



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

2021 SPECA ECONOMIC FORUM

(Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 17-18 November 2021)

TASHKENT STATEMENT

on

**Sustainable Transport, Trade and Connectivity in the SPECA Region for a Greener,
Circular and Inclusive Post-Pandemic Recovery**

The countries participating in the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), represented by their delegates at the 2021 SPECA Economic Forum in Tashkent, twenty-three years after the signing of the Tashkent Declaration that established SPECA, affirm their intention to collaborate with the objective of building a greener, circular and inclusive economy in the region, as it begins recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, with particular focus on trade, transport and connectivity.

The Participants of the 2021 SPECA Economic Forum,

- Noting the commitment of the Heads of State of the Central Asian countries expressed in their Joint Statement in conclusion of the Central Asian Summit on 6 August 2021 in Avaza, Turkmenistan, to advance sustainable development, connectivity, trade and cooperation in the region,
- Noting in particular, the call made in the Avaza Statement for the creation of new and modernizing existing multimodal transport corridors, multifunctional logistics centres, the introduction of innovative, energy-saving and digital technologies, the facilitation of cross-border procedures, in accordance with international best practices, the development of sustainable tourism, and other areas,
- Noting the proximity of the objectives of the Avaza Statement and the goals and mandate of SPECA, making possible the use of the Programme as an institutional platform to achieve in practice the high objectives of the Avaza Statement, including the preparation of the respective Roadmap,

- Reaffirming the importance of circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for economic prosperity and resilience, in addressing environmental challenges, mitigating climate change to recover from the pandemic,
- Recognizing the need to strengthen regional cooperation in the field of climate change mitigation and adaptation, rational use of water and energy resources, and to promote projects and programmes aimed at introducing resource-saving and green technologies, including the development of renewable energy sources,
- Stressing the need to align the rapid development of trade, transport and connectivity in the region to build back better a green, circular and inclusive economy after the pandemic,
- Confirming the commitment of the global community, voiced at the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly, to restore trust and fight together the cascade of crises, from the pandemic to supersized inequalities, climate change, and other issues,
- Acknowledging the call of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan at the 76th session of the General Assembly to build on the responsibility of the United Nations in addressing transnational threats to peace, security and sustainable development, as well as climate change, international migration, and other issues,
- Taking into account the initiative proposed by the President of the Republic of Tajikistan on declaring 2025 as International Year for the Preservation of Glaciers and establishment of a Special International Fund for Glaciers in the framework of the United Nations,
- Recognizing the urgent need to bridge gaps in incomes, infrastructure, technological development, digitalization, democratic development, environmental protection, addressing the needs of disadvantaged communities, and other related areas, in the wake of the pandemic,
- Recognizing that effective cooperation and coordination among the international organizations, bilateral and multilateral international development partners and financial institutions will be needed to avoid fragmentation and duplication of efforts to support connectivity in the SPECA region,
- Expressing appreciation for the financial support to the functioning of SPECA from the Russian Federation, Republic of Kazakhstan and the Islamic Development Bank, while calling to other development partners to financially support the work of SPECA going forward,
- Inspired by the successful initial implementation of the Ashgabat Declaration on Reducing Barriers to Trade and Transport using United Nations legal instruments, norms, standards and recommendations while bolstering connectivity in the SPECA region,
- Taking note of the information provided by the Republic of Azerbaijan on rehabilitation and reconstruction activities with the application of green and smart technologies as well as the appeal to international organizations to assist all SPECA countries in this process,

