



## **REPORT**

### **United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA)**

#### **24<sup>th</sup> Session of the Working Group on Water, Energy and Environment**

(10-11 November 2021, online)

#### **Organization**

The 24<sup>th</sup> Session of the Working Group (WG) on Water, Energy and Environment of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) (hereinafter referred to as SPECA WG or WG) was held online on 10-11 November 2021 and hosted by the Government of Uzbekistan.

Forty participants attended the meeting, including representatives of the SPECA member countries, United Nations organizations, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC), the German Society for International cooperation (GIZ), the Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation of the Asian Development Bank, the Interstate Commission for Sustainable Development (ICSD), the Scientific Information Centre, Inter-State Commission for Water Coordination (SIC ICWC), the USAID's Regional Water and Vulnerable Environment project, Executive Committee of the CIS Electric Power Council.

Mr. Bahrom Umarbekov, Deputy Director, Ministry of Energy, Uzbekistan chaired the session. The Director of the UNECE Environment Division, Mr. Marco Keiner, and Director of the UNESCAP Energy Division, Mr. Hongpeng Liu welcomed the delegates.

#### **Background and Expectations**

In 2015, the UN member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to address crucial issues facing the global community. It became clear that it was important to define a limited number of achievable SDG targets, which would need cross-border collaboration in the SPECA setting. To this end, at the 10th session of the SPECA Governing Council (Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 11 November 2015) representatives of SPECA participating countries adopted a Declaration reiterating their commitment to the Programme as a platform for promoting cooperation in the SPECA subregion and achieving sustainable development.

Climate change poses increasingly severe risks for ecosystems, human health and the economy of the SPECA sub-region. Cross-sectoral and regional cooperation on the energy, water, and natural resources has potential to provide economic gains, improve the environment and increase the well-being of citizens. Cooperation can also support the region's adaptation to climate change including response to natural disasters. To this end, the main objective of this Session of the Working Group was to discuss opportunities for intersectoral and regional cooperation on water, energy and environmental challenges.

## Meeting proceedings

### Working Group programme implementation in 2020-2021

Representatives of UNECE and UNESCAP reported on activities implemented during 2020-2021 under the aegis of SPECA. UNECE secretariat informed the participants about the results of the completed projects on [Capacity Building for Cooperation on Dam Safety in Central Asia \(evaluation report\)](#), and Enhancing Transboundary Energy Cooperation Through Introduction of Wind and Solar Energy into Power systems of the CIS countries the implementation SDG 7, as well as progress achieved under the [Transboundary Cooperation in Chu and Talas River Basin](#) and [National Policy Dialogues in Central Asia](#). UNESCAP secretariat informed on the progress in implementation of the following projects: [Regional E-Learning courses on nexus approach in Biodiversity/Ecosystems, Health and Climate, Water and SDGs](#); [Supporting countries in North and Central Asia to meet the commitments under the Paris Agreement](#); Support for Sustainable Infrastructure Planning in Cities in Central Asia, Sustainable and clean energy for Central Asia, [Asia-Pacific Energy Portal](#).

### SPECA countries perspectives, moderated by UNECE

Country representatives provided brief information on national priorities for water, energy and environmental challenges and opportunities for cross-sectoral and regional cooperation. **Ms. Farida Alakbarova, Head of Integrated Water Resources Management subdivision, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Azerbaijan** informed that the rational use of natural resources including water resources is a priority for the country. The Government established the Water Commission and transboundary water cooperation is of particular importance. The Commission provides a multi stakeholder intersectoral platform to address national water related challenges and drives water sector reform. The geographic location of Kazakhstan and scarcity of water resources necessitates comprehensive intersectoral cooperation in the country as informed by Mr. **Muslim Zhienbayev Deputy Director of the Department of Transboundary Rivers, Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources**. He also highlighted that Kazakhstan is the downstream country to all the rivers running through the country's territory. Seven of eight water basins of the country are of transboundary nature and therefore, regional and transboundary cooperation is very important for the country. **Mr. Akylbek Sulaimanov Head of the Water Resources Department State Agency of Water Resources** informed that Kyrgyzstan is heavily impacted by climate change, which among other resulted in the changes of the vegetation periods. Under the chairmanship of Prime Minister, the National Water Council considers the development of the Road Map on the implementation of the Water Code of Kyrgyzstan. Many of these activities are conducted under the ongoing project on National Water Policy Dialogues supported by UNECE. Energy related policies and programmes implemented in Uzbekistan were presented by **Mr. Bahrom Umarbekov Deputy Director Power Sector Reform Office, Ministry of Energy**. Since 2019 the Government of Uzbekistan has been implementing a power sector reform agenda that foresees the increase of the share of the energy generated by renewable sources.

