



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

Sixteenth session of the SPECA Working Group on Trade

SPECA/PWG-Trade/2021/EN/X

**PROGRESS REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES
OF THE SPECA WORKING GROUP ON TRADE**

In line with the overall objectives of SPECA to support its participating countries in developing subregional economic cooperation, integrating their economies into the world economy, and attaining the Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the WG on Trade shall foster subregional cooperation to promote national and regional development of sustainable trade in the SPECA participating countries. To achieve this, the Working Group: (i) Provides a platform for supporting progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through subregional cooperation in trade and trade facilitation with a focus on SDGs directly related to trade development, notably SDG 17 on partnerships, taking into account interlinkages between the SDGs; (ii) Assists in improving the awareness of SPECA countries on the trade-related SDGs; help provide information and share best practice experiences, taking into account interlinkages between the SDGs; (iii) Promotes policy dialogue to support: trade policy cooperation among the SPECA countries and their trade negotiators; trade facilitation; aligning positions on sustainable trade, dealing with non-tariff measures, and investment policies; and (iv) Provides analysis and capacity-building in the areas of trade facilitation, sustainable trade development, regulatory harmonization, agricultural quality standards, elimination of non-tariff barriers to trade, investment, and other areas, including identification of funding modalities for SPECA activities.

The thematic orientation of the activities of the Working Group on Trade includes: (i) sustainable trade development among the countries in the region and with the main trading partners; (ii) trade facilitation and promotion of trade facilitation norms, standards and best practice recommendations; (iii) public-private cooperation for trade facilitation; (iv) regulatory harmonization, market surveillance and risk management; (v) agricultural commercial quality standards; (vi) investment and trade development; and (vii) other areas of competence of UNECE and ESCAP related to the development of trade, regional markets and harmonization of standards in these areas. The deliverables of the WG on Trade focus on four areas: (i) trade policy cooperation, including on the WTO negotiations; (ii) implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy; (iii) implementation of the SPECA Principles for Sustainable Trade; (iv) non-tariff measures and barriers to trade; as well as (v) digitalization of multimodal transport information exchange, with which the WG started dealing in 2021.

| Name of Activity | Time & Venue | SPECA countries | Major results |
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| 16 th session of the SPECA Working Group on Trade | 16 November 2021 Hybrid | Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, | The overall objective of the session is to foster: exchange of experiences; mutual assistance to achieve trade facilitation, the trade-related SDGs, |

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| | format of the session (in person and online) | Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan | goals of the Ashgabat Initiative; SPECA Principles of Sustainable Trade, Trade Facilitation Strategy; public-private cooperation; and more collaboration in the digitalization of trade and transport operations, aligned with the United Nations standards. |
| Assistance to the WTO process in the SPECA countries | | | |
| <p>Assessment of the readiness of Uzbekistan to implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) (several activities)</p> <p><i>A.</i> Training for the consultants from Uzbekistan to assess the readiness of Uzbekistan to implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA)</p> <p><i>B.</i> Validation seminar of the consultants' report on assessing the readiness of Uzbekistan to implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA)</p> <p><i>C.</i> Consultants reviewed and finalized the readiness assessment report</p> | <p><i>A.</i> 9 December 2020, Uzbekistan, online</p> <p><i>B.</i> 22 April 2021, Uzbekistan, online</p> <p><i>C.</i> May 2021</p> | Uzbekistan | <p><i>A.</i> Seminar successfully organized online via WebEx with the UNECE Regional Adviser and a resource person from Ukraine. Template for the assessment report, questionnaire, and presentation of the measures drafted in Russian, as requested by the beneficiaries, who appreciated the materials. Extensive report on the discussions prepared – to serve as a basis for the assessment report by the consultants.</p> <p><i>B.</i> Seminar organized as an interactive event with the participation of UNECE and the resource person. Draft readiness assessment report reviewed. Comments made for the final editing of the readiness assessment report.</p> <p><i>C.</i> Readiness assessment report reviewed, finalized, and presented to the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Recommendations made for further action. Request by Uzbekistan for assistance on concrete measures issued: draft a national trade facilitation strategy; assist with the establishment of an enquiry point; assist with the digitalization of transport corridors using UN/CEFACT standards; assist the use of UN/CEFACT standards in the</p> |