make the following

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Reinforce regional economic cooperation with a focus on productive sectors and green technologies as a factor for stability in the subregion and its further integration into global value chains; set priorities for turnkey projects that would make a difference in their areas of work.
2. Strengthen SPECA countries' cooperation on measures and challenges in maintaining undisrupted supply-chains and international transport during and after the COVID-19 pandemic through seamless, contactless and collaborative solutions, including these promoted through the UNECE and ESCAP joint capacity-building project in that area.
3. Step up the implementation of the Roadmap for the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for the Landlocked Developing Countries.
4. Invite SPECA countries that have not yet done so to consider acceding to and efficiently implementing the United Nations legal instruments on inland transport to enhance regional and inter-regional transport connectivity. Countries are invited to become contracting parties to UN transport infrastructure-related agreements (European Agreement on Main International Traffic Arteries (AGR), European Agreement on Main International Railway Lines (AGC), European Agreement on Important International Combined Transport Lines and Related Installations (AGTC), the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network, the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network and Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports) and implement digital solutions for border crossing facilitation (such as eTIR, eCMR, and other facilitation tools).
5. Emphasize the importance of a coordinated approach in the development of multimodal transport systems with special emphasis on the railway and intermodal transport sectors, completing missing railway infrastructure links connecting SPECA countries at intra and inter-regional level as part of a comprehensive network of Euro-Asian Transport links, Trans-Asian Railway network and Dry Ports of international importance. Agree on regional and inter-regional transport interoperability priorities, proposing coordinated corridor management actions to achieve these priorities.
6. Invite SPECA countries to work on (i) further harmonization, as appropriate, of rail transport infrastructure standards for cross-border transport, (ii) expand the railway transport infrastructure, (iii) improved transport infrastructure resilience, (iv) elimination of major barriers, (v) promotion of sustainable and efficient operations for seamless intermodal transport (vi) digitalization of transport documents in use on the main Euro-Asian inland transport routes and (vii) moving away, wherever applicable, from unimodal to multimodal transport operations and documents aimed at further streamlining and facilitating existing administrative barriers.

7. Strengthen the cooperation of the SPECA countries in the World Trade Organization, to make trade an engine for sustainable development, notably through sustainable transport, trade, and transit. Regional cooperation of the countries in the WTO process should be given a priority.
8. Collaborate in the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), among the countries and with international partners, such as UNECE and ESCAP, and invite SPECA countries that have not yet done so to complete accession to the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific as soon as possible.
9. Step up the implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy and Roadmap, notably to harmonize border-crossing procedures and information sharing on these procedures among the countries; set up and develop cooperation among National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs); establish trade facilitation enquiry points (TFA Art.1, para.3), using the UNECE Guide on Trade Facilitation Enquiry Points developed for the SPECA countries; and use the results of the United Nations Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade Survey 2021 to measure progress in trade facilitation and paperless trade.
10. Building on the support of UNECE and ESCAP to strengthening the institutional foundations of digital connectivity and transformation in the SPECA countries, work on the implementation of UNECE and ESCAP legal norms, standards, best practice recommendations, and other tools, for the digitalization of information exchange in international supply chains and multimodal transport chains. Take note of the offer of the Republic of Kazakhstan to create a SPECA Digital Solutions Centre for Sustainable Development (DSC SD) as an implementing tool to advance the digital transformation in the SPECA region. The Republic of Kazakhstan will present a concept note in this regard and present this proposal at the Digital Almaty Forum in February 2022.
11. Analyze the non-tariff measures introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic and develop policy responses to avoid their transformation into non-tariff barriers to trade and build back better the economy after the pandemic.
12. Reinforce work on the digitalization of trade and multimodal transport information exchange to achieve interoperability and strengthen connectivity among the countries of Central Asia and with their neighbours, using such United Nations standards as the UN/CEFACT semantic standards and Multimodal Transport Reference Data Model.
13. Support SPECA countries in their efforts to implement the SPECA Principles of Sustainable Trade, including by harnessing the power of trade for sustainable development and transition to circular economy, notably to scale up analytical and research work on the Principles and their implementation; expand capacity building activities, organize national and regional consultations, develop an implementation Action Plan for each SPECA country and the subregion, increase the outreach to other fora, such as UNEP, WTO, OECD, and others; create a network of SPECA Sustainable Trade experts, using the UNECE regional study "Promoting sustainable trade and circular economy in SPECA countries: State of play and way forward".
14. Consider including trade as an important component in national sustainable development strategies, with a particular focus on: the interlinkages between trade, circular economy, and

sustainable development; the elimination of procedural and regulatory barriers to trade, notably those that negatively affect the environment; trade facilitation to help eliminate wasteful practices in international trade; food security policies to build cross-border trust and cooperation and reduce the impact of climate change; fostering the efficient use of water for irrigation; trade facilitation in agricultural commodities; and increasing production and export of high-value agricultural products and organic products.

