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|  | **2021 SPECA ECONOMIC FORUM**  **Sustainable Transport and Trade for a Green and Inclusive Economy after the Pandemic**  17-18 NOVEMBER 2021 │ TASHKENT │ UZBEKISTAN |



**Programme**

**(Location: t.b.a. )**

Background: The United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) was established on 26 March 1998 by the Tashkent Declaration signed by the Presidents of the Central Asian countries and the Executive Secretaries of the UNECE and ESCAP as a United Nations special programme to support the countries in their efforts for economic development, cooperation and integration into the economies of Europe and Asia. The current SPECA participating countries are Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. UNECE and ESCAP jointly provide overall support to the activities within the framework of the Programme, in close collaboration with the UN Resident Coordinators in the SPECA countries. SPECA provides a subregional collaboration platform for the implementation of those Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that can be achieved better through regional cooperation. In 2021, Uzbekistan is chairing the Programme and hosts the SPECA Days in Tashkent from 16 to 19 November 2021.

The concept of this Forum builds on the recommendations of the 2018 SPECA Evaluation Report that SPECA, as a service-oriented, flexible and strategic platform for policy coordination and cooperation, should foster dialogue, consolidation of positions, solving common problems, elaboration of strategies and work plans for their implementation, as well as sharing expertise. The theme of the 2021 Forum reflects the demand of Uzbekistan and the other SPECA countries to assist in their positioning as connectivity point and hub at the geographic heart of the Eurasian landmass. The Forum will build on the results of the 2019 SPECA Economic Forum *Connectivity: Sustainable Transport and Trade Facilitation in the SPECA Subregion*, using the UN norms, standards, and tools. It will take stock of the implementation of the Ashgabat Initiative[[1]](#footnote-2), the Bishkek Declaration[[2]](#footnote-3) as well as the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy and Principles of Sustainable Trade, adopted by the SPECA Governing Council at its fourteen session on 21 November 2019 in Ashgabat, as well as the conclusions of the Regional Dialogue on Strengthening Transport Connectivity in the SPECA Region and Beyond in the Era of COVID-19.[[3]](#footnote-4)

The 2021 SPECA Forum focuses on progress in the development of sustainable transport and trade in the SPECA subregion and their potential contribution to making the economies of the subregion greener, circular, and inclusive: building back better after the pandemic. The choice of topic reflects some of the priority issues for the subregion today: the effects of climate change on key aspects of economic development and cooperation, as well as sustainable development. COVID-19 related restrictions, lockdowns, and border closures caused serious disruptions of supply chains and citizen’s mobility, which created additional costs. Therefore, this year the emphasis will be on efficiency and best practices in handling transport operations during the COVID-19 pandemic and building back better in the aftermath. The session on sustainable transport will tackle connectivity as a key issue for lowering transport and transit costs – crucial for competitiveness and economic development of SPECA landlocked developing countries (LLDC). LLDCs pay more than double what coastal countries do to export their goods and high trade costs erode the competitiveness of the LLDCs resulting in an enormous negative impact on their overall sustainable development[[4]](#footnote-5). Given the environmental benefits of using railway and its high resilience, greater rail transport development is important for increased sustainability and resilience of the SPECA economies. The session on sustainable trade focuses on the implementation of the SPECA Principles of Sustainable Trade and the digitalization of multimodal transport data and document exchange in the region. The objective is to promote the implementation of the Forum programme also highlights innovative ways to attract investment into a greener and more resilient economy in the region. A separate session is dedicated to the gender aspect of rebuilding the economies of the region better, and empowering women who work on sustainable development, transport, and trade. Given that Uzbekistan is hosting the SPECA events this year and has strengthened its involvement as the Chair of SPECA, one session combines various studies and initiatives related to Uzbekistan.

