



SPECA

Fostering regional integration

The United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) was founded by the Presidents of four Central Asian States and the Executive Secretaries of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in 1998 by the Tashkent Declaration. Today it counts seven members: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. UNECE and ESCAP provide support to SPECA.

The Programme has six Project Working Groups (Water and Energy, Transport and Border Crossing, Trade, Statistics, Knowledge-based Development, and Gender and Economy). Its highest decision-making body, the Governing Council, consisting of SPECA National Coordinators, meets annually. It adopts biannual work plans and discusses and approves annual progress reports by the Project Working Groups. SPECA Economic Forums are organized in conjunction with the sessions of the Governing Council, where strategic issues of regional cooperation are discussed and recommendations for further work are made.

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The SPECA Work Plan for 2010-2011 approved by the 2009 session of the Governing Council in Bishkek contains 54 projects, of which 35 have secured or expected funding. The total budget of projects with secured or expected funding is around \$10 million, more than twice the amount for the previous biennium. In 2010, programme implementation by the six SPECA Project Working Groups proceeded in accordance with the Work Plan. High-level events supported by SPECA Project Working Groups included the "Aid for Trade Roadmap for SPECA" Ministerial Meeting on 1 and 2 December in Baku and the Donors Conference organized by the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea on 9 December in Almaty. The Donors Conference in Almaty adopted the Third Aral Sea Basin Programme, a five-year programme of action to improve the socio-economic situation

and achieve environmental sustainability in the Aral Sea Basin which was elaborated with the assistance of UNECE within the framework of the Programme "Regional dialogue and cooperation on water resources management in Central Asia". The same Programme continued to support in 2010 the modernization of institutional and legal frameworks for regional water resources management in Central Asia: an expert group to review existing legal instruments and elaborate proposals for their modernization held its first meeting on 23 October 2010.

The 2010 SPECA Economic Forum entitled "Strengthening regional cooperation in Central Asia: a contribution to long-term stability and sustainable development of Afghanistan" was held on 18 and 19 October in Geneva. In addition to the high-level delegations of SPECA member countries, representatives of UNECE and ESCAP Member States, United Nations agencies, international and regional organizations, multilateral and bilateral donors and NGOs also participated in the Forum.



The SPECA Governing Council on 19 October appreciated highly the substantive discussions at the SPECA Economic Forum. It approved the progress reports by the Project Working Groups for 2010. High-level representatives of SPECA member countries expressed satisfaction with programme implementation and the impact of SPECA on regional economic cooperation. The majority of SPECA projects build the capacity of member countries to accede to and implement UNECE legal instruments, norms and standards, and as a rule are funded by extrabudgetary contributions. SPECA projects mostly rely on the in-house expertise of the two regional commissions and a solid network of local policymakers and experts.

Representatives of SPECA member countries welcomed the upcoming opening of the UNECE-ESCAP SPECA Regional Office in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The Office is expected

to further strengthen SPECA by improving liaison with the Governments of member countries, including more thorough needs assessment as well as coordination and cooperation with partner organizations. It is expected to work closely with the regional offices of multilateral and bilateral donors, thus increasing the flow of extrabudgetary contributions to projects implemented within the SPECA framework.

The Governing Council elected Turkmenistan as the next Chair of SPECA.

In 2010, SPECA continued to strengthen cooperation with United Nations agencies, international and regional organizations and international and bilateral donors. At the fourth Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) held in Istanbul on 2 and 3 November 2010, SPECA was invited to join the Core Group of RECCA and establish a partnership with the Secretariat of RECCA at the Center for regional Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.