FOURTEENTH SESSION OF THE SPECA GOVERNING COUNCIL
(Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 21 November 2019)

REPORT

I. Introduction


II. Participants

Representatives of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as well as the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats participated in the session. Representatives from other United Nations member States, United Nations agencies and programmes, international and regional organizations, as well as the academic community also took part as observers. The list of participants of the fourteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council and the 2019 SPECA Economic Forum is attached (Annex II).

III. Opening of the session

The session was chaired by H.E. Mr. Ezizgeldi Annamuhammedov, Deputy Minister of Finance and Economy of Turkmenistan.

The Chairperson of the session, as well as Mr. Kire Ilioski, Head of the UNECE delegation, and Mr. Hirohito Toda, Head of the ESCAP delegation, delivered short opening statements. They welcomed all delegates to the fourteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council. The high-level representatives of Turkmenistan and the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats stressed the role of the “SPECA Evaluation” which gave new impetus to further strengthening the Programme. They also emphasized the importance of the United Nations Special Programme as a platform for policy dialogue, capacity-building, elaboration of strategies, and development of cooperation among the SPECA participating countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. They wished all participants of the annual session of the SPECA Governing Council successful and fruitful work.

The Chairperson of the fourteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council invited all participants to observe a minute of silence to honour the memory of Andrey Vasilyev, former UNECE Coordinator of SPECA and Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.
IV. Adoption of the agenda

The annotated agenda of the fourteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council was adopted by the delegations of the SPECA participating countries (Annex I).

V. Outcomes of the 2019 SPECA Economic Forum “Connectivity: Sustainable Transport and Trade Facilitation in the SPECA Subregion”

The 2019 SPECA Economic Forum focused on improving connectivity in the region: using sustainable transport and trade facilitation to connect people, enterprises, supply chains, regulatory agencies, IT systems, logistics, trade and transport infrastructure networks to facilitate the movement of people and goods, while ensuring inclusive and sustainable growth in the SPECA region, with the aim to support the SPECA participating countries in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The report of the 2019 SPECA Economic Forum can be found at http://www.unece.org/speca/meetings-and-events/economic-forums/2019/2019-speca-economic-forum/doc.html

The Chairperson of the session presented the outcomes of the 2019 SPECA Economic Forum and gave the floor to Mr. Mario Apostolov, UNECE Deputy Coordinator of SPECA, to present on behalf of the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats the “Ashgabat Initiative” on reducing barriers to trade and transport using United Nations legal instruments, norms, standards and recommendations while bolstering connectivity in the SPECA region as the concluding document of the 2019 SPECA Economic Forum, discussed and approved by participants of the Forum. The delegations of the SPECA participating countries made no additional comments or suggestions.

The Governing Council adopted the Ashgabat Initiative (enclosed document IV).

VI. Terms of Reference of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia and its Thematic Working Groups, SPECA Trust Fund, SPECA Secretariat and other organizational issues

Terms of Reference of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia


Terms of Reference of the SPECA TWGs

A. The Governing Council considered the draft Terms of Reference (ToRs) of the SPECA Working Groups on:
   - Water, Energy and Environment (enclosed document VI);
   - Sustainable Transport, Transit and Connectivity (enclosed document VII);
   - Trade (enclosed document VIII); and
   - Gender and SDGs (enclosed document X).

B. Prior to the discussion of the draft ToR of the SPECA Working Group on Knowledge-based Development, the Chairperson invited the UNECE Secretary to the SPECA Working Group to make a short presentation on the recommendations of the last session of the Working Group, held in June 2019, and on its updated ToR.

The SPECA national delegations approved the recommendation of the 2019 session of the SPECA Working Group on Knowledge-based Development to change the name of the Group to “SPECA
Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development (WG on ITSD)”. The Governing Council also considered the draft Terms of Reference of the Group (enclosed document IX).

C. The SPECA Working Group on Statistics did not submit its draft ToR to the session of the Governing Council. Instead of the updated ToR, the Group provided the Report of its fourteenth session held in September 2019.

The Chairperson of the session invited the UNECE Deputy Coordinator of SPECA to provide more detailed information, who, in his turn, emphasized that the SPECA Working Group on Statistics wanted to discontinue meetings and activities of the Group, and to continue its work in a new broader format of annual Eurostat / EFTA / UNECE High-Level Seminars for EECCA countries and other relevant forums. The Group had already organized the fourteenth session in the new format.

The delegations of the SPECA participating countries made no comments on the draft Terms of Reference of the SPECA Thematic Working Groups.

**Establishment of the SPECA Trust Fund**

The Chairperson of the session gave the floor to a high-level delegate from Turkmenistan to make a presentation on the initiative of the Government of Turkmenistan on the establishment of the SPECA Trust Fund. The delegations of the SPECA countries had a thorough discussion on this issue. Several delegations noted the need to obtain more information on the functioning, financing and management of the Trust Fund. The Governing Council welcomed the proposal by the Government of Turkmenistan on the creation of the SPECA Trust Fund. The Head of the UNECE Delegation strongly supported the proposal to establish a SPECA Fund.