### Transboundary and regional cooperation in the SPECA sub-region: integrated water, energy and environment management - moderated by UNESCAP

**Aksulu Kushanova, Energy Investment Specialist, Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia** presented progress and findings under the EU project "Central Asia Nexus dialogue: Fostering Water Energy and Food Security Nexus and Multi-sector Investment. The project is aimed to create a multi-sectoral enabling environment to facilitate sustainable investments for increased water, energy, food security and ecosystems in Central Asia. The project is a country-needs driven and focused on achieving its objective through enhancing nexus dialogue, building capacity, and demo projects.

**Caroline Milow, Programme Manager, Green Central Asia**, presented the recently launched initiative on Green Central Asia: Enhancing regional dialogue on climate, environment and security. The initiative is aimed at mitigating risks that potentially may emanate from the negative impact of the climate change and focused on supporting a dialogue on climate change and its risks for the Central Asian countries and strengthen transboundary cooperation to prevent conflicts.

**Dinara Ziganshina, Acting Director, SIC ICWC** informed participants of SIC's work on water, energy, food and environmental security in Central Asia and the benefits of intersectoral solutions. Regional experts conducted an intersectoral assessment and concluded that despite the various risks and challenges the region is facing the countries may still maintain water, food and energy security if a well-coordinated intersectoral approaches is adopted.

**Kazuhiro Yoshida, Senior Water Resources Specialist, ADB** informed about the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Programme and the Water Pillar planned to be established under the Programme. The Programme aims to be part of a broader regional economic framework to raise the profile of water security across the region and facilitate cross-sector dialogue and investments for mutually beneficial outcomes; complement other regional initiatives and programs, e.g., IFAS, and support achievement of national development goals - SDGs, NDCs

**Richard Volk, Chief of Party, USAID Regional Water and Vulnerable Environment (WAVE)** presented Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem (WEFE) nexus related activities. The programme is implemented around the four major workstreams capacity building with focus on WEFE nexus that includes: improved curricula and training, support collaborative research, and promote science-to-policy linkages; multilevel governance; long term planning and decision support; and regional and national level initiatives.

**Georgy Ermolenko, Director of the Department, Executive Committee of the CIS Electric Power Council (EPC CIS)** presented information about ongoing activities being implemented by the EPC CIS to promote the economic, social and environmental benefits of the enhanced power grid connectivity in Central Asia.

### **New initiatives for the WG**

The Working Group recalled that at its 22nd session the WEE WG requested to explore opportunities to develop new projects and initiatives with the aim to support participating countries: i) in addressing regional and transboundary water, energy and linked environmental issues, ii) in facilitating the achievement of related national development objectives and SDGs, iii) in promoting intersectoral analysis of energy and water issues, vi) in improving water, energy and environment sector cooperation nationally and between countries, v) in considering emerging challenges. The session focused on new projects and initiatives proposed in response to the previous WG's decisions and discussions with SPECA countries.

**Nataliya Nikiforova, Environmental Affairs Officer, UNECE**, presented a new project on safe water and sanitation and strengthened resilience against COVID-19 and other infectious diseases in Central Asia. Implemented under the Protocol on Water and Health of the Water Convention the key objective of the project is to strengthen the capacity of Central Asian countries to set and implement water supply, sanitation and health targets in accordance with the Protocol, in order to increase resilience to COVID-19 and other infectious diseases.

**Talibek Makeev, Consultant, UNECE** presented a study on Applying principles of circular economy to sustainable tourism in SPECA countries. The study aimed to provide an overview of the current status of tourism in the region and the policies relevant to the circular economy in the sector,

as well as the challenges and opportunities in applying circular principles for tourism value chain activities.

**Matthew Griffiths, Senior Programme Manager, OECD** informed about a new project Regional mechanism for the low-carbon, climate-resilient transformation of the energy-water-land Nexus in Central Asia. Through Germany's International Climate Initiative (IKI) from the German Federal Ministry of Environment, this multi-year regional project is proposed to operationalise the energy-water-land nexus through robust economic and financial analytical work to identify nexus opportunities and demonstrate the business case for cooperation around nexus issues at the regional and national level

**Anis Zaman, Economic Affairs Officer, UNESCAP** presented the project which is aimed to identify energy transition pathways for Central Asian countries in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. The projects called NEXTEP (National Expert SDG Tool for Energy Planning) has been launched for Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. It will be expanded further to cover all SPECA member countries.

