



**2012 SPECA ECONOMIC FORUM "STRENGTHENING REGIONAL ECONOMIC
COOPERATION AND INTEGRATION IN CENTRAL ASIA BY SHARING THE ASIAN
EXPERIENCE" AND THE 7TH SESSION OF THE SPECA GOVERNING COUNCIL**

27-28 November 2012, Bangkok, Thailand

AIDE MEMOIRE

I. Introduction

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) will convene the 2012 SPECA Economic Forum "Strengthening Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Central Asia by Sharing the Asian Experience" and the 7th session of the SPECA Governing Council on 27-28 November 2012 in Bangkok, Thailand.

II. Background

The United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) was launched in 1998 to strengthen subregional cooperation in Central Asia and its integration into the world economy. The SPECA member countries are Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The Programme is jointly supported by ESCAP and UNECE.

SPECA covers a region of strategic importance for member countries of ESCAP and UNECE and addresses key areas of economic and environmental cooperation.

SPECA Economic Forums give an opportunity to discuss strategic issues of economic development and cooperation in the SPECA region and to conduct consultations with partner organisations, donors, the private sector and investors.

The Governing Council as the supreme management body of SPECA provides overall policy guidance to the work carried out within the SPECA framework, oversees the work of the SPECA Project Working Groups, takes stock of progress achieved, identifies priorities for the future and approves SPECA Work Plans. It is constituted of senior policy makers at the level of Vice-Prime Ministers or Ministers from the SPECA member countries, ESCAP and UNECE Executive Secretaries.

III. Organization and Format of the Meetings

The 2012 SPECA Economic Forum will be organized by ESCAP in collaboration with the UNECE on 27 (full day) and 28 November (a half day). There will be four broad sessions during the Forum: (1) Subregional Cooperation for Sustainable and Inclusive Development in Asia: Successes and Challenges; (2) SPECA Economies in Asian and Eurasian Regional Cooperation Organizations; (3) Economic Integration and Regional Security Cooperation in Central Asia; (4) Experience of International Financial Institutions in Supporting Regional Economic Cooperation

and Integration in Central Asia; (5) The Contribution of SPECA to Regional Economic Cooperation in Central Asia: Adapting the Asian and Eurasian Experience.

Presentations by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) program/ADB, Mekong River Commission (MRC) could present broad range of approaches and tools that have been used to forge ever closer and stronger links among its member countries with widely differing economic models and levels of economic development.

Statements by the intergovernmental organizations and financial institutions active in Central Asia with the overview history and objectives, present areas of activities, successes and challenges could be of interest for the Forum participants.

In addition, two analytical papers on (a) the comparative performances of the regional organizations/arrangements in Asia and the Pacific region, and (b) the opportunities and challenges faced by the Central Asian countries in integrating their economies with the rest of Asia and the Pacific region will be presented by Asian economists. The proposed papers will, among other things, carry out some modeling/simulations to demonstrate in concrete terms the positive impacts (and downside risks) of Central Asian economies' integration with the Asia-Pacific region.

The 7th session of the SPECA Governing Council will be held in the afternoon of 28 November 2012. It will review the Forums' recommendations and activities carried out by the SPECA Project Working Groups since the last session of the Governing Council, as well as adopt the Decisions.

IV. Objectives of the 2012 SPECA Economic Forum and the 7th session of the SPECA Governing Council

The economic downturn that started in 2008 is leading to fundamental changes in the world economy: today Asia is the most dynamic region and the least affected by the global economic crisis. The objective of the 2012 SPECA Economic Forum is to examine the role of strengthened regional economic cooperation in Central Asia on the backdrop of these new global developments. The Forum will offer an opportunity to SPECA member countries to learn more about the successes and challenges of regional economic cooperation in Asia, in particular the experience of regional and subregional organizations, like ASEAN, SAARC and the Greater Mekong Sub-region.

The 7th session of the SPECA Governing Council will take stock of progress, to share the concerns of member countries and to propose further steps to strengthen the Programme – building on the results achieved so far. The high-level representatives of SPECA member countries will be invited to formulate their views on the following issues:

- The needs and expectations of their countries in the areas covered by the Programme;
- Proposals on how to use SPECA more extensively to formulate and implement regional policies in the areas covered by the Programme.
- Proposals on financial mechanisms for effective implementation of the SPECA projects.

V. Participants

In addition to the high-level representatives of the SPECA member countries, representatives from a wide range of stakeholders will attend the 2012 SPECA Economic Forum, including senior government officials from the neighbouring countries, representatives of UN agencies, international, intergovernmental, regional and subregional organisations, academia, the business sector and civil society.

The 7th session of the SPECA Governing Council will be attended by the SPECA member-countries, UN agencies, international, intergovernmental, regional and subregional organisations. Neighbouring and other interested countries will be invited to take part as observers.

VI. Key Partners

Asian Development Bank (ADB), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Eurasian Development Bank (EDB), Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS), Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), World Bank.

VII. Other Events

The side event entitled “Review of Work in the SPECA framework in Support of Implementation of the Decisions of the V Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan” will be held in the afternoon of 26 November 2012. The 7th session of the SPECA Project Working Group on Trade will be held on 26 November 2012 in conjunction with the 2012 SPECA Economic Forum and the 7th session of the SPECA Governing Council in Bangkok.

VIII. Next steps

The two Regional Commissions will present a discussion paper and initiate a process of broad consultations (involving the Governments as well as academia, private sector and civil society) on a set of measures to further strengthen the Programme, to be adopted by the 8th session of the SPECA Governing Council in 2013.