**Establishment of the SPECA Secretariat**

At its thirteenth session held on 21 September 2018, the Governing Council noted the offer by the Government of Kazakhstan to host the secretariat of SPECA in the new United Nations common premises in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and requested 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 13th session of the Governing Council also decided to consider this issue further at the current fourteenth session.

The Chairperson of the session gave the floor to a high-level representative of Kazakhstan. A representative of Kazakhstan noted that they had communicated to all SPECA countries through the diplomatic channels the suggestion to establish a SPECA secretariat in Almaty. Only Uzbekistan had responded, mentioning that they had no objections. A representative of Tajikistan noted that his country welcomed in principle the establishment of a SPECA secretariat. A representative of Turkmenistan requested Kazakhstan to resend their letter, accompanied by a Concept of the SPECA secretariat, in order to respond. A representative of Azerbaijan will check the position of the country and respond in good time. Representatives of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan requested Kazakhstan to provide detailed information on the structure, financing and functioning of the Secretariat. A representative of Uzbekistan noted that they would contact the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to confirm the current status of correspondence. A representative of the ESCAP delegation proposed to consider this issue at the next session of the SPECA Governing Council in 2020, which was supported by the SPECA participating countries.
Other organizational issues – SPECA Focal Points and Focal Points for the SPECA TWGs

A representative of the ESCAP secretariat noted that not all SPECA countries had nominated their SPECA focal points to assist the SPECA National Coordinators, as well as the UNECE and ESCAP Coordinators and Deputy Coordinators of SPECA, in the proper management of the Programme. Focal points must also be nominated for each Working Group to assist the UNECE and ESCAP Secretaries to the Thematic Working Groups to ensure successful delivery of the TWG programmes of work of the Groups. SPECA participating countries that had not yet appointed focal points were requested to make their nominations.

VII. SPECA activities since the last session of the Governing Council (Almaty, Kazakhstan, 21 September 2018)

Progress Reports of the Thematic Working Groups

The Chairperson of the session noted that the Progress Reports on the activities carried out by the SPECA Thematic Working Groups since the last session of the Governing Council had been sent in advance to the SPECA countries and distributed among the participants before the session. The Chairperson invited a representative of the UNECE secretariat to take the floor. The representative of the UNECE secretariat presented a brief overview of the activities carried out by the SPECA Thematic Working Groups since the last session of the Governing Council.

The Governing Council noted with appreciation the activities carried out by the SPECA Thematic Working Groups since its last session in 2018.

The Chairperson of the session expressed his appreciation to the SPECA participating countries for supporting the activities of the SPECA Thematic Working Groups. On behalf of the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats and the SPECA countries, he also expressed their special appreciation to the Russian Federation for their support to all SPECA activities, as well as to Kazakhstan, the European Union and the Islamic Development Bank for their support of specific activities within the framework of the SPECA Thematic Working Groups.

SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development

The Chairperson invited the UNECE Secretary to the SPECA Working Group on Knowledge-based Development to make a short presentation on the Strategy. A representative of the UNECE secretariat noted that, in line with Decision 3 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/3) of the 2018 session of the Governing Council, the UNECE secretariat, in cooperation with the SPECA participating countries, had finalized the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development and presented the Strategy to this session of the Governing Council for consideration.

The participants in the 2019 annual session of the Governing Council expressed their gratitude to the UNECE secretariat and the SPECA participating countries for the development of the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development.

Documents submitted by the SPECA Working Group on Trade

The Chairperson of the session requested delegations of the SPECA participating countries to consider the documents submitted by the SPECA Working Group on Trade: the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy, including a draft Roadmap for its implementation (submitted for information only), the
Principles of Sustainable Trade in the SPECA Subregion, and the Concept Note for a Study on Regulatory and Procedural Barriers to Trade in the SPECA Subregion.

The Governing Council adopted the documents prepared by the SPECA Working Group on Trade.

Delegations of the SPECA countries expressed their appreciation to the UNECE secretariat and the SPECA Working Group on Trade for the work well done and requested the UNECE secretariat and the SPECA Working Group on Trade to seek funds and prepare a SPECA Study on Regulatory and Procedural Barriers to Trade in the SPECA Subregion.

VIII. Adoption of the SPECA Work Plan for 2020-2021

The Chairperson of the session invited a representative of the UNECE secretariat to make a short presentation of the SPECA Work Plan for 2020-2021. A UNECE representative noted that the draft SPECA Work Plan for 2020-2021 had been uploaded on the SPECA Website of the UNECE and distributed among the participants before the session. He briefly presented the draft work plan and thanked the UNECE team for the preparation of documents for the 2019 SPECA events in Ashgabat.