In line with the recommendations of the 2018 SPECA Evaluation Report, endorsed by all SPECA Governments, this Forum is conceived as a policy and operational meeting, with a less formal format, leading to more meaningful exchanges. It aims at enhancing discussions through panel sessions, oriented towards building partnerships for the achievement of concrete tasks, adopting regional initiatives and strategies, outlining actions to achieve them, formulating ideas for enhancing international transport regime, lowering trade barriers and other actions to foster cross-border supply chains. The participants will help prepare recommendations on how to make the SPECA subregion a well-connected, and sustainable transport system and trade facilitation hub, devising follow-up mechanisms on how to ensure the realization of these policy recommendations that will help achieve relevant SDGs.

Discussions will focus on improving connectivity in the region, using sustainable transport and trade facilitation legal instruments, norms, standards, and tools to foster sustainable growth in the subregion.

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| 17 NOVEMBER 2021 | |
|  | **REGISTRATION OF PARTICIPANTS** |
|  | **Chairperson of the 2021 SPECA Economic Forum:**  **H.E. Mr. Badriddin Abidov,** Deputy Minister of Investment and Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan |
| 10:00 – 11:45 | **OPENING OF THE FORUM**  **Welcome statements:**  **H.E. Mr. Umurzakov,** Minister of Investment and Foreign Trade and Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan  **Ms. Olga Algayerova,** Executive Secretary, UNECE  **Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana,** Executive Secretary, ESCAP  **UN Resident Coordinator in Uzbekistan**  ***Statements by Heads of Delegations of the SPECA countries***:  Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan  ***Statements by other high-level representatives and heads of delegations*** (UNRCCA the Russian Federation, EU, EAEU, SCO, ECO, other countries, organizations)  ***Note on the structure and objectives of the 2021 SPECA Economic Forum***  **Mr. Mario Apostolov**, Forum Coordinator, UNECE |
| 11:45 – 12:45 | **LUNCH BREAK** |
| 12:45 – 14:45 | **SESSION I: HOW TO RESTORE CONNECTIVITY AND BUILD BACK MORE SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT SYSTEM IN THE SPECA SUBREGION**  **Moderated by a SPECA country Resident Coordinator**  **Mr. Yuwei Li**, Director, Sustainable Transport Division, UNECE (10 min)  **Mr. Weimin Ren**, Director, Transport Division, ESCAP (10 min)  Panel 1 composed of 4-5 representatives of SPECA countries and international organizations on best practices for more efficient transport operations during COVID 19 and building back better transport system, (3 questions in moderated discussion, 5 x 8 min)  **Mr. Jasurbek Choriyev**, Deputy Minister of Transport of Uzbekistan  Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, …  ***Partners:*** Ministries of Transport in the SPECA countries; OHRLLS, TER  ***Objective:*** Strengthen capacities and share best practices on how to restore/enhance connectivity and ensure sustainable and efficient functioning of international transport corridors during the COVID-19 crisis which caused serious disruptions of supply chains and citizen’s mobility**.**  Panel 2 composed of 4-5 representatives of international organizations and IFIs (e.g. World Bank, ADB, EIB, IsDB, UIC, OSJD, ECO, TER2) on building back better transport system, with special focus on railways (two statements in moderated discussion, 7 x 6 min)  Statements by the other international organizations and IFI’s (8 min)  ***Partners:*** international financial institution, regional and sectorial organizations,  ***Objectives:*** Reinforce the commitment of the SPECA countries to efficient implement UN legal instruments and build sustainable transport system, with specific focus on railways  **Discussion (10 min)**  ESCAP: Presentation on the outcomes of the sessions of Working Groups on Asian Highway, Trans-Asian Railway networks and Dry ports held in 2021, as well as the preparation of the Next Regional Action Programme on Sustainable Transport Development and the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Transport. |
| 14:45 – 15:00 | **COFFEE BREAK** |
| 15:00 – 17:00 | **SESSION II: SUSTAINABLE TRADE IN THE SPECA SUBREGION**  **Moderator: Ms. Michaela Friberg-Storey**, UN Resident Coordinator in Kazakhstan  *Uzbekistan’s priorities for sustainable trade and regional cooperation*  **H.E. Mr. Badriddin Abidov,** Deputy Minister of Investment and Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan  *Facilitating trade in Tajikistan and the SPECA region and its impact on sustainable development*  **H.E. Mr. Abdurakhmon Abdurakhmonzoda,** Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Trade, Chair of SPECA WP on Trade.  *The contribution of trade to sustainable development in Central Asia*  **Mr. William Tompson, Head, Eurasia Division, OECD**  *The potential of trade facilitation and data digitalization for Central Asia*.  **Mr. Mario Apostolov**, Regional Adviser, UNECE  *Towards implementing the SPECA Principles of Sustainable Trade.*  **Ms. Elisabeth Tuerk**, Director ECT Division, UNECE  More speakers from GIZ (on their Trade Facilitation project and cooperation with UNECE), ITC (on their “Ready4Trade Central Asia” and desired cooperation with UNECE and SPECA), SCO, CAREC, EAEU, EU  **Discussion (20 min)**  ***Partners to be invited to participate in the session and discussion:*** *WTO, SCO, GIZ, TRACECA, ECO, ITC, EU, EAEU; CAREC/ADB, OECD*  ***Objective:*** *reinforce the commitment of the SPECA countries to achieve functional cooperation in regional trade and implement the UNECE standards for multimodal transport data and document exchange, as an innovative tool to achieve cooperation. Obtain commitment of the countries to support the SPECA Principles of Sustainable Trade. Obtain commitment from development partners to support these initiatives.* |