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| | | | Single Window of Uzbekistan. |
| National consultant to help Tajikistan make an assessment of the implementation of the WTO TFA, and assistance for the Trade Policy Review of Tajikistan | Starting in the fall of 2021, ongoing | Tajikistan | Consultant hired, started research; draft report to be ready in December 2021. |
| Implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy | | | |
| Seminar on information exchange for trade facilitation and trade procedures in the SPECA region, notably on web sites of the SPECA Customs services (art.1 WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, TFA) | 12 February 2021, online | All SPECA countries | Established common approach to the facilitation of availability of information to conduct cross-border trade in the SPECA countries, on the basis of a proposed concept of a web tool for information sharing; agreement with GIZ to share the support for this initiative; awareness of participants on the issues discussed raised; and search for solution to the identified challenges started. Webinar participants agreed on the need for such a tool to improve the implementation of the WTO TFA; offer new channels for sharing trade-related information between the SPECA countries; ensure synergies between Customs authorities and the private sector. Experts from the Partnership on Transport and Logistics for Central Asia suggested to work on the provision of information. Participants from the SPECA countries expressed willingness to work on it and requested help from UNECE and GIZ. UNECE and GIZ started support projects. |
| Webinar on trade facilitation enquiry points (art. 1.3 WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, TFA) | 2 March 2021, online | All SPECA countries | UNECE and experts from the region reviewed current experience and proposed a concrete approach to establishing a TF enquiry point in SPECA countries. The experts from the WTO secretariat provided information on the functioning and guide for SPS and TBT enquiry points, to be used as example for the TF enquiry point. Stakeholders from |

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| | | | the SPECA countries participated in Q&A session and formulated a set of recommendations on developing a methodological guide on establishing and operating TFA enquiry points. The participants asked UNECE to work on it, and UNECE hired a consultant to prepare a draft of such Guide for the SPECA countries on how to establish a TF enquiry point. A national consultant hired in Uzbekistan to work with the Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade on the establishment of a national TF enquiry point. |
| Study on harmonization of border-crossing procedures in the SPECA region | Ongoing | All SPECA countries | Study on harmonization of border-crossing procedures in the SPECA region made a working document of the SPECA WG on Trade. Updated version to be presented at the 16 th session of the SPECA WG on Trade on 16 November 2021 and the 16 th SPECA Governing Council session on 19 November 2021. |
| Support to accession to the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific | Ongoing since November 2020 | Tajikistan | Inter-agency consultations held, and accession documentation prepared |
| Technical and Legal Readiness Assessment for Cross-border Paperless Trade | Ongoing since September 2021 | Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan | Detailed assessment and national action plans expected by December 2021 |
| Webinar on Using ESCAP's online Trade Intelligence and Negotiation Advisor (TINA) | July 2021 | All SPECA countries | Policy analysts better equipped for regional trade agreement negotiations |
| Implementation of the SPECA Principles of Sustainable Trade | | | |
| Assessment of the readiness of the SPECA countries to implement the SPECA Principles of Sustainable Trade | November 2020 – February 2021 | Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan | National assessments on the readiness of 6 SPECA countries (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) finalized. Overall assessment report, building on the national reports – ongoing. |

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| | | | Presentation of the overall report planned for the 16 th session of the SPECA WG on Trade on 16 November 2021 and the 16 th SPECA Governing Council session on 19 November 2021. |
| Analysis (study) of the interconnection between trade facilitation, sustainable trade, water management, food security and the circular economy in the SPECA region, considering the need for regional cooperation to achieve relevant SDGs | Ongoing | All SPECA countries | Analysis/study – ongoing. Presentation of the overall report planned for the 16 th session of the SPECA WG on Trade on 16 November 2021 and the 16 th SPECA Governing Council session on 19 November 2021. |
| Study of non-tariff barriers to trade | | | |
| National study on procedural and regulatory barriers to trade in Uzbekistan | Ongoing (to be finalized by March 2022) | Uzbekistan | A regional study finalized and published in November 2020. A national follow-up: drafting |
| Using UN (UN/CEFACT) standards for the digitalization of multimodal transport data and document exchange | | | |
| National pilot implementation project in Uzbekistan | July – November 2021 | Uzbekistan | National pilot study and recommendations for the implementation of the UN/CEFACT standards for the digitalization of multimodal transport data and document exchange – ongoing. |