



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

Tenth session of the SPECA Governing Council

(Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 11 November 2015)

REPORT

I. Introduction

The tenth session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) was held on 11 November 2015 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. The 2015 SPECA Economic Forum entitled “Supporting the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the SPECA region” was held on 10 and 11 November 2015 just prior to the session of the Governing Council.

II. Participants

Representatives of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan as well as the Deputy Executive Secretary of the UNECE, 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 and programmes, international and regional organizations, as well as the academic community, private sector and the civil society participated as observers. The list of participants of the tenth session of the SPECA Governing Council and the 2015 SPECA Economic Forum is attached (Annex I).

III. Opening of the session

The session was chaired by Mr. Saidrahmon Nazrizoda, First Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Trade of the Republic of Tajikistan, the Chair country of SPECA in 2015.

In their opening statements the Chairperson, the UNECE Deputy Executive Secretary and the Head of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia and the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office emphasized that world leaders during the 70th United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 adopted an ambitious and comprehensive 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SPECA region shares a number of unique challenges in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including landlocked geography with very large distances to the nearest seaports, dramatic environmental problems caused by the tragedy of the Aral Sea, increasing strain on shared water resources, continuing desertification, rapid melting of glaciers and unusual weather patterns caused by climate change. Many of these challenges can be effectively addressed only through strengthened regional cooperation. SPECA has a strong potential in supporting the achievement of SDGs in the participating countries and offers a good intergovernmental subregional platform to exchange experiences and review progress.

Heads of Delegation in their opening statements described progress achieved in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and ongoing efforts to promote the economic development of their countries.

IV. Adoption of the agenda

Representative of the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats informed participants that the Executive Secretaries of UNECE and ESCAP could not participate in the session of the SPECA Governing Council, and the Deputy Executive Secretary of the UNECE and the Head of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia and the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office would represent them.

The Governing Council adopted the agenda of its tenth session (Annex II).

V. Outcomes of the 2015 SPECA Economic Forum “Supporting the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the SPECA region” (Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 10-11 November 2015). Adoption of a political document on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2015 SPECA Economic Forum discussed how strengthened regional cooperation in such key areas as trade, transport, water and environment can facilitate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in Central Asia. Participants also emphasized the advantages of a regional approach in such cross-cutting areas as gender, innovation, statistics and disaster risk reduction. The Report of the 2015 SPECA Economic Forum is attached to this document (Annex VI).

The Chairperson presented the summary of the 2015 SPECA Economic Forum (Annex III) and the draft Declaration “Paving the way for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the SPECA region” (Annex IV) as a political document on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

When discussing the paragraph 11 of the draft Declaration, several delegations emphasized the role of regional organizations such as the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea and its Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development and the Interstate Coordination Water Commission of Central Asia.

After discussion, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decisions under agenda item 3:

“The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the outcomes of the 2015 SPECA Economic Forum, “Supporting the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the SPECA region” held in Dushanbe on 10-11 November 2015. The Governing Council calls upon the UNECE and ESCAP as well as other United Nations agencies and programmes to provide active support to regional efforts by SPECA participating countries to achieve the Sustainable Developments Goals.”

and

“The Governing Council adopts the Declaration “Paving the way for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the SPECA region”.

The proposed draft decisions were adopted (see Annex V - Decisions 1 and 2).

VI. SPECA activities since the last session of the Governing Council (Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 5 December 2014)

The Progress Reports on the work carried out by the SPECA Project Working Groups since the last session of the Governing Council were presented by the United Nations secretariat. The Progress Reports can be found at: www.unece.org/SPECA/Governing_Council/10th_session. After discussion, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision under agenda item 4:

“The Governing Council notes with appreciation the Progress Reports on the work carried out by the SPECA Project Working Groups since its last session. The Governing Council expresses satisfaction with the scope of activities and the stability of extrabudgetary funding received by SPECA projects.”

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

VII. Adoption of the SPECA Work Plan for 2016-2017

The Senior Officer of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia and the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office presented a report on the activities to be carried out within the SPECA framework in 2016-2017. The SPECA Work Plan for 2016-2017 can be found at: www.unece.org/SPECA/Governing_Council/10th_session. After discussion, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision under item 5 of the agenda:

“The Governing Council approves the SPECA Work Plan for 2016-2017 as presented to the session. It encourages SPECA participating countries, Working Groups, donors and partner organizations to actively support the implementation of projects contained in the Work Plan.”

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

VIII. Cooperation between SPECA and regional organizations and institutions

The Governing Council heard a report by the SPECA Deputy Coordinator at the UNECE on cooperation of the Programme with partner organizations. After discussion, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision under item 6 of the agenda:

“The Governing Council welcomes the progress made in strengthening cooperation between SPECA and other programmes and organizations in providing support to economic cooperation in the SPECA region. The Governing Council invites UNECE and ESCAP and their partner organizations to continue developing close cooperation, including further development and implementation of joint projects.”