IX. Election of the next Chair country of SPECA. Date and venue of the 2020 SPECA Economic Forum and the fifteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council

The Chairperson of the session gave the floor to a representative of the UNECE. On behalf of the UNECE, a high-level UNECE representative expressed the sincere gratitude to Turkmenistan for its active work as the Chair country of SPECA in 2019.

The Chairperson of the session invited the Head of the delegation of Kyrgyzstan to make a short statement. A high-level representative of Kyrgyzstan confirmed the proposal made at the thirteenth session of the Governing Council to assume the Chairmanship of SPECA in 2020 and host the annual session of the SPECA Governing Council and the 2020 Economic Forum. The SPECA National Delegations unanimously elected Kyrgyzstan as the SPECA Chair country for 2020.

The SPECA participating countries decided that the fifteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council and the 2020 SPECA Economic Forum would be held in Kyrgyzstan in 2020. The dates and venue of these events would be agreed upon and communicated through the diplomatic channels. The theme of the 2020 SPECA Economic Forum would also be determined at a later date.

The delegation of Tajikistan proposed to organize, in the future, one-day Economic Forums. They noted this may be a more effective use of time, commenting that it is a highly loaded work schedule, and there is not always enough time for presentations and discussions. There is also a need to reduce the number of presentations and plan more time for discussions.

X Other business

The delegations of the SPECA participating countries expressed their sincere gratitude to Turkmenistan for chairing the 2019 SPECA events and for the excellent organization of the fourteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council, the 2019 SPECA Economic Forum, and their side events as well as the hospitality offered to the participants of the 2019 SPECA DAYS in Ashgabat. A representative of the ESCAP delegation thanked the Government of Turkmenistan for chairing the 2019 SPECA meetings in Ashgabat, their excellent organization and the generous hospitality offered to all participants.
The Chairperson of the session thanked the participants for their kind words and their high appreciation of the work done by the Government of Turkmenistan, and, on behalf of the delegations of the SPECA countries, expressed the deep appreciation to the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats for their efforts to organize these important events and for their active work aimed at strengthening SPECA and their continued support to the implementation of the Programme.

XI. Adoption of decisions

The draft Decisions of the fourteenth session of the Governing Council were distributed during the session. The Chairperson of the session requested the participants to discuss and propose changes and additions to the draft decisions.

The participants made the following changes and additions:

1. When discussing draft decision 3 on the updated Terms of Reference of SPECA, the representative of Tajikistan underlined that in Decision 4 of the last session, the Governing Council noted the recommendation of the Expert Group meeting to focus SPECA on policy dialogue (away from project management) and decided to consider these issues at this session. He proposed not to make this change, as limiting SPECA to policy dialogue will remove the possibility of implementing capacity-building activities and establishing the SPECA Trust Fund. The delegations of the SPECA countries supported this proposal and insisted not to modify the SPECA ToR to policy dialogue and to keep its main mandate as it is. He confirmed that Tajikistan considered the establishment of a SPECA Trust Fund to be very important as it would create opportunities to render targeted support to specific projects. Tajikistan looks forward to receiving further information on the proposed mode of functioning, governance structure and financing of the SPECA Trust Fund, as well as additional information on the SPECA secretariat from Kazakhstan.

2. In discussing the draft decisions on the updated Terms of Reference of the SPECA Thematic Working Groups, the delegation of Tajikistan proposed to insert into the TORs capacity-building activities and implementation of decisions of the Governing Council.

3. When discussing draft decision 4 on the updated Terms of Reference of the SPECA Working Group on Water, Energy and Environment, a representative of the Russian Federation as observer drew the attention of the Governing Council to the para 10 of the draft ToR “Representatives of neighbouring countries may be invited …” while in other draft ToRs “are invited” is written and suggested to harmonize the updated ToR with other ToRs of the Thematic Working Groups. The proposal was unanimously approved by all SPECA countries.

When considering draft decision 4 to disband the SPECA WG on Statistics, taking into account the recommendations of the fourteenth session of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics on the future role of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics “to discontinue the meetings and activities of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics…”, the delegation of Turkmenistan noted that the SPECA countries needed the Working Group on Statistics and requested all other delegations of the SPECA countries to reject this draft decision and proposed the following “The Governing Council requests the SPECA Working Group on Statistics to draft updated Terms of Reference of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics for consideration at the next session of the SPECA Governing Council in 2020”. This proposal was unanimously supported by all delegations of the SPECA participating countries.

4. When considering draft decisions 7 and 8, a representative of the ESCAP delegation proposed to add a deadline for the SPECA countries to nominate all relevant Focal Points by 31 March 2020.
5. When discussing draft decision 10, the Head of Delegation of Uzbekistan requested to add to the sentence “It adopts the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development” the following “bearing in mind that Uzbekistan will have enough time to consider the submitted document and provide its opinions, proposals and comments to the UNECE secretariat”.

