborative platform uniting governments, UN entities, the private sector, and NGOs.
- c. Focus on **building women's entrepreneurship and leadership skills** through targeted programmes and initiatives.
- d. Advocate for the **inclusion of women in decision-making processes**, emphasizing the need to bring women to the table in all areas of governance and development.
- e. **Strengthen women's autonomy and participation across the region**, ensuring their voices and contributions are recognized and valued.