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

IX. Election of the next Chair (country) of SPECA

Several representatives from the SPECA countries expressed sincere gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan for the excellent chairmanship of the Programme in 2015 and proposed the adoption of the following decision under item 7 of the agenda:

“The Governing Council expresses its sincere gratitude to Tajikistan for its active work as the Chair country of SPECA in 2015.”

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

The Chairperson announced that in the Note Verbale received by the UNECE secretariat, the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan expressed its willingness to assume the chairmanship of the Programme in 2016. The Head of Delegation of Azerbaijan reconfirmed the readiness of Azerbaijan to assume the chairmanship of SPECA. The Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision under item 7 of the agenda:

“The Governing Council welcomes the offer by the Government of Azerbaijan to assume the Chairmanship of SPECA in 2016. The Governing Council elects Azerbaijan as the Chair country of SPECA for 2016.”

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

X. Other business, including date and venue of the 2016 SPECA Economic Forum and 11th session of the SPECA Governing Council

The Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision under item 8 of the agenda:

“The Governing Council decides that the eleventh session of the SPECA Governing Council and the 2016 SPECA Economic Forum will be held in Azerbaijan in 2016. The exact dates and venue of these events will be agreed upon and communicated through diplomatic channels.”

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

The Heads of Delegation thanked the Government of Tajikistan for the excellent organization of the SPECA events and hospitality. They also expressed their gratitude to the two United Nations Regional Commissions for their devoted support to the Programme as a whole. The Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following additional decisions under item 9 of the agenda:

“The Governing Council expresses its sincere gratitude to the Government of Tajikistan for the excellent organization and hospitality offered to the participants of the 2015 SPECA Economic Forum and the tenth session of the SPECA Governing Council.”

and

“The Governing Council expresses its deep appreciation to the secretariats of UNECE and ESCAP 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 9 and 10).

The representative of the Government of Afghanistan briefed participants on the outcomes of the recent meeting of the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) on 3

and 4 September 2015 in Kabul. The RECCA process is contributing to new partnerships for enhanced cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbours. Such cooperation will facilitate the achievement of the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

XI. Closing of the session

The Chairperson of the session, the Deputy Executive Secretary of the UNECE and the Head of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia and the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office in their closing statements called on SPECA participating countries, the United Nations and development partners to work together on the implementation of the decisions of the Governing Council.

The Chairperson closed the 10th session of the SPECA Governing Council.

ANNEX I

2015 SPECA ECONOMIC FORUM
“Supporting and monitoring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the SPECA region”

and

THE TENTH SESSION OF THE SPECA GOVERNING COUNCIL

(Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 10-11 November 2015)

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ANNEX II

TENTH SESSION OF THE SPECA GOVERNING COUNCIL**(Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 10-11 November 2015)****AGENDA****1. Opening of the session**

Opening of the session by the representative of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, the Chair country of SPECA, followed by the opening statements of the Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the Head of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia and the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office, and the Heads of Delegation of the SPECA countries and interested observers.

2. Adoption of the Agenda**3. Outcomes of the 2015 SPECA Economic Forum “Supporting the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the SPECA region” (Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 10-11 November 2015). Adoption of a political document on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

Summary by the Chairperson of the 2015 SPECA Economic Forum followed by a discussion.

4. SPECA activities since the last session of the Governing Council (Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 5 December 2014)

Progress reports of the SPECA Project Working Groups circulated in advance of the session. Progress reports of the SPECA Project Working Groups followed by a discussion:

- Progress Report of the PWG on Water and Energy Resources
- Progress Report of the PWG on Transport and Border Crossing
- Progress Report of the PWG on Trade
- Progress Report of the PWG on Statistics
- Progress Report of the PWG on Knowledge-based Development
- Progress Report of the WG on Gender and Economy

5. Adoption of the SPECA Work Plan for 2016-2017

The draft SPECA Work Plan for 2016-2017 circulated in advance of the session. Report by the representatives of the UN secretariat followed by a discussion.

6. Cooperation between SPECA and regional organizations and institutions

Report by the SPECA Deputy Coordinator at UNECE on cooperation with partner organizations and institutions, followed by a discussion with participation of representatives of international and regional organizations.

7. Election of the next Chair (country) of SPECA**8. Other business, including date and venue of the 2016 SPECA Economic Forum and 11th session of the SPECA Governing Council****9. Adoption of decisions****10. Closing of the session**

Closing statements by the Heads of Delegation of the SPECA participating countries, the Deputy Executive Secretary of UNECE and the Head of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia and the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA.

ANNEX III

2015 SPECA ECONOMIC FORUM “Supporting the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the SPECA region”

(Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 10-11 November 2015)

SUMMARY BY THE CHAIRPERSON

The 2015 SPECA Economic Forum “Supporting the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the SPECA region” concluded that strengthened subregional cooperation is an important precondition for the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) due to the highly specific conditions of Central Asia. SPECA participating countries are landlocked with the nearest seaports hundreds of miles away; they experience increasing strain on their shared water resources and suffer from the effects of climate change and the lasting environmental, economic, social and health problems caused by the drying out of the Aral Sea.