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| 18 NOVEMBER 2021 | |
| 10:00 – 12:00 | **SESSION III: APPLYING THE PRINCIPLES OF CIRCULAR ECONOMY TO SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT, TRADE AND TOURISM IN THE SPECA COUNTRIES (organized by the Environment Division in cooperation with Transport and Trade)**  **Moderator: Resident Coordinator in …**   1. **Speaker: [TBC]**   Sustainable, clean and healthy transport: implementing the Vienna Declaration of the fifth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment.   1. **Bo Libert, UNECE Consultant**   **Environmental perspective of the implementation of Sustainable Trade** Speakers on 2-3 elements of the Principles of Sustainable Trade focused on the environment   1. **Speaker [Ministry of Tourism or State Committee for Nature of Uzbekistan]**   Applying Principles of Circular Economy to Sustainable Tourism in SPECA Countries  **Mr. Marco Keiner – key messages and takeaways**  **Statements by representatives of the SPECA countries and international organizations** (e.g.UNEP, OSCE, CIS, ECO, GIZ, OECD)  ***Partners:*** Ministries of Environment, Transport, Trade, and Health in the SPECA countries; UNEP, UNRCCA, OSCE, UNDP, OECD.  ***Objective:*** buildpolitical will among the SPECA countries for transition to circular economy with support from UNECE instruments on transport and environment and trade |
| 12:00 – 13:00 | **LUNCH BREAK** |
| 13:00 – 14:45 | **SESSION IV: INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO INVESTMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**  **Moderator:** UN Resident Coordinator in one of the SPECA countries  **Panel 1. SDG-linked financing strategies to attract sustainable investments in SPECA countries**  **H.E. Mr. Badriddin Abidov,** Deputy Minister of Investment and Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan (to discuss importance of investment and innovative financing priorities for the region in this area) (10 minutes)  Presentations  1. Leveraging FDI for Sustainable Development, Heather Taylor-Strauss, Trade, Investment and Innovation Division, Heather Taylor-Strauss, ESCAP, and Douglas van der Berghe, ESCAP consultant (15 Minutes) (outline what is sustainable FDI, highlight key FDI trends in SPECA, ESCAP Handbook on Policies, Promotion and Facilitation of Sustainable FDI (forthcoming), and potentially also refer to our training course that guides countries on how to develop tailored indicators to evaluate the contribution of an FDI project to their priority SD sectors)  2. Innovative and Sustainable Financing Instruments for Sustainable Development, Macroeconomic and Financing for Development Division, Alberto Isgut (15 minutes)   1. ECE? 2. UNCTAD 3. Opportunities for a Multilateral Framework Investment Facilitation for Development for SPECA Countries, Axel Berger, German Development Institute (tbc)   7. MPFD to suggest?  *Statements by development partners on their activities fostering investment for sustainable development in the SPECA region: UNCTAD,* OECD, GIZ, ADB, etc.  **Panel 2. discussion on business incubators as innovative means of investment for sustainable development**  **Moderator:** Deputy Minister of Innovative Development of Uzbekistan or UN Resident Coordinator in one of the SPECA countries  *Statements by development partners on their activities fostering investment for sustainable development in the SPECA region:* OECD, GIZ, ADB, etc.  **3. Establishment of SPECA Fund**  **Ms. Olga Algayerova, Executive Secretary, or Mr. Dmitry Mariyasin,** Deputy Executive Secretary, UNECE  **Discussion** |