The Governing Council adopted all draft decisions with the provision that the UNECE secretariat would incorporate all changes made by participants of the session (enclosed document III).

XIV. Closing of the session

The Chairperson of the session, as well as the Heads of UNECE and ESCAP delegations in their closing statements called on the SPECA participating countries, the United Nations agencies and programmes, and development partners to work together on the implementation of the decisions of the Governing Council.

The Chairperson of the session thanked all participants for their intensive and productive work and closed the fourteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council.
ANNEX I

Fourteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council
(Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 21 November 2019)

ANNOTATED AGENDA

1. Opening of the session

Opening of the session by a high-level representative of the Government of Turkmenistan, followed by opening statements by high-level representatives of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and the Heads of Delegation of the SPECA participating countries.

Honouring the memory of Andrey Vasilyev, former UNECE Coordinator of SPECA and Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. Minute of Silence.

2. Adoption of the Agenda

The Governing Council will consider the adoption of the agenda of its fourteenth session.


Report by the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats followed by a discussion. The Governing Council will consider the adoption of the Concluding document and recommendations of the 2019 SPECA Economic Forum.

4. Terms of Reference of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia and its Thematic Working Groups, SPECA Trust Fund, SPECA Secretariat and other organizational issues 1

The Governing Council will consider the adoption of the updated Terms of Reference of SPECA and its Thematic Working Groups, establishment of the SPECA Trust Fund and the SPECA secretariat, and other organizational issues.

5. SPECA activities since the last session of the Governing Council (Almaty, Kazakhstan, 21 September 2018)

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:

- Working Group on Water, Energy and Environment
- Working Group on Sustainable Transport, Transit and Connectivity
- Working Group on Trade
- Working Group on Statistics
- Working Group on Knowledge-based Development
- Working Group on Gender and SDGs
The Governing Council will take note of the progress made in the implementation of the activities of the SPECA Thematic Working Groups since the thirteenth session of the Governing Council and provide guidance for the effective implementation of its remaining activities in 2019.

In compliance with the Decision 3 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/3) of the thirteenth session of the Governing Council, the UNECE secretariat in cooperation with the SPECA countries finalized the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development. The Governing Council will consider the adoption of the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development.

The Governing Council will consider and adopt the following documents submitted by the SPECA Working Group on Trade:

- SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy
- Principles of Sustainable Trade in the SPECA Subregion
- Concept Note for a Study on Regulatory and Procedural Barriers to Trade in the SPECA Subregion

The Governing Council will receive for information a draft SPECA Strategy Concept on Water, Energy and Environment.

6. Adoption of the SPECA Work Plan for 2020-2021

The draft SPECA Work Plan for 2020-2021 will be circulated in advance of the session. Report by the representatives of the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats followed by a discussion. The Governing Council will consider the adoption of the SPECA Work Plan for 2020-2021.

7. Election of the next Chair country of SPECA

8. Date and venue of the 2020 SPECA Economic Forum and fifteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council

9. Other business

10. Adoption of decisions

11. Closing of the session

Closing statements by the Heads of Delegation of the SPECA participating countries, the high-level representatives of the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats.

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1 The 13th session of the Governing Council (Almaty, Kazakhstan, 21 September 2018) in its Decision 4 noted the proposal of the Expert Group Meeting (Almaty, Kazakhstan, 11 and 12 June 2018) to change the name of SPECA and focus SPECA on policy dialogue (away from project management) and decided to consider these issues at its next session.

The SPECA Governing Council also requested the SPECA participating countries to nominate SPECA Focal Points and Focal Points for each Working Group in writing to the ESCAP and UNECE secretariats.

The SPECA Governing Council noted in Decision 5 of its 13th session 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 requested 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 decided to consider this issue further at its next session in 2019.
ANNEX II

2019 SPECA ECONOMIC FORUM
“Connectivity: Sustainable Transport and Trade Facilitation in the SPECA Subregion”

and

FOURTEENTH SESSION OF THE SPECA GOVERNING COUNCIL
(Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 20-21 November 2019)

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

SPECA NATIONAL DELEGATIONS

AFGHANISTAN

H.E. Mr. Meerwais NAB, Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Kabul

H.E. Mr. Ajmal AHMADI, Minister of Industry and Commerce of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Kabul

Mr. Amir Mohammad RAMIN, Director General for Regional Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Kabul

Mr. Mohammad Yamma SHAMS, Chairman of the Afghanistan Railway Authority, Acting Chairman of the National Road Authority, Ministry of Transport of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Kabul

Mr. Seyar EHSAN, Official of MFA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Kabul

Mr. Wais SULTANI, General Director of Ground Transport, Ministry of Transport and Transit of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Kabul

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