The discussion focused on those areas – water, environment, trade and connectivity – where regional cooperation is the most important for the successful implementation of the post-2015 Development Agenda. Participants agreed that innovation, gender, statistics and disaster risk reduction are cross-cutting issues which also call for a subregional approach. SPECA can facilitate the exchange of best practices, capacity-building, the joint development and implementation of subregional projects and the sharing of experiences. Representatives of SPECA participating countries presented their plans, needs and priorities with a view to developing a partnership with the United Nations and other representatives of the development community for joint action.

Participants underlined that the promotion of a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system was of great importance for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To achieve this, SPECA needs to provide assistance to the elimination of procedural and regulatory barriers to trade, help explore strategic possibilities for further developing regional trade and support the exchange of experience gained during the implementation of the WTO’s Aid-for-Trade initiative.

Geography poses a particular challenge for the SPECA countries which are landlocked or double landlocked. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises the serious implications of geography when it warns that landlocked developing countries deserve special attention. Participants discussed how improved connectivity can turn SPECA countries from landlocked into land-linked.

Participants underlined that innovation features prominently in several SDGs, as well as among the means of implementation and in global partnerships. It was emphasised that the success of efforts to achieve SDGs in the subregion depends also on the ability of the countries to improve subregional cooperation on water resources management. In Central Asia, several goals are directly or indirectly related to regional cooperation on water resources management and the environment.

Participants noted that effective monitoring of progress towards the SDGs requires improved statistics. Gender is a cross-cutting issue for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As the region is prone to disasters, capacity-building and other forms of support to disaster risk reduction should be an integral part of assistance to SDG implementation.

Central Asian regional organizations, like the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development (ICSD), the Regional Environment Centre of Central Asia (CAREC) and other representatives of the civil society as well as the private sector and academic community were invited to become active partners in supporting the implementation and monitoring of SDGs.

As many SPECA countries are facing serious economic challenges, financing for development is especially important if these countries through the implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. Participants recommended that the Governing Council approves the declaration “Paving the way for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the SPECA region” which outlines how the Programme can contribute to the implementation and monitoring of progress towards the SDGs.

ANNEX III**“PAVING THE WAY FOR THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE SPECA REGION”****DECLARATION**

1. We, high-level representatives of countries participating in the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, Afghanistan and Azerbaijan (SPECA) reiterate our commitment to the Programme as a platform for promoting subregional cooperation in the SPECA region, its further integration in the world economy and achieving sustainable development.
2. The 2015 session of the SPECA Governing Council marks the 10th Anniversary of the International Conference on Strengthening Sub-Regional Economic Cooperation in Central Asia and the Future Role of SPECA (Astana, Kazakhstan, 25-27 May 2005).
3. Since then, a number of important achievements were made including: the broadening of the Programme’s thematic scope; an increase in the number of countries participating; as well as stronger interest in and support to the Programme from development partners such as international organizations and bilateral donors. Nevertheless, much more remains to be done in order to realize the full potential of SPECA.
4. We welcome the recent adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda by the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit 2015 and the commitment to its implementation, including the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by governments and other stakeholders working closely together.
5. We reconfirm that SPECA, as envisaged at the 2014 session of its Governing Council in Ashgabat, has a strong potential for supporting and facilitating the achievement of the SDGs. The SPECA framework, including its Governing Council, Economic Forums, and Working Groups as well as projects implemented under its aegis, can provide an important platform for supporting progress towards many of the SDGs through the exchange of best practice, capacity-building, joint development and implementation of regional projects and the sharing of experience on the use of new financial mechanisms and partnerships.
6. We emphasize the importance of subregional cooperation for the achievement of the SDGs and targets, in particular for those related to the development of resilient infrastructure, trade and industry, sustainable management of natural resources and climate change.
7. In the light of the above, we decide on the following:
 - a) Starting from 2016, the SPECA Project Working Groups will be converted into Thematic Working Groups (TWG) on:

- Water, Energy and Environment
- Sustainable Transport, Transit and Connectivity
- Trade and Trade Facilitation
- Knowledge-based Development (or Innovation and PPPs)
- Gender and Economy and
- Statistics

b) The Thematic Working Groups will:

- Follow closely the efforts of participating countries to implement the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and offer advice and assistance within their respective mandates. For example, the Working Group on Statistics could play a vital role in strengthening national statistical capacities for collecting data relevant to measuring progress towards SDG implementation in the SPECA region;
- Pay particular attention to strengthening regional cooperation when it would enhance the ability of participating countries to achieve the SDGs;
- Provide fora, as experience is gained in the achievement of relevant SDGs, for the exchange of experiences, lessons learned and good practice, as well as for mobilizing additional support for national and subregional implementation;
- Undertake enhanced policy discussions on strategic issues, from a regional perspective; and
- Continue overseeing the implementation of projects included in the SPECA Work Plans. Projects within the respective mandates of TWGs will be included in the Work Plans upon the request of participating countries and when resources for implementation are assured.

