



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

Ninth session of the SPECA Governing Council

(Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 5 December 2014)

REPORT

I. Introduction

The ninth session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) was held on 5 December 2014 in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. The 2014 SPECA Economic Forum entitled “Improving connectivity: a key contribution of SPECA to the success of the Transformation Decade of Afghanistan” was held on 4 December 2014 just prior to the session of the Governing Council.

II. Participants

Representatives of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, as well as the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Deputy Executive Secretary of UNECE, Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and the Head of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia and the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office, participated in the session. Representatives from other United Nations member States, United Nations agencies, international and regional organizations, as well as the academic community also participated as observers. The List of participants of the ninth session of the SPECA Governing Council and the 2014 SPECA Economic Forum is attached (Annex I).

III. Opening of the session

The ninth session of the Governing Council was chaired by **Mr. Atiqullah Atifmal, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan**, the Chair country of SPECA in 2014.

In his opening statement, the Chairperson underlined that SPECA, in order to develop its full potential, needs to attract more high-level decision-makers for policy discussions on key issues of regional cooperation. Strategic discussions are indispensable, since they remind policymakers of the tremendous political, security and economic advantages offered by such cooperation. Discussions at the Economic Forum helped a great deal to generate political will to strengthen regional cooperation by pointing to its importance for the economic development and also for the security and stability of the whole region. SPECA needs to make more efforts to advertise the importance of the “software” it offers to

support the efficient and professional operation of the “hardware” represented by the rapidly developing regional transport, trade and communications infrastructure. The United Nations Regional Commissions supporting SPECA offer a wealth of relevant legal instruments, norms, standards and recommendations that can guide the development of unified regional regulatory frameworks. This promotion through SPECA will help mobilize more resources for technical assistance provided in the framework of the Project Working Groups.

The Executive Secretary of the UNECE in his opening statement invited delegates to provide strategic guidance on the issues in the agenda and, in particular, on: the potential role of SPECA in the overall accountability framework for the Sustainable Development Goals; strengthening the ownership of the Programme by its participating countries; and its more active involvement in improving connectivity between Afghanistan and other SPECA countries. Clearly formulated needs and the more active participation of SPECA countries in donor coordination would help in raising the funds necessary for more active work by SPECA.

The Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP noted that the realization of new Sustainable Development Goals will only succeed, if they are supported in a concerted way by all actors – national governments, international organizations, donors, the business sector and civil society. In this regard, SPECA could play a very important role by providing necessary guidance for strategy, best practices and lessons learned. It could also become a subregional mechanism for accountability in the implementation of the SDGs and the Post-2015 Development Agenda. He also emphasized that there is a need to undertake effective monitoring, evaluation and reporting, for better accountability, on progress in the implementation of the sustainable development goals. In this respect, it is important to agree and establish measurable goals and targets that can capture the multidimensional nature of sustainable development, and to create a framework for the implementation of those objectives with stable sources of financing.

The Heads of Delegation of SPECA participating countries expressed their support to the Programme. SPECA, with its impressive body of knowledge on regional connectivity can effectively facilitate policymaking on regional cooperation. The Programme needs to focus on strategic issues of regional cooperation and conduct more policy discussions in order to build confidence. SPECA provides capacity-building and other forms of technical assistance in the most important areas of regional cooperation and contributes to the development of unified regulatory frameworks in these areas. The thematic scope and priorities of the Programme have been shaped by its participating countries and reflect their needs and priorities. Effective support by the two United Nations Regional Commissions to the Programme is highly appreciated and should continue.

IV. Adoption of the agenda

The Governing Council adopted the provisional agenda of its ninth session.

V. Outcomes of the 2014 SPECA Economic Forum “Improving connectivity: a key contribution of SPECA to the success of the Transformation Decade of Afghanistan” (Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 4 December 2014)

The Chairperson invited **Mr. Shun-ichi Murata, Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP and the ESCAP Coordinator of SPECA**, to present the summary and conclusions by the Chairperson of the 2014 SPECA Economic Forum (Annex II). After discussion, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision under agenda item 3:

“The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the outcomes of the 2014 SPECA Economic Forum, “Improving connectivity: a key contribution of SPECA to the success of the Transformation Decade of Afghanistan,” held in Ashgabat on 4 December 2014. SPECA work plans should give priority to capacity-building and other forms of technical assistance to Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries that strengthen regional trade, transport and telecommunication links and improve border crossing. The Governing Council calls upon the donor community to increase funding to such projects in the SPECA framework. It emphasizes that the development of regional infrastructure should be complemented with capacity-building and assistance to the modernization and harmonization of relevant regulatory frameworks for facilitating the safe and efficient use of this infrastructure”.

