



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

**Fifth Session of the SPECA Project Working Group  
on Knowledge-based Development**

(Baku, Azerbaijan, 4 December 2013)

**REPORT**

The fifth session of the SPECA Project Working Group on Knowledge-based Development (PWG on KBD), jointly organized by ESCAP and UNECE and hosted by the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan, was held in Baku on 4 December 2013. In conjunction with the session, ESCAP organized an Expert Consultation on the Asian Information Superhighway and Regional Connectivity in collaboration with the Ministry of Communications and Information Technologies of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Baku on 3 and 4 December 2013.

Representatives of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as well as observers from India, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines and Republic of Korea, participated in the session along with representatives of UNECE and ESCAP. A representative of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation also participated as an observer. The List of participants of the fifth session of the SPECA PWG on KBD is attached (Annex I).

**Opening of the session**

Mr. Nariman Hajiyev, representing the Ministry of Communications and Information Technologies of the Republic of Azerbaijan, welcomed the participants of the session. Mr. Hajiyev expressed appreciation to ESCAP and UNECE for organizing the session and highlighted the important role of the PWG on KBD, which serves as a forum for discussion on issues related to knowledge-based development among SPECA countries. The PWG on KBD promotes and supports policies on knowledge-based development, facilitates cooperation between SPECA countries and other regional initiatives, and coordinates capacity-building and institutional strengthening activities.

On behalf of ESCAP, Mr. Nikolay Pomoshchnikov, Head of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia (SONCA) and the Joint ESCAP-UNECE SPECA Office, welcomed participants to the fifth session of the SPECA PWG on KBD and expressed his appreciation to the Government of the Republic of

Azerbaijan for hosting the session. He also thanked UNECE for its support in co-organizing the fifth session and emphasized that both regional commissions are firmly committed to strengthening the capacity of SPECA countries in the area of knowledge-based development, including information and communication technologies. Mr. Pomoshchnikov noted that knowledge-based development will spur innovation, enhance productivity, and facilitate stronger integration with regional and global economies. In this regard, he noted that the Asian Information Superhighway initiative plays an important role in assisting governments, including SPECA countries, in their efforts to enhance broadband connectivity and the knowledge-based economy. He also noted the important contributions of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development, and encouraged SPECA countries to work towards building an inclusive, knowledge-based society.

Mr. Christopher Athey, UNECE Secretary to the PWG on KBD and Economic Affairs Officer in the UNECE Economic Cooperation, Trade, and Land Management Division, welcomed the fifth session and expressed his thanks to the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan for their hospitality in hosting this important event. He also thanked ESCAP for taking the lead in organizing the fifth session, as well as the Expert Consultation on the Asian Information Superhighway and Regional Connectivity. The Expert Consultation addressed a subject of great relevance to UNECE activities in the region, with access to information being a key driver of innovation and knowledge-based development, and a role for PPP in providing the necessary infrastructure. This highlights the value of the joint working between United Nations Regional Commissions exemplified by the SPECA PWG on KBD, where work can be mutually reinforcing. He stressed the fact that the UNECE is committed to support the PWG by providing secretariat support and contributing to capacity-building activities for the benefit of SPECA countries in areas covered by this PWG, including Innovation Performance Reviews. He also extended his gratitude to the Government of the Russian Federation and to the Eurasian Development Bank for their extrabudgetary support, which makes it possible to implement many of the activities of the PWG.

### **Election of officers and adoption of the agenda**

The PWG elected Mr. Nariman Hajiyev, representing the Ministry of Communications and Information Technologies of the Republic of Azerbaijan, as Chairperson of the fifth session of the PWG on KBD. Following this, the PWG adopted the agenda of the fifth session of the PWG on KBD.

### **Outcome of the 2013 SPECA Economic Forum “Inclusive and Sustainable Development through Regional Cooperation” and the eighth session of the SPECA Governing Council**

Mr. Pomoshchnikov and Mr. Athey provided a summary of the 2013 SPECA Economic Forum on “Inclusive and Sustainable Development through Regional

Cooperation”, as well as the eighth session of the SPECA Governing Council held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in November 2013.

### **Review of programme implementation**

Mr. Dominic Leong, ESCAP Secretary to the PWG on KBD and Associate Economic Affairs Officer of the ESCAP Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division, and Mr. Athey reported on activities carried out since the seventh session of the SPECA Governing Council in Bangkok, Thailand, 28 November 2012 (Annex II). The activities are in line with the Programme of Work of the PWG for 2012-2013, which was adopted at the fourth session of the PWG on KBD, held in Baku on 25 November 2011.

The PWG on KBD acknowledged with satisfaction the important contributions of the capacity building activities implemented during the reporting period.

Delegates agreed that the PWG on KBD is a useful platform for the exchange of experiences and best practices, as well as capacity-building in such areas as ICT for development, broadband infrastructure, innovative development, knowledge-based disaster risk management, the financing of innovation and public-private partnerships, and supported further work in these areas.

### **Adoption of the Programme of Work for 2014-2015 of the SPECA PWG on KBD**

Mr. Leong and Mr. Athey made proposals on the possible structure of the Programme of Work for 2014-2015 of the PWG on KBD and on activities to be included in the programme of work.

Delegates considered the proposed programme of work to be highly relevant to the needs of their countries, and supported the activities listed in the Programme of Work for 2014-2015.

Representatives of Azerbaijan expressed their appreciation to UNECE and ESCAP for the activities implemented during the period 2012-2013, as well as for the envisaged activities under the Programme of Work for 2014-2015, and urged strengthened cooperation amongst all SPECA countries. It emphasized that programme activities should be prioritized to benefit all SPECA countries, including Azerbaijan and Afghanistan, and that countries should work together to strengthen initiatives within the context of the post-2015 development agenda.

The Republic of Azerbaijan also highlighted the importance of the Trans-Eurasian Information Superhighway (TASIM) project for knowledge-based development in SPECA countries. The PWG on KBD welcomed the recent positive developments in the TASIM project, in particular the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding among operators aimed at creating a transnational fiber-optic backbone between Europe and Asia.

The PWG adopted the Programme of Work for 2014-2015 as the basis for its work in the next biennium (Annex III). The PWG agreed that the details of the envisaged activities in the programme of work could be further elaborated in consultation with the host countries of these future activities.

Delegates were invited to contact the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats within 30 days if they had any further comments on the Programme of Work for 2014-2015.

### **Date and venue of the next session of the SPECA PWG on KBD**

The PWG agreed to hold its next session in 2014 and that the exact date and venue of the sixth session of the PWG will be decided through consultations with the SPECA countries.

### **Other business**

Draft decisions, conclusions and recommendations were distributed among the delegations of the SPECA countries.

Representatives of Azerbaijan requested an amendment to the draft decisions and the delegates adopted the decisions by consensus. The Decisions of the fifth session of the SPECA Project Working Group on Knowledge-based Development are attached to this report (Annex IV).

### **Closing of the session**

Mr. Pomoshchnikov expressed satisfaction with the results of the session and reiterated the important role of the SPECA PWG on KBD as a platform to share experiences and discuss ICT and knowledge-based development issues in the region. He emphasized the important role of broadband connectivity in enhancing economic prosperity and higher levels of innovation, and encouraged SPECA countries to use the SPECA platform to further strengthen its relations with neighbouring countries.

Mr. Athey and Mr. Pomoshchnikov expressed gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan for hosting this important event and the hospitality extended to its participants. They also expressed sincere appreciation to all delegates from SPECA countries for their active participation and cooperation, which contributed to the success of the session.

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