c) At their next sessions, the TWGs, while continuing to oversee and jointly elaborate projects for inclusion in SPECA Work Plans will begin discussing individual and joint initiatives as well as the plans of SPECA participating countries for achieving those SDGs and targets which fall within their respective areas of expertise and mandates.

d) Matters related to overall progress in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, as well as cross-sectoral linkages among relevant SDGs will be also discussed, as appropriate, at the future sessions of the SPECA Governing Council and Economic Forums. This will take into account expected decisions by relevant UN intergovernmental bodies on how regional and global follow-up and review will be organized, including by the United Nations Regional Commissions.

8. We recognize that achievement of gender equality as a specific focus of the SDGs through Goal 5, is also a cross-cutting issue to be factored into the implementation of the other SDGs, and thus commit to the consideration of gender aspects of subregional cooperation within SPECA for achievement of the SDGs.

9. We highly appreciate the expressed commitment of our development partners and, in particular, the UNDP and UN Country Teams in the SPECA region, to actively support the national and subregional efforts of SPECA countries to achieve the SDGs. We invite our partners to continue to actively cooperate with UNECE and ESCAP in bringing the relevant lessons learned

and experiences gained to the SPECA Thematic Working Groups and other meetings so that they can be shared and discussed among SPECA countries with a view to expediting progress towards the achievement of SDGs in the region and contributing to SDG follow-up and review.

10. We underscore the importance of partnerships for SDGs implementation. In this regard the UN Country Teams, as well as the Regional UN Development Group Team, which provides an important link between country and regional actions towards SDGs, should play an important role in strengthening subregional cooperation in the SPECA region and provide an important contribution to strengthening inter-governmental cooperation within the SPECA framework.

11. We encourage UNECE, ESCAP and their partners to continue providing assistance within the SPECA framework and through direct cooperation with regional organizations that are expected to play an active role in the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

12. We recognize the role of civil society and, in particular, the Central Asia Regional Environmental Centre, the academic community and the private sector, in supporting and complementing the efforts of Governments to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

TENTH SESSION OF THE SPECA GOVERNING COUNCIL

(Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 11 November 2015)

DECISIONS

Decision 1 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2015/1)

The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the outcomes of the 2015 SPECA Economic Forum, “Supporting the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the SPECA region” held in Dushanbe on 10-11 November 2015. The Governing Council calls upon the UNECE and ESCAP as well as other United Nations agencies and programmes to provide active support to regional efforts by SPECA participating countries to achieve the Sustainable Developments Goals.

Decision 2 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2015/2)

The Governing Council adopts the Declaration “Paving the way for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the SPECA region”.

Decision 3 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2015/3)

The Governing Council notes with appreciation the Progress Reports on the work carried out by the SPECA Project Working Groups since its last session. The Governing Council expresses satisfaction with the scope of activities and the stability of extrabudgetary funding received by SPECA projects.

Decision 4 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2015/4)

The Governing Council approves the SPECA Work Plan for 2016-2017 as presented to the session. It encourages SPECA participating countries, Working Groups, donors and partner organizations to actively support the implementation of projects contained in the Work Plan.

Decision 5 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2015/5)

The Governing Council welcomes the progress made in strengthening cooperation between SPECA and other programmes and organizations in providing support to economic cooperation in the SPECA region. The Governing Council invites UNECE and ESCAP and their partner organizations to continue developing close cooperation, including further development and implementation of joint projects.

Decision 6 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2015/6)

The Governing Council expresses its sincere gratitude to Tajikistan for its active work as the Chair country of SPECA in 2015.

Decision 7 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2015/7)

The Governing Council welcomes the offer by the Government of Azerbaijan to assume the Chairmanship of SPECA in 2016. The Governing Council elects Azerbaijan as the Chair country of SPECA for 2016.

Decision 8 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2015/8)

The Governing Council decides that the eleventh session of the SPECA Governing Council and the 2016 SPECA Economic Forum will be held in Azerbaijan in 2016. The exact dates and venue of these events will be agreed upon and communicated through diplomatic channels.

Decision 9 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2015/9)

The Governing Council expresses its sincere gratitude to the Government of Tajikistan for the excellent organization and hospitality offered to the participants of the 2015 SPECA Economic Forum and the tenth session of the SPECA Governing Council.

Decision 10 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2015/10)

The Governing Council expresses its deep appreciation to the secretariats of UNECE and ESCAP 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.

