



## SPECIAL PROGRAMME FOR THE ECONOMIES OF CENTRAL ASIA (SPECA)

SPECA/WG-Trade/2023/EN/3

### **Recommendations of the Eighteenth Session of the SPECA Working Group on Trade**

Baku, 20 November 2023

The eighteenth session of the SPECA Working Group (WG) on Trade reviewed the latest achievements in the implementation of the strategic documents of the Group in the region. The participants discussed the following topics: report on the activities in 2022-2023; strengthening the cooperation of the SPECA participating States in the World Trade Organization (WTO); implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy and Principles of Sustainable Trade; regulatory and procedural barriers to trade; and the use of the UN/CEFACT standards for the digitalization of trade and multimodal transport data and document exchange; and projects for trade and sustainable development in the SPECA subregion.

The participants recommend to the Governments of SPECA States to:

1. Further strengthen collaboration among the SPECA countries on trade policy issues, notably promote the collaboration of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in their bid to accede to the WTO, and further commit all SPECA countries both current members of WTO and the acceding countries, to consult each other and collaborate in the WTO negotiations. If possible, create a platform for regional cooperation for information exchange among all the SPECA participating States on WTO matters on both technical and policymakers' levels.
2. UNECE and ESCAP to develop a study on the impact of WTO accession on SPECA countries that are already members of WTO (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan).
3. Continue the implementation of the measures in the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy, in cooperation among the SPECA States, and make suggestions for updating the Roadmap for the implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy<sup>1</sup> for one of the next sessions of the SPECA Working Group on Trade.
4. Strengthen support for regional supply chains using various UN instruments: legal norms, standards, and best practice recommendations; creating a joint information portal.
5. Support work on the following deliverables:
  - the regular UN survey on digital and sustainable trade facilitation,

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<sup>1</sup>[https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/SPECA/documents/gc/session14/Roadmap\\_for\\_Implementation\\_of\\_the\\_SPECA\\_TF\\_Strategy\\_English.pdf](https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/SPECA/documents/gc/session14/Roadmap_for_Implementation_of_the_SPECA_TF_Strategy_English.pdf)

- assessments of the readiness of SPECA States to implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, and post-accession alignment, notably UNECE to help prepare an assessment for Turkmenistan, as requested,
  - assessment of the readiness of the countries to implement the UN Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific,
  - finalization of the trade facilitation roadmap of Uzbekistan,
  - finalization and publication of the study on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade in Uzbekistan; carry out such a study in Turkmenistan; and begin a study in Azerbaijan,
6. Accelerate the implementation of paperless trade and cross-border paperless trade measures, especially the implementation of Single Window systems. Accelerate the implementation of trade facilitation for SMEs and women in trade facilitation procedures: increase access to Single Window and representation of SMEs and women traders in national trade facilitation committees (NTFCs). Increase cooperation and knowledge-sharing with other governments and international organizations. UNECE tools and detailed guidelines on trade facilitation can support governments in the implementation of these measures.
  7. Continue work on the inclusion of the SPECA Principles of Sustainable Trade and trade facilitation measures in work programmes, cooperation plans, best-practice exchanges, and the use of standards and tools for sustainable trade to achieve SDGs. Using the positive initial results of the seminar on these issues in Astana on 21 November 2022, explore possibilities to organize such seminars in at least three other countries in the SPECA region. Carry out further fundraising from independent sources for projects in support of the implementation of the Principles in the subregion.
  8. Step up the work on digitalization of trade and multimodal transport data and document exchange, notably in line with the draft SPECA Roadmap for digitalization of data and document exchange along the Trans-Caspian Corridor using the standards and Multimodal Transport Reference Data Model of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT).<sup>2</sup> Coordinate with the SPECA countries and ESCAP the organization of regional events, notably the 15<sup>th</sup> regional seminar on trade facilitation and data sharing, possibly in Aktau, Kazakhstan, in May 2024 (tbc).
  9. Provide support to pilot implementation projects in the region, in compliance with the Joint SPECA Ministerial Statement from 17 April 2023, notably the project led by TRACECA on the digitalization of the railway consignment note along the trans-Caspian corridor.
  10. Reinforce the work on data mapping between various documents, modes of transport, and sectors in the supply chains in compliance with the UN/CEFACT semantic standards and reference data models.

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://unece.org/trade/uncefact/mainstandards> and <https://unttc.org/stream/electronic-trade-and-transport-documents-and-data>

11. Involve more international organizations and development partners in work on trade facilitation and standardized digitalization of interoperable transport and supply chain information flows, e.g., the Permanent Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Commission of the Transport Corridor Europe - Caucasus – Central Asia (PS IGC TRACECA), the Organization for Co-operation between Railways (OSJD), the International Rail Transport Committee (CIT), the International Organization for International Carriage by Rail (OTIF), the International Trade Centre (ITC), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation programme, the International Road Transport Union (IRU), the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the bilateral cooperation agencies (USAID, GIZ) and others.
12. More actively use SPECA as a collaborative platform of the countries to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, notably to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to trade.
13. Consider holding the 2024 session of the WG on Trade in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, as part of the 11<sup>th</sup> Asia-Pacific Trade Facilitation Forum scheduled to be held from 1 to 5 April 2024. As per the request of Uzbekistan, organize a training on the use of UN standards for digitalization of multimodal transport data and document exchange in supply chains in the SPECA countries back-to-back with this event.
14. Each SPECA participating State is invited to nominate permanent participants, coordinators, or focal points in the SPECA WG on Trade.

The participants noted with great satisfaction the proactive role of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which hosted the 18<sup>th</sup> session of the SPECA WG on Trade. The participants expressed their fullhearted support to all aspects of regional cooperation among the SPECA participating States covered by the SPECA WG on Trade: regional collaboration in the WTO process, trade facilitation, sustainable trade, non-tariff barriers, and digitalization of supply chain and multimodal transport data and document exchange.