



2023 SPECA ECONOMIC FORUM

Transforming the SPECA Region into a Connectivity Hub with Global Outreach

21-22 NOVEMBER 2023 | BAKU | AZERBAIJAN

Programme

Venue: t.b.c

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 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (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 participating States. SPECA provides a regional collaboration platform for the implementation of those Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that can be achieved better through regional cooperation. In 2023, Azerbaijan is chairing the Programme and hosts the SPECA Days in Baku from 20 to 24 November 2023.

This Forum builds on the active position of Azerbaijan and the other SPECA participating countries to make SPECA a service-oriented, flexible, and strategic platform for policy coordination and cooperation to foster dialogue, consolidation of positions, solving common problems, elaboration of strategies and work plans for their implementation. This Forum reflects the overall theme of the Azerbaijani Chairmanship of SPECA in 2023 “Transforming the SPECA region into a connectivity hub with global outreach”. It also builds on the achievements during the last years in positioning the SPECA region as connectivity hub at the geographic heart of the Eurasian landmass: namely, the results of the 2019 SPECA Economic Forum “*Connectivity: Sustainable Transport and Trade Facilitation in the SPECA Subregion*”, which issued the Ashgabat Initiative¹ on enhancing connectivity using the UN norms, standards, and tools, as well as the 2021 Forum, which prepared the “Tashkent Statement on Sustainable

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

Transport, Trade and Connectivity in the SPECA Region for a Greener, Circular and Inclusive Post-Pandemic Recovery”².

The 2023 SPECA Economic Forum focuses on the increased significance of connectivity, in the face of new challenges, in the Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor (Middle Corridor) between Europe and China. It highlights the potential contribution of the digital transformation of data and document exchange along this trade and transport route to making the economies of the region greener, circular, and inclusive. The choice of topic reflects priority issues for the region today: the crises of the 21st century caused serious disruptions of supply chains, adding cost to logistics operations in a region already burdened with the problems of being land locked. The business community in landlocked developing countries (LLDC) pays more than double what coastal countries do to export their goods, while these and high trade costs erode the competitiveness of the LLDCs resulting in an enormous negative impact on their overall sustainable development. The sessions on digital transformation of supply chain information flows along the Middle Corridor and transport connectivity for more efficient Euro-Asian transport links focus on the digitalization of multimodal data and document exchange along the Middle Corridor to support exchange of electronic freight transport data from economic operators in line with relevant United Nations legal instruments and standards, including the UN/CEFACT package of standards for multimodal data exchange. The objective is to make data interoperable between sectors in the supply chain and the relevant modes of transport along the Middle Corridor, with a view to increasing the efficiency of data exchange and the movement of goods across borders.

The regional energy system in Central Asia contains huge untapped potential and, together with partners in the region, SPECA participating States are working to diversity energy transit routes and sources to global markets. In the meantime, participating States are also developing their infrastructure for integration of large-scale energy generation capacity and enhancing regional energy connectivity and energy trade through cooperation to improve the resiliency of the energy system and the energy security in Central Asia. An integrated and interconnected energy system, which encompasses the electricity and gas grid and enables the transport and trade of low-carbon and green hydrogen, can help create a more reliable, affordable, and sustainable energy supply. It will allow for deep decarbonization as well as increased and more effective integration of scaled renewable energy capacity into the energy system. This all is expected to positively contribute to the sustainable development of the economy, generate new jobs and improve gender equality.

This Forum is planned as an expert-level meeting providing opportunities to inform and exchange views through panel discussions, formulating new ideas and initiatives on issues related to trade, transport, digitalization, and energy in the SPECA region. As a result of the Forum, participants will help prepare a set of conclusions and expert level recommendations on how to transform the SPECA region into a well-connected and sustainable hub for trade and transport with global outreach, while achieving relevant SDGs. The final session of the Forum will feature academic and research institutions for a discussion on strategic foresight perspective for SPECA, with a long-term for harnessing international cooperation to consolidate economic cooperation and integration for the next 25 years.

All participants need to register online by completing the [registration form](#).