2015 SPECA ECONOMIC FORUM
“Supporting the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the SPECA region”

(Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 10-11 November 2015)

REPORT

Opening session

The Chairperson of the Economic Forum Mr. Saidrahmon Nazrizoda, First Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Trade of the Republic of Tajikistan, in his opening statement underlined that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development presents great opportunities and challenges for SPECA participating countries. National efforts alone, even if assisted by international development partners, might not be sufficient to achieve all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There are several key areas where strengthened subregional cooperation is an important precondition for success. Policymakers and experts alike emphasize the highly specific conditions of the subregion: its landlocked geography with the nearest seaports hundreds of miles away; the increasing strain on shared water resources; the dramatic effects of climate change; and the lasting environmental, economic, social and health problems caused by the drying out of the Aral Sea – all of which call for coordinated subregional action if all SDGs are to be achieved by 2030.

SPECA offers a neutral subregional framework for supporting and monitoring regional efforts to achieve the SDGs. The Economic Forum focused on those areas – water, environment, trade and connectivity – where regional cooperation is a sine qua non for real progress. In addition innovation, gender and statistics are cross-cutting issues which would profit from a subregional approach. SPECA can facilitate the exchange of best practices, capacity-building, the joint development and implementation of subregional projects and the sharing of experience - for example on the use of new financing mechanisms.

The Economic Forum offered an opportunity for SPECA participating countries to submit recommendations on the above issues to the Governing Council.

The Deputy Executive Secretary of the UNECE Mr. Andrey Vasilyev recalled how the comprehensive reform of the Programme, initiated at the International Conference on Strengthening Sub-regional Economic Cooperation in Central Asia and the Future Role of SPECA (Astana, 25-27 May 2005) had resulted in a significant broadening of SPECA activities. The Programme over the years has developed into a neutral UN framework providing effective support to regional cooperation and the integration of it participating countries into the world economy. Considering that many of the SGDs and targets could be better achieved through stronger joint efforts at the subregional level, SPECA is well positioned to serve as a platform for the participating countries, UN agencies and programmes, and other development partners to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through strengthened regional cooperation.

In his statement on behalf of Ms. Cihan Sultanoglu, Assistant Secretary-General and Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and CIS, Mr. Ben Slay, Senior Adviser of the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub for Europe and the CIS, warned that humanity faces a critical moment in its history: we are both the first generation able to eradicate extreme poverty – and the last generation able to prevent potentially catastrophic climate change. Unlike the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), SDGs are universal in character: they are intended to apply to North and South and rich and poor countries alike. They also embrace the entirety of the sustainable development agendas. The SDGs therefore have the potential to further cohere to global development agenda. The complexity of SDGs, the massive statistical capacity needed to monitor them and the fact that the Addis Ababa Finance for Development Conference “did not put fresh money on the table” make implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development a difficult task. Regional platforms, like SPECA, can help accelerate the implementation of the Agenda in several areas.

The Head of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) Mr. Petko Draganov stated that one key concept of sustainable development is the balancing of various priorities that might sometimes appear to be in conflict, such as environment and economics: this is particularly important in Central Asia, where countries face a host of challenges. He also outlined the importance of conflict prevention mechanisms to ensure steady and sustainable development: the UNRCCA wants to continue its cooperation with UNECE and its other partners in this important area in order to assist sustainable development.

The Head of Delegation of Afghanistan regarded the SDGs as an important policy framework for sustainable development that will greatly assist the economic and social development in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is also still working on implementing the MDGs, whose deadline for Afghanistan has been extended to 2020. He also reminded the audience that Afghanistan is in need of international support to both fulfil the MDGs and adopt the new 17 SDGs. Moreover, he emphasized that Afghanistan greatly values regional cooperation and has worked together with other SPECA countries to improve important areas such as hydrology, energy, transport and trade.

The Head of Delegation of Azerbaijan spoke about the successful achievement of MDGs by his country and active preparations, including new reforms to facilitate the achievement of SDGs which correspond closely to the development strategy of Azerbaijan. One of the main programmes is “Azerbaijan 2020: Vision of the Future” Development Concept which promotes transition towards a knowledge-based economy. It includes such structural reforms as the development of the non-oil sector, support to science and innovation, improved transit, transport and logistics infrastructure, balanced development of regions, investment in information and communication technology, human capital development and effective social protection and gender equality. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) process is providing significant support to the implementation of this strategy.

The Head of Delegation of Kazakhstan stated that traditional, annual SPECA Economic Forums became an important part of the dialogue on approaches and implementation of strategies on key areas of social and economic cooperation among the countries of Central Asia. SPECA plays an important role in the resolution of regional economic problems and promotes economic development through moving forward integration processes. Regional cooperation plays an important role in the foreign policy of Kazakhstan. The topic of this year’s Economic Forum is highly relevant for the SPECA countries, as it opens up new opportunities and presents new challenges in such key areas as regional trade, innovation, gender equality, statistics, management of shared water resources and climate change, and is fully in line with the priorities and tasks of Kazakhstan.

