

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

of the Conference on Strengthening Sub-regional Economic Cooperation in Central Asia and the Future Role of SPECA (as adopted at the concluding session of the Conference)

Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan, 25 – 27 May 2005

1. High-level representatives of the SPECA member countries, neighbouring countries, European Union, United Nations organisations, international financial institutions, regional and sub-regional cooperation organizations, bilateral donor agencies, the private sector and the civil society met in Astana, Kazakhstan on 25-27 May 2005 to discuss ways and means of strengthening economic cooperation in Central Asia and in the broader region.
2. The participants of the Conference underscored that the strengthening of sub-regional economic cooperation is a key precondition for sustainable development of countries of the SPECA region, their expeditious transition to full-fledged market economies and more rapid integration into the world economy.
3. Stronger sub-regional economic cooperation contributes to the creation of a zone of stability and prosperity in Central Asia and in the broader region and facilitates joint efforts of the international community to address new challenges.
4. Progress towards free movement of goods, services, physical and human capital in the sub-region strengthens the ability of the SPECA member countries to cope with the challenges of global economic integration, to improve their business and investment climate, attract foreign direct investments, develop knowledge-based economies and bridge the digital divide.
5. Strengthened sub-regional economic cooperation can also help the SPECA member countries achieve the Millennium Development Goals, namely the reduction of poverty, and effectively implement the practical recommendations of recent United Nations conferences and summits.
6. The participants of the Conference welcomed the commitment of the SPECA member countries to strengthen economic cooperation both among themselves, as well as with other countries and regional and international organisations. It was underscored that efforts of the SPECA member countries towards strengthening economic cooperation must be supported by the international community.
7. Taking into account the strategic importance of the Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan and their geo-politically important location on the cross-roads of Europe and Asia, as well as a number of challenges they presently face, the SPECA member countries requested the United Nations, in particular UNECE and UNESCAP to increasingly focus their technical assistance to the sub-region.
8. The participants of the Conference underlined the high potential of the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia as an important mechanism aimed at supporting economic and environmental cooperation among its members, their integration into the world economy and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

9. The participants of the Conference welcomed the initiative of the UN Secretary-General to strengthen the Programme as well as reform proposals jointly elaborated by UNECE and UNESCAP aimed at achieving this goal.

10. The SPECA member countries called upon the United Nations and other partners to strengthen institutional and financial support to SPECA in order to overcome the operational difficulties faced by the Programme in recent years.

11. The participants of the Conference recognised the need for stronger cooperation and coordination among various international programmes and activities aimed at promoting economic development in the SPECA region with a view to achieving greater synergies and complementarity of multilateral and bilateral efforts.

12. The participants of the Conference welcomed the elaboration of the 2005-2007 Work Plan of activities in support of SPECA and invited UNECE and UNESCAP along with other partner organisations and agencies to make further efforts towards its effective implementation. The participants of the Conference supported the proposal to consider a possibility of setting up a SPECA Working Group on Gender and Economy within the framework of the 2005-2007 Work Plan.

13. The SPECA member countries underscored that projects and activities proposed for implementation within the SPECA framework reflect their demands in technical cooperation support for building stronger national capacities in the areas of transport, use of water and energy resources, protection of the environment, trade, statistics and the use of ICT, and enjoy their full support. The use of in-house expertise of the two UN Regional Commissions and their partners, both national and international, makes the implementation of these projects and activities highly efficient.

14. The participants of the Conference invited interested organisations and donors to support the implementation of the Work Plan through additional partnerships and resources, which would help broaden the scope of activities, reach out to a greater number of national beneficiaries, and ensure more sustainable long-term funding.

15. The SPECA member countries called upon international financial institutions and UNDP to take full advantage of the collaborative process between the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Programme (CAREC) and SPECA, initiated at the Conference in Astana. SPECA, owned and led by its member countries, supported by readily available technical expertise of the two UN Regional Commissions and other partners, and which provides a neutral and mutually beneficial platform offered by the United Nations, can usefully compliment the work of CAREC. The participants of the Conference highlighted the need for strengthening coordination between the SPECA and CAREC activities through better partnerships and more regular exchange of information among the organisations involved in the implementation of SPECA and CAREC.

16. The participants of the Conference invited neighbouring countries to actively participate in the implementation of the SPECA projects and activities, particularly those with a broader regional outreach, like transport and customs corridors, regional energy networks and regional trade arrangements.

17. The SPECA member countries reconfirmed their willingness to strengthen cooperation between those regional and sub-regional organisations such as CACO, CIS, ECO, EurAsEC, IFAS and SCO on the one hand and SPECA on the other, with a view of using the potential of SPECA in support of the implementation of the high-level initiatives recently launched within the framework of these organizations.

18. The participants of the Conference strongly agreed with the proposal to invite Afghanistan to join SPECA and Afghanistan becomes a full member of SPECA subject to the official acceptance of this invitation by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

19. The participants of the Conference also welcomed the outcomes of the special multi-stakeholder event organised during the Conference, which comprised of a Business Forum, a Forum on Knowledge-Based Economy and Sub-regional Cooperation and a Round Table on Gender and Economy, and that offered an opportunity for a constructive dialogue with representatives of the private sector and the civil society. The participants of the Conference welcomed reactivation of the work of the SPECA Business Council.

20. The participants of the Conference expressed their sincere gratitude for the timely initiative by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan to organise the Conference and hospitality extended to them in Astana as well as for the highly efficient support of UNECE and UNESCAP to the preparation and conduct of the event.

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