| 14:45 – 15:00 | **COFFEE BREAK** |
| 15:00 – 16:00 | **SESSION V: Women’s economic empowerment for sustainable development: policy challenges during and after COVID-19 for the SPECA region**  **Moderator:**  **Speakers:** Representatives of the SPECA member states: Azerbaijan (the chairwomen of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs) , Uzbekistan (chair of the International Business Forum on empowering women for sustainable development in Central Asia, 15 June 2021), partners – Europe and Central Asia Regional Office of UN Women, UNDP regional Hub and FAO Regional Office.  ***Objective*:** The session at the 2021 SPECA Economic Forum on *women’s economic empowerment for sustainable development: policy challenges during and after COVID-19 for the SPECA region* will discuss policy action and priorities for the post-pandemic recovery plans to accelerate the advancement of women’s participation in the economy, notably in the areas of transport trade and connectivity.  ***Partners***: Representatives of SPECA countries and partners from the UN system will share experience in undertaking specific measures and discuss visions and plans for recovery policies in these sectors with a gender lens.  **Partners**: ITC… |
| 16:00 – 17:00 | **SESSION V: Focus on Uzbekistan: presentation of studies and projects with a focus on Uzbekistan and its role in regional cooperation**  **Moderator:** UN Resident Coordinator in Uzbekistan  ***Speakers*:** Short presentations on the findings and policy recommendations of recent or current studies and projects undertaken by UNECE and ESCAP with a focus on Uzbekistan: assessment of the readiness of Uzbekistan to implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, study on procedural and regulatory barriers to trade in Uzbekistan, innovation review of Uzbekistan, environment performance review, shift to a sustainable freight, etc.  ***Objective*:** Build political will for the implementation of the policy recommendations of these studies and projects; obtain endorsement (notably for the regional cooperation aspect) from the SPECA Governing Council. |
| 17:00 – 17:30 | **CLOSING SESSION: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 2021 SPECA ECONOMIC FORUM**  **Discussing the concluding document and recommendations of the 2021 SPECA Economic Forum**  **Closing statements by representatives of Uzbekistan, UNECE and ESCAP** |
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1. The Ashgabat Initiative was the outcome document from the 2019 SPECA Economic Forum that fostered connectivity, trade and transport facilitation <https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/SPECA/documents/gc/session14/IV._AHGABAT_INITIATIVE_English.pdf> and in Russian: <https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/SPECA/documents/gc/session14/IV._AHGABAT_INITIATIVE_Russian.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Bishkek Declaration adopted by the SPECA Governing Council at its fifteen session on 20 November 2020 in Bishkek: <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Bishkek%20Declaration_ENG_0.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. https://unece.org/transport/events/strengthening-transport-connectivity-speca-region-and-beyond-era-covid-19 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Ministerial Meeting of LLDCs on Trade and Transport Achieving the SDGs in Landlocked Developing Countries through Connectivity and Trade Facilitation, Astana, Kazakhstan, 16-17 May 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)