Representative of Kyrgyzstan underlined that the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic fully supports the efforts of the UNECE and ESCAP to create favourable conditions for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals and for the resolution of existing problems of regional cooperation in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan has introduced several initiatives to support sustainable development, including the National Sustainable Development Strategy for 2013-2017 and the Programme of Transition to Sustainable Development for 2013-2017. A Coordination committee for the adaptation, implementation and monitoring of SDGs is being set up. The outcomes of the SPECA Economic Forum are expected to help the Central Asian countries broaden the spheres of bilateral and multilateral cooperation and use integration mechanisms more effectively in the interest of the people of all countries.

The Head of Delegation of Turkmenistan underlined that his Government fully supports the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It includes such important goals as the provision of accessible, cheap and clean energy, sustainable industrialization, sustainable consumption and production patterns. ECOSOC should consider a global mechanism to support the achievement of SDGs. Regional Commissions should play a crucial role in their implementation and monitoring. With support by UNDP, the Regional Centre on Climate Change Technology is planned to be established in Ashgabat. The TAPI construction is presently being launched and the construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan railroad is under way. The Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway has already been opened as well as a port, providing multi-modal transport, on the Caspian Sea.

Session I: Trade

Ms. Virginia Cram-Martos, Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division of UNECE highlighted the importance of Aid-for-Trade activities: the UNECE conducted studies on procedural and regulatory barriers and cooperated with countries to better implement UNECE recommendations, norms and tools to support trade in the region. She identified overland transport infrastructure, logistical services, customs clearance and other border control agencies as core areas for action. General recommendations were the establishment of an inter-risk management committee and a trade facilitation forum which comprised relevant ministries and agencies from all SPECA countries as well as private sector representatives. Moreover, there is a need for reducing documentary requirements and for more effective procedures to improve risk management. Standardization and quality insurance as well as harmonization of metrological systems were also important measures to be taken. Moreover, market surveillance showed the need to improve procedures to fight counterfeit goods and suggested that it might be useful to establish a national notification system for hazardous goods.

Mr. Mario Apostolov, UNECE Secretary to the SPECA Project Working Group on Trade and UNECE Regional Advisor on Trade, gave a presentation about how SPECA supports trade development and cooperation. Reflecting on the High-level Seminar on Regional Cooperation and Trade in Central Asia organized within the framework of the SPECA WG on Trade, he recommended that SPECA should become a more action-driven platform used for projects that are identified by the SPECA countries themselves. Moreover, SPECA should also be connected to broader regional initiatives and be used as platform for information exchange and cooperation on WTO issues. He also urged the audience to develop regional and national trade facilitation strategies and develop regional and national studies on a range of trade-facilitation processes. He gave a detailed account about how to develop and implement national and regional trade facilitation strategies and draft a trade facilitation document.

Ms. Tiziana Bonapace, the Head of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia and the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office, in highlighting the findings of the recently released ESCAP's Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report 2015 underlined the progress that governments of SPECA countries had made in providing an enabling environment for the business sector. The private sector, by virtue of its contribution to growth, employment and innovation, has the ability to respond to the challenges of sustainable development as an opportunity. However, businesses must align their thinking and integrate inclusivity and sustainability into their core values. A new multipronged strategy is required which focuses on: (i) Resource efficiency and minimizing waste; (ii) Adopting and promoting clean and renewable energy, and energy efficiency; (iii) Entrepreneurship and innovation; (iv) Social capital - a measure of the value of a company's networks and relationships and the capacity to manage the growing interconnectivity and interdependency which are impacting the business structures and ecosystems; (v) Employment and empowerment of the work force. Further integration of the business sector into regional and global supply chains through knowledge sharing, nurturing business models and technologies corporate accountability, investing in research and scientific capacity and converting the results of innovative research to market-ready products, particularly through the deployment of renewable energy technologies and mobilizing finance to grow new businesses were all required.

Mr. Marat Usupov, the Head of the UNIDO Operations in Kyrgyzstan, gave a presentation on trade capacity-building in Central Asia. He talked about the principles of Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development and how UNIDO helps countries to implement them. He then gave an overview of the Trade Capacity-Building Training Activities and UNIDO activities in the SPECA countries. Next, he addressed the Trade Facilitation Challenges and Opportunities in Central Asia, which included technical barriers to Trade, Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, Red Tape and the compliance with international standards. He stressed the importance of goods being tested, inspected and certified to comply with international standards which has become even more important in the 21st century: goods from developing countries are often rejected at the border on sanitary or quality grounds. He also made recommendations on trade facilitation processes. He pointed out how the UNIDO's value chain approach can improve the quality and hence competitiveness of products.

The International Trade Centre's (ITC) National Programme Manager for Tajikistan Mr. Saidmumin Kamolov gave a talk about the ICT's support of small and medium-sized enterprises. In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the ICT helped to improve the textile and clothing sector's export competitiveness by strengthening trade and business support services and sectoral and national export strategies. The ICT also assisted Tajikistan with the WTO and post-WTO accession, as well as trade facilitation. The ICT was also active in Kazakhstan, for example by organizing WTO accession seminars. The ITC wants to continue its work in the future and also expand its assistance to the other countries of the region.