² https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/TASHKENT%20STATEMENT_ENG_0.pdf and in Russian: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/TASHKENT%20STATEMENT_RUS.pdf

Day one, 21 November 2023

9:00 – 10:00

REGISTRATION OF PARTICIPANTS

Co-chairpersons of the 2023 SPECA Economic Forum:

H.E. Mr. Samad Bashirli, Deputy Minister of Economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and

Mr. Dmitry Maryasin, Deputy Executive Secretary, UNECE

10:00 – 11:30

OPENING SESSION

Welcome statements:

H.E. Mr. Mikayil Jabbarov, Minister of Economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan

Ms. Tatiana Molcean, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNECE Executive Secretary

Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, UN Under-Secretary-General and ESCAP Executive Secretary

Statements by Heads of Delegation of the SPECA participating States:
Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

Statements by other high-level representatives and heads of delegation

11:30 - 12:00

COFFEE BREAK

12:00 - 13:00

SESSION I: DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF DATA AND DOCUMENT EXCHANGE IN SUPPLY CHAINS USING UN STANDARDS

Moderator: Ms. Vladanka Andreeva, UN Resident Coordinator in Azerbaijan

Digital transformation of information flows along supply chains supporting trade in the SPECA region: Priorities of Azerbaijan

Deputy Minister of Digital Development and Transport of Azerbaijan

Presentation of the “Digital Silk Way” project by the Azerbaijani side (5 min)

Enhancing connectivity and sustainable development through trade facilitation and electronic business in the SPECA region

H.E. Mr. Ahliddin Nuriddinzoda, Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Trade of the Republic of Tajikistan, Chairperson, SPECA Working Group on Trade

Digital transformation of information flows along supply chains: best practice experience case from Europe

Ms. Sue Probert, Chairperson, UN/CEFACT

Mr. Gaidar Abdikerimov, Secretary General, International Association «Trans-Caspian International Transport Route»

13:00 – 15:00	LUNCH BREAK
15:00 – 15:45	<p>SESSION I (continued): DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF DATA AND DOCUMENT EXCHANGE IN SUPPLY CHAINS USING UN STANDARDS</p> <p>Moderator: Ms. Vladanka Andreeva, UN Resident Coordinator in Azerbaijan</p> <p><i>Pilot implementation of global standards to digitalize information flows along the TRACECA routes</i></p> <p>Mr. Asset Assavbayev, Secretary General, PS IGC TRACECA</p> <p><i>Digital transformation of information flows along supply chains: International partnerships to support SPECA</i></p> <p>Mr. Mario Apostolov, Regional Adviser, UNECE ECT Division</p> <p>Representative of ESCAP</p> <p><i>Interventions from other organizations: The way forward for SPECA (tbc)</i></p> <p>High-level experts from international organizations (UNCTAD, FIATA, ITC, ADB) (tbc)</p> <p>Objective: Reinforce the commitment of the SPECA participating States to achieve functional cooperation in regional trade and implement the UNECE and UN/CEFACT electronic business semantic standards and reference data models. Obtain commitment of the countries and development partners to support these initiatives, as well as the SPECA Principles of Sustainable Trade.</p>
15:45 – 16:00	COFFEE BREAK
16:00 – 17:45	<p>SESSION II: TRANSPORT CONNECTIVITY FOR MORE EFFICIENT EURO-ASIAN TRANSPORT LINKS</p> <p>Moderator: Azerbaijan Ministry of Digital Development and Transport (tbc)</p> <p>Keynote Speaker: Mr. Sapar Bektasov, Director of Department for Development of Transit and Transport Logistics, Ministry of Industry and Infrastructural Development, Kazakhstan (tbc)</p> <p><i>Digitalization of transport services in the SPECA region</i></p> <p>ESCAP representative or country represented by ESCAP</p> <p>Panel: How to embrace full benefits of digitalization of transport services - eTIR International System</p> <p>Moderator: UNECE (60 min)</p> <p>High-level speakers from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan (National Custom Service)</p> <p>Mr. Vadim Zakharenko, General Delegate to the Permanent Delegation to Eurasia, IRU (tbc)</p>

Improving transport infrastructure for the purpose of enhanced transport connectivity and sustainability in the SPECA region

Senior-level representative of the Coordinating Council of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Transit Freight (<https://www.transit.az/>)

Discussion

Objectives: Streamline regional cooperation on digitalization of transport operations, seamless international transit and good connectivity to attract international flows along the inland Euro-Asian Transport corridors and boost national economies. Agree to identify and deploy measures to reduce physical and non-physical barriers to improve competitiveness of inland transport operations, thus support the efforts for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Promote regional cooperation and coordination in inland transport infrastructure development for an efficient transport system to address challenges faced by the SPECA landlocked countries