The proposed draft decision was adopted as amended (see Annex V - Decision 1).

VI. Outcomes of the Follow-up meeting to the 2013 SPECA Economic Forum “The potential role of SPECA in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Central Asia” (Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 5 December 2014)

The Chairperson invited **Mr. Christian Friis Bach, Executive Secretary of the UNECE**, to report on the main conclusions of the Follow-up meeting to the 2013 SPECA Economic Forum “The potential role of SPECA in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Central Asia”. The Conclusions of the Follow-up meeting to the 2013 SPECA Economic Forum are attached to the report (Annex III). After discussion, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision under agenda item 4:

“The Governing Council approves the conclusions of the Follow-up meeting to the 2013 SPECA Economic Forum, “The potential role of SPECA in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Central Asia,” held in Ashgabat on 5 December 2014. Because SPECA is a neutral regional framework under the United Nations umbrella, it could offer a platform for the exchange of best practices and capacity-building as well as for harmonization and validation initiatives for meeting data and reporting requirements in order to support the regional dimension of monitoring and accountability for the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Due to its limited mandate and resources, SPECA alone cannot serve as a framework for comprehensive monitoring and accountability for the SDGs, at the same time it could play an important role in a region-wide monitoring and accountability framework”.

The proposed draft decision was adopted (see Annex V - Decision 2).

VII. Outcomes of the Brainstorming session on strengthening the ownership of SPECA (Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 5 December 2014)

The Chairperson invited **Mr. Andrey Vasilyev, Deputy Executive Secretary of the UNECE and the UNECE Coordinator of SPECA**, to deliver a report on the outcomes of the Brainstorming session on strengthening the ownership of SPECA. The Conclusions of the Brainstorming session on strengthening the ownership of SPECA are attached to the report (Annex IV). After discussion, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision under agenda item 5:

“The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the outcomes of the Brainstorming session on strengthening the ownership of SPECA held in Ashgabat on 5 December 2014. It calls upon the UNECE and ESCAP to translate the ideas and initiatives voiced during this session into concrete proposals and circulate them among the participants”.

The proposed draft decision was adopted (see Annex V - Decision 3).

The Delegation of Azerbaijan proposed to consider changing the name of the Programme to more explicitly include Afghanistan and Azerbaijan. It was agreed to discuss this matter at the next session of the SPECA Governing Council.

VIII. SPECA activities since the last session of the Governing Council (Almaty, Kazakhstan, 22 November 2013)

The Chairperson invited **Mr. Nikolay Pomoshchnikov, Head of the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office**, to present the Progress Reports on the work carried out by the SPECA Project Working Groups since the last session of the Governing Council. The Progress Reports can be found at: www.unece.org/SPECA/Governing_Council/9th_session. After discussion, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision under agenda item 6:

“The Governing Council notes with appreciation the Progress Reports on the work carried out by the SPECA Project Working Groups (PWGs) since its last session. It expresses satisfaction with the scope of activities and its appreciation to the donors who have supported projects under the PWGs”.

The proposed draft decision was adopted (see Annex V - Decision 4).

IX. Project proposals supporting connectivity between Afghanistan and Central Asia

The Chairperson invited **Ms. Virginia Cram-Martos, Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division of the UNECE**, to introduce project proposals supporting connectivity between Afghanistan and other SPECA countries. The project proposals can be found at: www.unece.org/SPECA/Governing_Council/9th_session. After

discussion, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision under the item 7 of the agenda:

“The Governing Council calls upon the UNECE and ESCAP to continue their activities assessing the needs of participating countries and elaborating project proposals that support connectivity between Afghanistan and Central Asia with a view to including them in the SPECA Work Plan for 2015-2016 to be adopted by the next session of the Council”.

