

Statement
by Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan
Mr. Rashid MEREDOV at the ministerial meeting
of the countries participating
in the UN Special Program for the Economies
of Central Asia (UNSPECA)
(Geneva, 17 April, 2023)

Dear Mr. Chair,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me express my gratitude to the Republic of Azerbaijan, chairing the UN Special Program for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) in 2023, for the initiative to organize today's ministerial meeting.

We note with satisfaction the timely proposal to discuss the most important issues that will determine the vector of our joint steps to improve SPECA.

Dear colleagues,

For the past 25 years, the Special Program for the Economies of Central Asia has been a unique platform for the successful implementation of the economic policies of the countries of the region. Within the framework of the Program, we consider significant issues, from transport and connectivity to gender and statistical analysis.

The “Tashkent Declaration” has provided the legal basis for multilateral cooperation between the SPECA member parties in priority areas of interaction from the regional and national points of view. In this context, the UN Economic Commission for Europe, along with the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Ocean, we consider as full-fledged participants in all processes related to the functioning of the Program.

In this regard, we welcomed the initiative of the UN regional commissions to evaluate the activities of SPECA for its subsequent improvement.

Turkmenistan proceeds from the fact that improvement implies the expansion of program activities, increasing the efficiency of the work of its thematic working groups and the program management system as a whole. At the same time, all activities should be carried out in a coordinated, consistent and timely manner, without duplication of activities and with maximum impact for all parties.

In our opinion, the quintessence of all consolidated steps in this direction should be the development of a clear supporting mechanism for project and program activities under the auspices of the UN.

We are grateful to all our partners, participants of the special program, as well as donors for their contribution and proposals during the last five years of considering the issue of improving SPECA. At each stage of the discussions within the framework of the Sessions of the SPECA Governing Council and expert meetings, Turkmenistan contributed to this dialogue.

In November 2019, in the year of the Chairmanship of Turkmenistan in SPECA, on the margins of the “SPECA Days in Ashgabat”, for the first time at a high level, our countries considered the establishment of the SPECA Trust Fund, as well as the Program Secretariat.

Realizing that the issues are interconnected, our country has put forward its vision on each aspect related to the improvement of the Special Program and its acceptable form as following.

First, we sympathize with the proposals reflected in the reviews of UNECE and ESCAP experts, where countries are invited to take the lead in managing SPECA activities.

At the same time, the Turkmen side has repeatedly noted that it considers SPECA as a unique platform under the auspices of the UN on a regional scale, which allows discussing with the countries of the region the vector of its further economic development.

We are convinced that it will continue to function actively with the participation of countries and the direct support of UNECE and ESCAP.

In principle, we are in favor of maintaining the SPECA program under the auspices of the UN, but with significant involvement of member countries in its management.

Second, we support a holistic approach to the improvement of SPECA, rather than its reconstruction. Attempts to establish a separate structure for economic cooperation for the Central Asian region - like the Secretariat of the Trust Fund *without the involvement of the UN* in its work, may give the impression of duplicating the activities of already existing regional structures and programs (*primarily the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and to a lesser extent degree from the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA)*).

Third, we see that a consensus on this issue of hosting the Secretariat has not yet been reached, due to the objective and justified desires of several countries to host the Secretariat.

As an alternative, we believe it is possible to create an *ad hoc* SPECA Secretariat in UNECE or ESCAP, by expanding the staffing of the Commissions for 1-2 staff members each. The presence of regional advisers in the Commissions can serve as a staffing basis. We are aware that this issue entails a lot of work in New York, as it has a direct impact on the UN budget.

In case of approval, we propose through our delegations at the UN Headquarters, to actively work and pass it through the 5th Committee.

Fourth, considering the current realities and based on the results of past meetings, we believe that it is advisable to maintain a single SPECA financing mechanism, supporting its activities by the Fund, and not to establish separate institutions such as the SPECA Trust Fund and the SPECA Secretariat.

Speaking about the issue of financing the activities of the Fund, in the event of its establishment, we note the expediency of applying the principle of equal contribution both to the initial advance payment and subsequent annual contributions.

In this regard, Turkmenistan proposed to consider the issue of establishing a Fund likewise to the UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF). This approach will help support the program life of SPECA not only for the member countries, but also for other interested donors, to attract additional resources, and to ensure the transparency of their development. As you know, this proposal is reflected in the decisions of the 16th session of the SPECA Governing Council (*Tashkent, November 19, 2021*)

Dear participants,

Constant dialogue and screening of plans and projects of the program will significantly increase its activity. For these purposes, we consider it expedient to hold regular meetings of the Permanent Representatives of the SPECA countries under the coordination of the current Chairman of the Special Program in Geneva.

At the same time, we support the idea of working out a special UN resolution on the margins of the 77th or next 78th session of the UN General Assembly to mark the 25th anniversary of the Special Programme.

We are ready to make every effort in the process of preparing and discussing the text in New York.

In general, Turkmenistan stands for a balanced approach in making decisions regarding the future of SPECA, since this body contributes to strengthening the economic potential of our Sub-region within the framework of the UNECE and ESCAP.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that Turkmenistan is ready for active, constructive and active participation in the work of the Special Program for the Economies of Central Asia.

Thank you for attention.