17:45 - 18:00

Keynote presentation: Gender equality as a critical enabler of transformation and enhanced connectivity

Ms. Dania Espaeva, Chair of the Central Asia Women Leaders Caucus

Day two, 22 November 2023

10:00 – 11:30

SESSION III: GREEN ENERGY CONNECTIVITY IN THE SPECA REGION FOR RESILIENT AND CARBON NEUTRAL ENERGY SYSTEMS

Moderator: (tbc)

Session objective: discuss how energy connectivity in the SPECA region enhances energy security and helps countries build resilient and carbon neutral energy systems

Context: Enhancing regional energy connectivity and energy trade through cooperation is a critical factor to enhance the resiliency of the energy system and the energy security in Central Asia. An integrated and interconnected energy system, that encompasses electricity and gas grid, and is also compatible for transport and trade of low-carbon and green hydrogen, can help create a more reliable, affordable and sustainable energy supply and allow deep decarbonization as well as more effective integration of scaled renewable energy capacity into the energy system.

Setting the scene:

- Building resilient and carbon neutral energy systems, **Ms. Iva Brkic**, UNECE
- Sustainable connectivity and the Green Power Corridor Framework, **Ms. Anna Lobanova**, ESCAP

Panel discussion:

Moderator: (tbc)

	<p>Mr. Sergey Katyshev, Independent Consultant, ex-Head of Projects Management Department, Kazakhstan Electricity Grid Operation Company (“KEGOC”), Kazakhstan</p> <p>Mr. Furugzod Usmonov, Vice-Chair, Group of Expert on Cleaner Electricity Systems, Tajikistan</p> <p>Mr. Tofiq Hasanzada, Vice-Chair, Committee on Sustainable Energy, Azerbaijan ADB CAREC (tbc)</p> <p>Economic Cooperation Organization (tbc)</p>
11:30 – 11:45	COFFEE BREAK
11:45 – 13:30	<p>SESSION IV: SPECA AT 25 AND VISION FOR THE 25 YEARS TO COME</p> <p>This session will represent an opportunity to discuss the strategic foresight perspective for SPECA, with a long-term horizon for the next 25 years. This will be a panel discussion with focus on shaping the future of the SPECA region, long-term environmental challenges, the water, food and energy nexus, and the future of economy in the SPECA region in 2050.</p> <p>Moderator: (tbc)</p> <p>Panel of leading academics and practitioners with presentations and discussion on environmental perspectives:</p> <p>Prof. Adalat Muradov, Rector of Azerbaijan State University of Economics Prof. Simon Evenet, University of St. Gallen Ms. Zulfiya Suleymenova, Adviser to the President of Kazakhstan on Environmental Issues Ms. Dinara Ziganshina, Director, Scientific Information Centre of Interstate Commission for Water Coordination in Central Asia Mr. Martin Smutný, Managing partner, INTEGRA Consulting Ltd Mr. Johannes Linn, Brookings Institution, on SPECA and possible cooperation with other institutions</p>
13:30 – 14:00	<p>CLOSING STATEMENTS AND RESULTS OF THE 2023 SPECA ECONOMIC FORUM</p> <p><i>Closing statements and results of the Forum</i></p> <p>Mr. Dmitry Mariyasin, Deputy Executive Secretary, UNECE</p> <p>H.E. Mr. Samad Bashirli, Deputy Minister of Economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan</p>
14:00 – 15:30	LUNCH

Further Information:

www.unece.org

Contacts:

Mr. Mario Apostolov

UNECE Deputy Coordinator for SPECA
Regional Advisor
Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, UNECE
Tel.: +41 22 917 11 34
E-mail: mario.apostolov@un.org

Ms. Mijidgombo Oyunjargal

Senior Research Assistant
Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, UNECE
Tel.: +41 22 917 41 47
E-mail: mijidgombo.oyunjargal@un.org

Ms. Mulayim Akhundova

Head of Division for Cooperation with International Economic Organizations
Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan
Tel.: +994 50 520 55 22
E-mail: mulayim.akhundova@economy.gov.az

Ms. Narmin Huseynova

Second Secretary
Permanent Mission of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the UN Office
and other international organizations in Geneva
Tel.: +41 78 225 49 51
E-mail: narmin_huseynova@mfa.gov.az