**Claudia Kamke, Environmental Affairs Officer, UNECE** informed about the projects on strengthening mine tailings safety and interinstitutional cooperation on the prevention of accidental pollution from tailings management facilities in Central Asia

### **Next steps and decisions**

Based on discussions under the previous agenda items, the WG discussed and agreed on decisions of its 24th session (Annex II).



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

**24<sup>th</sup> Session of the Working Group on Water, Energy and Environment**  
(10-11 November 2021, online)

**Provisional programme**

<b>Day 1</b>	
<b>Time</b>	12:00 - Tashkent; 14:00 - Bangkok; 08:00 - Geneva; 11:00 - Baku; 13:00 - Nur-Sultan; 13:00 - Bishkek; 12:00 – Ashgabat; 12:00 – Dushanbe; 03:00 - Rockville (US)
<b>30 min</b>	<b>1. Opening of the session</b> - Uzbekistan - Hongpeng Liu, Director, Energy Division, UNESCAP - Marco Keiner, Director, Environment Division, UNECE
<b>5 min</b>	<b>2. Adoption of the agenda</b> <i>Brief information on the programme and expected outcomes – UNECE and ESCAP</i>
<b>45 min</b>	<b>3. WG programme implementation in 2020-2021</b> - Presentations of ESCAP activities – <b>Aneta Nikolova and Sergey Tulinov, UNESCAP</b> - Presentation of UNECE activities – <b>Alexander Belokurov, Igor Litvinyuk and Batyr Hajiyev, UNECE</b>  <b>Q&amp;A session</b>
<b>20 min</b>	<b>Break</b>
<b>75 min</b>	<b>4. SPECA countries perspectives</b> <i>Country representatives are requested to provide brief information on national priorities for water, energy and environmental challenges and opportunities for cross-sectoral and regional cooperation (10 -15 min per country)</i> - Azerbaijan - Kazakhstan - Kyrgyzstan - Tajikistan - Turkmenistan - Uzbekistan

Day 2	
<b>Time</b>	12:00 - Tashkent; 14:00 - Bangkok; 08:00 - Geneva; 11:00 - Baku; 13:00 - Nur-Sultan; 13:00 - Bishkek; 12:00 – Ashgabat; 12:00 – Dushanbe; 03:00 - Rockville (US)
<b>75 min</b>	<p><b>5. Transboundary and regional cooperation in the SPECA sub-region: integrated water, energy and environment management</b></p> <p><i>Regional and development partner organizations are requested to provide an overview of their ongoing activities in the area of water, energy and environment and partnership opportunities (10 min per intervention)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Progress and findings under the EU project “Nexus dialogue in Central Asia” – <b>Aksulu Kushanova, Energy Investment Specialist, Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia</b></li> <li>- Green Central Asia: Enhancing regional dialogue on climate, environment and security <b>Caroline Milow, Programme Manager, Green Central Asia, GIZ</b></li> <li>- Water, energy, food and environmental security in Central Asia: benefits of intersectoral solutions – <b>Dinara Ziganshina, Acting Director, SIC ICWC</b></li> <li>- Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Water Pillar - <b>Kazuhiro Yoshida, Senior Water Resources Specialist, ADB</b></li> <li>- WEF nexus related activities - <b>Richard Volk, Chief of Party, USAID Regional Water and Vulnerable Environment (WAVE)</b></li> <li>- Enhancing power grid connectivity to achieve affordable and clean energy for all in Central Asia – <b>Georgy Ermolenko, Director of the Department, EC EPC CIS</b></li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Q&amp;A session</b></p>
<b>20 min</b>	<b>Break</b>
<b>60 min</b>	<p><b>6. New initiatives for the WG</b></p> <p><i>The session will focus on new projects and initiatives proposed in response to the previous WG’s decisions and discussions with SPECA countries (10 min each)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Protocol on Water and Health in Central Asia: launching a project on safe water and sanitation and strengthened resilience against COVID-19 and other infectious diseases – <b>Nataliya Nikiforova, Environmental Affairs Officer, UNECE</b></li> <li>- Applying principles of circular economy to sustainable tourism in SPECA countries – <b>Talaibek Makeev, Consultant, UNECE</b></li> <li>- Regional mechanisms for the low-carbon, climate-resilient transformation of the energy-water-land Nexus in Central Asia – <b>Matthew Griffiths, Senior Programme Manager, OECD</b></li> <li>- Energy Transition Pathways for Central Asian countries in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement (NEXTEP project) – <b>Anis Zaman, Economic Affairs Officer, UNESCAP</b></li> <li>- UNECE Projects on strengthening mine tailings safety and interinstitutional cooperation on the prevention of accidental pollution from tailings management facilities</li> </ul>