The proposed draft decision was adopted as amended (see Annex V - Decision 5).

X. Report on the work of the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office since the last session of the Governing Council (Almaty, Kazakhstan, 22 November 2013)

Mr. Nikolay Pomoshchnikov, Head of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia and the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office, presented a report on the work of the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office since the previous session of the Governing Council. The PowerPoint presentation of the report can be found on the website of the Office (<http://www.unescap.org/events/9th-session-speca-governing-council>). After discussion, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision under item 8 of the agenda:

“The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the report on the work of the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office. It encourages further strengthening the role of the Office in project implementation within the SPECA framework”.

The proposed draft decision was adopted (see Annex V - Decision 6).

XI. Cooperation between SPECA and regional organizations and institutions

Mr. Marton Krasznai, SPECA Deputy Coordinator at the UNECE, presented an oral report on cooperation between SPECA and regional organizations and institutions. After discussion, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision under item 9 of the agenda:

“The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the report on cooperation between SPECA and regional organizations and institutions. It supports the further strengthening of coordination and cooperation with partner organizations and donors in strategic areas of regional cooperation”.

The proposed draft decision was adopted (see Annex V - Decision 7).

XII. Election of the next Chair country of SPECA, date and venue of the 2015 SPECA Economic Forum and 10th session of the SPECA Governing Council

The Head of Delegation of Kazakhstan, speaking on behalf of the SPECA participating countries, expressed sincere gratitude to the Government of the Islamic Republic of

Afghanistan for the excellent chairmanship of the Programme in 2014 and proposed the adoption of the following decision under item 10 of agenda:

“The Governing Council expresses its sincere gratitude to Afghanistan for its active work as the Chair country of SPECA between 2013 and 2014”.

The proposed draft decision was adopted (see Annex V – Decisions 8).

Under the agenda item 10 “Election of the next Chair country of SPECA” and the agenda item 11 “Other business, including date and venue of the 2015 SPECA Economic Forum and 10th session of the SPECA Governing Council”, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision:

“The Governing Council decides that the Chair country of SPECA for the period 2014 and 2015 will be agreed upon by consultations among interested SPECA participating countries through diplomatic channels. The dates and venue of the 2015 SPECA Economic Forum and the tenth session of the SPECA Governing Council will be communicated in due course”.

The proposed draft decision was adopted (see Annex V – Decision 9).

XIII. Other business

The Chairperson thanked the Government of Turkmenistan for the excellent organization of the SPECA events and its generous hospitality. He also expressed his gratitude to the two United Nations Regional Commissions and, in particular the Executive Secretaries of the UNECE and ESCAP, for their devoted support to the Chairmanship of Afghanistan and the Programme as a whole. The Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following additional decisions under item 11 of the agenda:

“The Governing Council expresses its sincere gratitude to the Government of Turkmenistan for the excellent organization and hospitality offered to the participants of the 2014 SPECA Economic Forum and the ninth session of the SPECA Governing Council”.

and

“The Governing Council expresses its deep appreciation to the secretariats of ESCAP and UNECE and their Executive Secretaries for their efforts to organize these important annual events and also expresses its special appreciation for their active work aimed at strengthening SPECA and their continued support to Programme implementation”.

The proposed draft decisions were adopted (see Annex V – Decisions 10 and 11).

XIV. Closing of the session

In its closing statement, the Chairperson of the session thanked all participants for the intensive and productive work. The decisions adopted by the Governing Council would provide guidance to the Programme on its potential role in monitoring and accountability for the Post-2015 Development Agenda at the regional level, as well as on possible measures to strengthen ownership by its participating countries. The Governing Council confirmed the importance of more active involvement of the Programme in improving connectivity between Afghanistan and other SPECA participating countries. The Chairperson thanked again the Government of Turkmenistan for the warm hospitality and excellent support to the SPECA events in Ashgabat.

2014 SPECA ECONOMIC FORUM
and
THE NINTH SESSION OF THE SPECA GOVERNING COUNCIL
(Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 4-5 December 2014)

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

/ENGLISH ONLY/

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