



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

**Eighteenth session of the SPECA Working Group on Trade**

SPECA/PWG-Trade/2023/EN/2

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

In line with the overall objectives of SPECA to support its participating States 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 States. To achieve this through subregional cooperation, the Working Group shall: (i) Provide 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) Assist in improving the awareness of SPECA States on the trade-related SDGs; help provide information and share best practice experiences, taking into account interlinkages between the SDGs; (iii) Promote policy dialogue to support: trade policy cooperation among the SPECA States and their trade negotiators; trade facilitation; aligning positions on sustainable trade, dealing with non-tariff measures, and investment policies; and (iv) Provide 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 five 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 participating States	Major results
18 <sup>th</sup> session of the SPECA Working Group on Trade	20 November 2023	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan,	The session is scheduled to advance progress on all topics in the programme of the Group: regional cooperation in the

	Baku, Azerbaijan	Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	WTO process; implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy, the SPECA Principles of Sustainable Trade, non-tariff barriers, and standardized digitalization of information flows along SPECA multimodal trade corridors (new topic).
Thirteenth UNECE International (Odessa) Seminar on Trade and Transport Facilitation: <i>EU Electronic Freight Transport Information Regulation and UN/CEFACT Semantic Standards and Multimodal Transport Reference Data Model<sup>1</sup></i>	22 December 2022, online	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan	The seminar provided core information to stakeholders in Ukraine and neighbouring countries on the EU eFTI regulation <sup>2</sup> and the UN/CEFACT semantic standards and Multimodal Transport Reference Data Model, which serve as foundation for multimodal interoperability in the implementation of the eFTI Regulation. Non-EU eFTI platforms—like the port community system in Odessa—can be certified for work with eFTI information exchange. This was the main reason for the request to hold this additional Odessa Seminar.
Capacity-building on the nexus between Sustainable Trade, Water Management, Food Security, Trade Facilitation, and Circular Economy <sup>3</sup>	21 November 2022 Astana, Kazakhstan	Kazakhstan	First national seminar on the implementation of the SPECA Principles of Sustainable Trade. A scoping study on the implementation of the principles and a Business Process Analysis on trade in environmentally friendly agricultural products in the SPECA region presented. The Government of Kazakhstan had already taken pioneering steps to include these Principles in its sustainable development strategies, and the meeting further supported the national endeavors. The overall aim is to strengthen knowledge and capacities of national experts in sustainable trade and circular economy and create a link to national sustainable development plans.
Brainstorming session with Kazakhstani agencies on who is doing what on digitalization of data and document exchange for trade and transport	22 November 2022 Astana, Kazakhstan	Kazakhstan	The UNECE Regional Adviser and the QazTrade organization of Kazakhstan co-organized a brainstorming session to identify which agency is doing what in Kazakhstan for the digitalization of supply chain information exchange and on using United Nations standards.
SPECA Ministerial Meeting <sup>4</sup>	17 April 2023 Geneva	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan,	The Ministerial Meeting issued Joint <a href="#">Ministerial Statement issued at a meeting</a> , which requested UNECE to “develop a roadmap for digitalization

		Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	of multimodal data and document exchange along the trans-Caspian transport corridor using relevant United Nations standards”. This would include a regional pilot project for SPECA participating States.
Fourteenth UNECE International (Odessa) Seminar on Trade and Transport Facilitation <sup>5</sup> : <i>Trade Facilitation and Digital Transformation of Multimodal Information Exchange in Eastern Europe and SPECA, using United Nations Standards</i>	22-23 May 2023 Baku, Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	Presentations made by the Chair of UN/CEFACT, the Regional Adviser, eFTI, DTLF and other experts resulted in preparing a methodology for digitalization of data and document exchange in the trans-Caspian corridor and a draft roadmap for digitalization of multimodal data and document exchange in the region. Apart from signing the memorandum of understanding on digitalizing the railway consignment note, cooperation started on integrating port community systems in the overall flow of information in the trans-Caspian corridor, involving the port community systems of Odessa and Baku and the International Port Community System Association (IPCSA). This led to discussing collaboration with TRACECA, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), EU4Digital and others on support for countries and pilot projects.
Validation seminar for the National Trade Facilitation Roadmap of Uzbekistan	16 October 2023 Tashkent, Uzbekistan	Uzbekistan	Validation seminar for the draft trade facilitation roadmap of Uzbekistan, developed by UNECE and consultants.
Readiness assessment for cross-border paperless trade study	January 2022 - January 2023	Tajikistan	Tajikistan acceded to the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific on 8 December 2022, indicating the commitment of the country to accelerate development on paperless and cross-border paperless trade. To support the country in implementing the Framework Agreement, this report provides an assessment of the readiness of Tajikistan for cross-border paperless trade and proposes action plans which serve as a basis for developing more detailed activities at the national level.

Readiness assessment for cross-border paperless trade study	January - December 2022	Turkmenistan	This report provides an assessment of the readiness of Turkmenistan for cross-border paperless trade, in other words, the current capabilities and future plans of Turkmenistan for usage of electronic data and/or documents in international trade transactions. The findings from the technical and legal readiness assessments for cross-border paperless trade will follow. Recommendations on the technical and legal aspects of cross-border paperless trade are then provided, followed by an initial action plan for Turkmenistan to move forward in this area.
Policy recommendations on Kazakhstan's export	March 2022 - March 2023	Kazakhstan	This report analyzes the trade process and procedures for exporting iron, steel, and metal products from Kazakhstan to European countries, specifically Latvia and France. It provides policy recommendations to enhance trade facilitation and emphasizes the importance of Kazakhstan's accession to the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific to enhance trade facilitation.
Second sessions of the Standing Committee and Paperless Trade Council of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (CPTA)	19-23 June 2023	Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan	Second sessions of the Standing Committee and Paperless Trade Council were held in Bangkok and online from 19 to 23 June 2023. Representatives from Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, together with other Parties to CPTA, attended the meeting and firmed up the plan to implement CPTA.
Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation in United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia 2023	Early November 2023 (in time for the SPECA meeting)	All SPECA States	Report based on the UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation.
Upgrading of ESCAP's Trade Intelligence and Negotiation Advisory (TINA, <a href="https://tina.trade">https://tina.trade</a> )	August 2023	All SPECA States	Following feedback from trade negotiators from CAREC members, TINA, with funding from ADB, TINA was upgraded to allow for multiple negotiation partners to facilitate trade agreement research as country blocks.

Contributed to the Workshop on Strengthening Knowledge and Capacities for the Design and Implementation of FTAs Involving CAREC Countries	25-28 January 2023, Georgia	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan	Trade negotiators from CAREC members were trained on tariff negotiations and usage of ESCAP's Trade Intelligence and Negotiation Advisory (TINA, <a href="https://tina.trade">https://tina.trade</a> )
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<sup>1</sup> <https://unece.org/info/Trade/events/374662>

<sup>2</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/electronic-freight-transport-information.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://unece.org/info/Trade/events/373002>

<sup>4</sup> Meeting of Ministers of SPECA Participating States. *Joint Ministerial Statement*, online:

[https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/SPECA%20Ministerial%20Meeting%2017.04.23%20Joint%20Ministerial%20Statement%20.pdf)

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<sup>5</sup> <https://unece.org/info/Trade/events/377875>