Representative of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) declared that it was GIZ goal to help partner countries to integrate into the world economy and use trade as an instrument of poverty reduction. He also regards regional cooperation as essential tool for trade facilitation and has pledged to continue cooperation with UNECE and other UN agencies. He regards SPECA as an important neutral forum for discussion and for promoting trade facilitation reforms in the region.

Session II. Improving Connectivity

Ms. Tiziana Bonapace talked about ESCAP promotion of regional and interregional connectivity. The improved cooperation between Central Asian countries has allowed great progress to be made

in the development of the Asian and Trans-Asian Highways as well as Dry Ports. ESCAP has also assisted with the establishment of transport corridors such as the Almaty-Bishkek-Dushanbe corridor and developed methodologies for cross-border and transit transports. She also stressed the importance of regional integration to soundly allocate energy resources and thus contribute to the achievement of SDG 7; she pointed out the potential of the Asian Energy Highway and renewable energy for the region. Moreover, regional cooperation has also greatly benefitted from the development of ICT connectivity. By developing all of the key networks such as transport, energy and ICT infrastructure, in a regionally seamless and integrated manner, benefits could increase and spread more evenly across and between countries.

Ms. Eva Molnar, the Director of the UNECE Transport Division, in a statement read by Ms. Virginia Cram-Martos, emphasized the role of improved connectivity in achieving the SDGs. In today's competitive world, economic growth has become a crucial component of countries' sustainable development. During the last 20-30 years, the need to reduce production costs has driven many manufacturers to Asia. This geographic production shift has generated new transport patterns and routes, creating significant opportunities for landlocked Central Asian countries to provide transport corridors for trade flows between Europe and Asia. SPECA is supporting the efforts of its participating countries to become "land-linked" by supporting the implementation of international legal instruments, development of multimodal transport infrastructure in a harmonized manner, creating prerequisite for more efficient railway transport operations through the finalization, adoption and application of the Unified Railway Law and improving safety and security of transport networks and operations.

Innovation

Mr. Christopher Athey, the UNECE Secretary to the SPECA Project Working Group on Knowledge-based Development and Economic Affairs Officer of the UNECE, drew lessons from the Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan. He recommended to mobilize remittances, to improve the business environments by reducing obstacles and improving infrastructure and facilitating quality improvements in business. Moreover, Tajikistan should both target new areas and build on existing strengths. He also recommended that Tajikistan should work together with other countries to increase innovation and international economic integration, for example by the participation of Tajikistan researchers in cross-border cooperation programmes.

Disaster Risk Reduction

Ms. Tiziana Bonapace presented the findings of the just released ESCAP 2015 Asia-Pacific Disaster Report and underlined that regional cooperation was critical to address the growing danger of natural disasters in the region, which could have negative consequences for sustainable development. While landlocked developing countries and least developed countries are at high risk of disasters, they have a low capacity of dealing with them. Floods in particular pose a serious threat in the region and can have tremendous transboundary impacts. Hence, countries should work together to share information and establish early warning mechanisms. Such cooperation will also be crucial for the achievement of many of the SDGs.

Session III. Water and environment

Mr. Sulton Rahimzoda, First Deputy Minister of Energy and Water Resources of the Republic of Tajikistan, spoke about possible approaches to the use of water and energy resources of Central Asia to facilitate the achievement of SDGs. He listed those SDGs and targets which are closely linked to water and energy. Today 85% of the water resources of Central Asia are used for

irrigation, while the rest for drinking water, sanitation, industry, fisheries and ecosystem services. Climate change is accelerating the melting of glaciers. The increasing strain on water resources is likely to lead to water shortages as soon as 2025. Central Asia is fully capable to satisfy all its energy needs from clean, renewable energy sources. The economically viable hydropower potential of Tajikistan (317 billion kwh.) is three times more than the present energy consumption of the whole region. The development of this potential would make possible the sustainable management of water resources, offering such advantages as higher water security and reduced risks of floods and droughts. The Government of the Republic of Tajikistan has launched a number of initiatives on water, including a proposal to launch a second international water decade under the title “Water for sustainable development.”

Mr. Marton Krasznai, SPECA Deputy Coordinator at the UNECE and UNECE Regional Adviser, spoke about UNECE programmes and projects in the field of water and environment, in particular the Programme “Regional dialogue and cooperation on water resources management in Central Asia” that includes support to the development of a regional space for water and environmental information, institutional and legal strengthening of the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development, support to the implementation of key principles of international water law, dam safety as well as bilateral cooperation on water resources management between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

The Head of UNEP Sub-regional Office in Central Asia Ms. Natalia Alexeeva introduced UNEP activities in such key areas as climate change, the management of ecosystems, chemicals and waste, monitoring of the environment, poverty and conflict, ecological governance and resource efficiency. UNEP is representing the “voice of the environment” in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A comprehensive approach to the SDGs that includes economic, social and environmental aspects and their connections is a priority for UNEP. She then talked about planned activities by UNEP to facilitate the achievement of environment-related SDGs.