15. Invite the SPECA countries to prepare, ahead of the upcoming Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, the Republic of Cyprus, October 2022), a joint statement committing to promoting sustainable tourism and applying the principles of circular economy, including by developing and adopting guidelines on the application of the circular economy principles to sustainable tourism and other sectors in SPECA countries.
16. Consider SPECA as one of the regional platforms for implementation of the new project, funded by the German Government's International Climate Initiative, "Regional mechanisms for the low-carbon, climate-resilient transformation of the energy-water-land nexus in Central Asia", keeping the Working Group on Water, Energy and Environment informed about the development of the project concept and work programme to be carried out during the preparatory phase of the project until February 2022.
17. Build up further cooperation on climate action, including on carbon pricing instruments and needs-based climate finance and consider implementing the recommendations of the ESCAP-UNEP-UNCTAD report on accelerating climate-smart trade and investment for sustainable development, including liberalization of trade in environmental goods and services.
18. Encourage SPECA countries to enhance cooperation on investment, including knowledge and experience sharing on sustainable foreign direct investment policies, promotion, and facilitation.
19. Enhance the transparency and predictability of their domestic investment regimes and streamline administrative procedures. This could include use of the UNECE People-first PPP Evaluation Methodology for the SDGs to self-assess national infrastructure projects and development of effective policies on innovation-enhancing public procurement, with support from the UNECE secretariat upon request and subject to availability of extrabudgetary resources. Such actions will help send a positive signal to investors.
20. Invite the SPECA countries to consider designing and implementing tailored general and sector specific indicators, using ESCAP indicator templates, to evaluate the sustainable development contribution of foreign direct investment.
21. Invite the SPECA countries to exchange good practices on effective support mechanisms to innovative enterprises, such as business incubation and acceleration programmes and tools to support innovative enterprises with high growth potential, including under the Action Plan of the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development.
22. Encourage the SPECA countries to implement a programme to support innovative start-ups from the subregion, in line with the proposed pilot activity under the Action Plan of the SPECA

Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development. This would include the allocation of sufficient human and financial resources, and additional efforts to attract support from international donors.

23. Finalize consultations on potential instruments to fund sustainable development, based on international best practices and implementation capacities of the SPECA countries. Consider establishing a multilateral framework – SPECA Fund - to facilitate investment for sustainable development of the SPECA countries. Research financing or unconditional funding mechanisms to the benefit of regional projects with high local impact using, for example, the possible SPECA fund, would help to leverage additional funds from the international development partners.
 24. Invite representatives of SPECA countries to participate in the 2022 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in the UNECE Region (RFSD) to be held 4-5 April 2022 and share experience on the progress and challenges in achieving SDG 5, and the 2022 Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) entitled “Building back Better from COVID-19 while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific” to be held 28-31 March 2022. Within this context, the 2022 APFSD will provide space for an in-depth review of relevant SDGs.
 25. Organize capacity building workshops for the SPECA countries on economic empowerment of women and women’s entrepreneurship development.
 26. Take note of the outcomes of the International Forum on Innovating and Modernizing Energy and Water in Central Asia that took place in Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan on 1-3 November 2021, the numerous practical ideas for cooperation, in transport, trade, connectivity, innovation, energy and water, including a potential pipeline of projects for a SPECA Fund, and prioritize regional cooperation and in-country initiatives that support the accelerated, just and green energy transition in the SPECA countries.
 27. Move the goal of common rational use of resources higher up the regional agenda, especially regarding the commonality of interests on energy and water in Central Asia, so that innovative financing tools and green bonds reach Central Asia, covering all clean energy technologies within a carbon neutral framework.
 28. Share country specific experiences and challenges more regularly, including with other regions in the world, so that Central Asian countries can benefit and leapfrog in education and capacity-building. United Nations platforms can pave the way, facilitating a much-needed dialogue between governments, the private sector, regional and international experts.
 29. Ensure that the SPECA Secretariat and SPECA Fund, which are expected to be established after the 2021 SPECA events, support the implementation of the above recommendations, in collaboration with the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats, the Governments of the SPECA countries, and willing development partners. This work will contribute to the smooth implementation of the Programme, supporting a systematic approach, using United Nations legal norms, standards, and recommendations, as a common background.
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