	<p>in Central Asia, <b>Ms. Claudia Kamke, Environmental Affairs Officer, UNECE</b></p> <p><b>Q&amp;A session</b></p>
<b>60 min</b>	<p><b>7. Next steps and decisions</b></p> <p><i>Based on discussions under previous items, the Working Group will review and agree future work and decisions to be adopted.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Round of comments by countries and partners</i></li> <li>- <i>Wrapping up and conclusions</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Moderator – Batyr Hajiyeu, Economic Affairs Officer, Environment Division, UNECE</b></p> <p><i>Discussion</i></p>



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

**TWENTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE SPECA WORKING GROUP  
ON WATER, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT**

**(10-11 November 2021)**

**DECISIONS**

The Working Group welcomed the project brief for the new IKI funded nexus project “*Regional mechanisms for the low-carbon, climate-resilient transformation of the energy-water-land Nexus in Central Asia*” and emphasized its relevance to the needs of the SPECA participating countries to effectively and jointly address water, energy and environmental challenges in the region in an integrated manner. It requests the United Nations secretariat to:

- i. consider the Working Group on Water, Energy and Environment as a SPECA regional platform;
- ii. inform the SPECA participating countries on project concept development and work programming to be undertaken during the project’s preparation phase to February 2022.

The Working Group welcomed the work conducted by UNECE on strengthening mine tailings safety in Central Asia, including at the river basin level. It invites SPECA countries to actively support ongoing tailings activities and to implement the *decision 2020/1 on strengthening mine tailings safety within the UNECE region and beyond*<sup>1</sup> under the Industrial Accidents Convention, the use of which was also encouraged by the Water Convention for countries’ efforts to strengthen mine tailings safety.

The Working Group also welcomed the project brief for the new 2022-2023 project on improving water, sanitation, hygiene and health for strengthened resilience against COVID-19 and other infectious diseases in Central Asia, funded by the Russian Federation and highlighted its relevance to the needs of the SPECA participating countries to effectively and jointly address environment, water and public health challenges in the region through an intersectoral approach. It requests the United Nations secretariat to keep the SPECA participating countries and, in particular, the Working Group on Water, Energy and Environment informed on the activities, progress and results under the above project.

The Working Group considered the brief analytical overview of the study on “*Applying Principles of Circular Economy to Sustainable Tourism in SPECA countries*”. The Working Group requests the United Nations secretariat to support the SPECA participating countries to:

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: [https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/Decision%202020\\_1-.pdf](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/Decision%202020_1-.pdf).



- i. develop guidelines on the application of circular economy principles to sustainable tourism and other sectors in SPECA countries; and
- ii. replicate and scale up existing approaches to build capacity and raise awareness of the benefits of circular economy through training workshops organized in cooperation with key stakeholders for government officials and tourism businesses.

***Development of National SDG 7 Roadmaps to Achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement in Central Asia*** (NEXTEP Project):

The Working Group welcomed UNESCAP information on using the NEXTEP tool to develop energy transition roadmaps in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and invites other SPECA countries to be engaged in the project.

***Supporting SPECA countries to meet the commitments under the Paris Agreement:***

The Working Group welcomes further cooperation on climate action, including on carbon pricing instruments and needs-based climate finance.

**Development of SPECA cooperation with interested regional organizations, including IFAS and its structures:**

The Working Group emphasized the need for further coordination of SPECA project activities with regional initiatives, in particular the "Aral Sea Basin Programme 4" (ASBP-4) and the "Regional Environmental Programme for Sustainable Development of Central Asia" (REP4SD)

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## List of participants

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### 24rd Session of the SPECA Working Group on Water, Energy and Environment

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**Date:** Wednesday, November 10-11, 2021

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