Session IV. Statistics, gender and economy and civil society

Ms. Virginia Cram-Martos – reading a statement on behalf of Mr. Lidia Bratanova, Director of the Statistical Division of UNECE – described the ways in which the implementation of the SDGs could be monitored. UNECE is involved in developing a global set of indicators for measuring SDGs and there has also been set up a group for providing strategic leadership for statistical monitoring on SDGs. She also urged SPECA countries to support their national statistical offices in an impartial way to assist them in monitoring of SDGs. Moreover, the UNECE will create a road map to assist the development of official statistics for monitoring SDGs. The UNECE will also continue to work with SPECA countries to prioritize targets in the improvement of national statistic systems and deliver capacity-building to Central Asian countries which replies to pressing challenges in economic, social and environment statistics and modernizes statistical production as well as legal frameworks for official statistics.

Ms. Elaine Conkievich, the Head of the UN Women Multi-Country Office for Central Asia, commended SPECA for being the first regional programme to initiate interstate consultations on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Gender equality, the empowerment of women and the human rights of women and girls are agreed as a central priority of the post-2030 Development Agenda. SPECA specific component on Gender and Economy should be integrated across all thematic areas covered by SPECA to ensure efficient response to gender specific needs and priorities in water, energy, trade and transport. UN Women is ready to support SPECA participating countries with regard to enforcing their relevant commitments and to better link their policies with women and gender related priorities and needs.

The Director of the Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia (CAREC) Mr. Iskandar Abdullaev talked about CAREC contribution to regional cooperation and role as catalyst and coordinator of environmental and development activities. For example, CAREC provides a knowledge, project and resource management system as well as provides innovative assessment tools that improve environmental monitoring. He also argued that a comprehensive, multi-layered and multi-stakeholder accountability framework is essential for the successful implementation of SDGs in the SPECA region, and identified the linking of national development agendas and global SDGs as the key area for cooperation.

Mr. Akbar Ali Pesnani, Resident Representative of the Aga Khan Development Network in Tajikistan, presented programmes of AKDN in Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as well as its regional projects. Major projects include the University of Central Asia, cross-border bridges, PamirEnergy, Aga Khan University, Hospital Karachi and telecommunications companies. AKDN works with various civil society stakeholders whose mandates include raising the quality of life in their areas.

Session V. Financing

In his presentation on the financing for development in SPECA countries, Mr. Ben Slay argued that the Official Development Assistance (ODA), while essential for development, should be blended with other sources of development finance to cover the great financial needs entailed with development projects. For SPECA countries, the recent ODA declines have been particularly large. At the same time, both domestic budget revenues and foreign direct investment (FDI) in the region have increased significantly. Moreover, remittances in the region are also an important source of development finance and have reduced poverty in less wealthy SPECA countries. While remittances have been dropping, this decline will probably not continue after 2016. He illustrated with an example from Tajikistan that “crowding-in” remittances can be an important source of money for projects too small to concern national governments but too large to be financed by local governments. He thus concluded that remittances were a major source of development finance for less wealthy SPECA countries and can be a source of the “blended finance” needed for local government projects.

Ms. Virginia Cram-Martos spoke about importance of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) to secure financing for infrastructure and the provision of public services. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda has already recognized this important role of PPPs and has spelled out the need for capacity-building within the public sector to make sure that projects are based on the best PPP practices possible. She illustrated the great effectiveness of PPPs (which is potentially greater than that of FDI), but also addressed their downsides: for example, PPPs must be sustainable and fiscally responsible. There is also a great expert knowledge required to implement PPPs. Ms. Cram-Martos recommended that PPPs should be brought into the mainstream through raising governments’ awareness about their advantages and disadvantages and about the need of adapting them to national specifics. This is an important step to secure important financial resources.

Mr. Nikolay Pomoshchnikov, Senior Officer of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia, informed about ESCAP work addressing sustainable development and financing for development. ESCAP study on the landscape of Asia and the Pacific has offered good practices, strategies and approaches that have potential to tap diversified sources of financing. The region recognizes the developmental role of fiscal policy to achieve social and environmental goals and reduce inequalities and the difference between actual tax collection and its potential which, if effectively, exploited could raise \$4 trillion per year. He quoted ESCAP five strategies to mobilize the region’s resource to finance sustainable development announced by Dr. Shamshad Akhtar,

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP, at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 16 July 2015. It included: 1) Effective regional cooperative arrangements between governments and private sector stakeholders to ensure the financial markets and institutions deliver on their original mandate of financial intermediation for development; 2) The establishment of an Asia and the Pacific Tax Forum; 3) Regional and global cooperative arrangements to curb illicit flows and under-invoicing of trade transactions; and 4) Regional integration of Asia and the Pacific stock markets; stronger governance, with supportive regulatory institutions for effective market performance.
