Report of the Governing Council of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia on its ninth session

Summary

At its ninth session, the Governing Council of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) noted with satisfaction the outcomes of the SPECA Economic Forum entitled “Improving connectivity: a key contribution of SPECA to the success of the Transformation Decade of Afghanistan,” which was held in Ashgabat on 4 December 2014. It also noted that the workplans of the Programme should focus on extending capacity-building and other forms of technical assistance to Afghanistan and other member countries with the objective to strengthen regional trade, transport and telecommunication links and improve border crossing. The Governing Council called upon the donor community to increase funding to such projects in the Programme’s framework. It emphasized that the development of regional infrastructure should be complemented with capacity-building and assistance extended towards the modernization and harmonization of relevant regulatory frameworks for facilitating safe and efficient use of that infrastructure. The Governing Council approved the conclusions of the 2014 SPECA Economic Forum.

The Governing Council noted with appreciation the progress reports on the work carried out by the Programme’s project working groups since its previous session. It expressed satisfaction with the scope of activities and its appreciation to the donors that had supported projects under the working groups.

The Governing Council noted with satisfaction the report on the work of the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office. It encouraged further strengthening the Office’s role in project implementation within the Programme’s framework.

The Governing Council noted with satisfaction the report on cooperation between the Programme and regional organizations and institutions. It also expressed its support to further strengthen coordination and cooperation with partner organizations and donors in strategic areas of regional cooperation.
I. Decisions

Decision 1 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/1)

The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the outcomes of the 2014 SPECA Economic Forum: “Improving connectivity: a key contribution of SPECA to the success of the Transformation Decade of Afghanistan”, held in Ashgabat on 4 December 2014. It also notes that the workplan of the Programme should focus on extending capacity-building and other forms of technical assistance to Afghanistan and other member countries with the aim to strengthen regional trade, transport and telecommunication links and improve border crossings. The Governing Council calls upon the donor community to increase funding to such projects in the Programme’s framework. It emphasizes that the development of regional infrastructure should be complemented with capacity-building and assistance towards the modernization and harmonization of relevant regulatory frameworks for facilitating the safe and efficient use of this infrastructure.
Decision 2 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/2)

The Governing Council approves the conclusions of the follow-up meeting to the 2013 SPECA Economic Forum: “The potential role of SPECA in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Central Asia”, held in Ashgabat on 5 December 2014. As the Programme is based on a politically impartial regional framework under the United Nations umbrella, it could serve as a platform for exchanging best practices and capacity-building, as well as for harmonizing and validating initiatives for meeting data and reporting requirements in order to support the regional dimension of monitoring and accountability for the development agenda beyond 2015. The Programme can play an important role with regard to the monitoring and accountability framework for the sustainable development goals. However, owing to its limited mandate and resources, the Programme alone cannot serve as mechanism for this function.

Decision 3 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/3)

The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the outcomes of the brainstorming session on strengthening the ownership of the Programme, held in Ashgabat on 5 December 2014. It calls upon the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) to translate the ideas and initiatives voiced during this session into concrete proposals and circulate them among the participants.

Decision 4 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/4)

The Governing Council notes with appreciation the progress reports on the work carried out by the Programme’s project working groups since its previous session. It expresses satisfaction with the scope of activities and its appreciation to the donors that have supported projects under the working groups.

Decision 5 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/5)

The Governing Council calls upon ECE and ESCAP to continue their activities relating to assessing the needs of participating countries and elaborating project proposals that support connectivity between Afghanistan and other member countries with a view to including them in the Programme’s workplan for the period 2015-2016 to be adopted by the Governing Council at its forthcoming session.

Decision 6 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/6)

The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the report on the work of the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office. It encourages further strengthening the Office’s role in project implementation within the Programme’s framework.

Decision 7 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/7)

The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the report on cooperation between the Programme and regional organizations and institutions. It supports further strengthening coordination and cooperation with partner organizations and donors in strategic areas of regional cooperation.
Decision 8 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/8)

The Governing Council expresses its sincere gratitude to Afghanistan for its active work as the Chair country of the Programme during 2013 and 2014.

Decision 9 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/9)

The Governing Council decides that the Chair country of the Programme for the period 2015-2016 will be agreed upon by consultations among interested participating countries through diplomatic channels. The Governing Council also decides that the dates and venue of the 2015 SPECA Economic Forum and the tenth session of the Governing Council will be communicated in due course.

Decision 10 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/10)

The Governing Council expresses its sincere gratitude to the Government of Turkmenistan for the excellent organization of the 2014 SPECA Economic Forum and the ninth session of the SPECA Governing Council, and the hospitality extended to the participants of those events.

Decision 11 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/11)

The Governing Council expresses its deep appreciation to the secretariats of ECE and ESCAP and their respective Executive Secretaries for their efforts in organizing these important annual events. It also expresses its special appreciation for their active work aimed at strengthening the Programme and their continued support to Programme implementation.

II. Introduction

1. The ninth session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) was held on 5 December 2014 in Ashgabat.

III. Participants

2. Representatives of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, as well as the Executive Secretary of ECE, the Deputy Executive Secretary of ECE, the Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP, and the Head of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia and the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office participated in the session. Representatives of other United Nations Member States, United Nations agencies, international and regional organizations and members of the academic community also participated as observers.

IV. Opening of the session

3. Mr. Atiqullah Atifmal, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, the Chair country of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia in 2013 and 2014 served as Chair of the session.

4. In his opening statement, the Chair underlined that the Programme, in order to develop its full potential, needed to attract more high-level decision-makers for policy discussions on key issues of regional cooperation. Strategic discussions were indispensable, as they reminded policymakers of the tremendous political, security and economic advantages offered by such cooperation. Discussions at the Economic Forum had helped to generate
political will to strengthen regional cooperation by pointing to its importance not only for economic development, but also for the security and stability of the whole region. The Programme also needed to build awareness of the key role of the technical assistance it had provided in the efficient and professional operation of the rapidly developing regional transport, trade and communications infrastructure. The regional commissions supporting the Programme had offered a wealth of relevant legal instruments, norms, standards and recommendations that could guide the development of unified regional regulatory frameworks. That exposure would help mobilize more resources for technical assistance provided in the framework of the project working groups.

5. The Executive Secretary of ECE, in his opening statement, invited delegates to provide strategic guidance on issues relating to the agenda items of the session, in particular the potential role of the Programme in the overall accountability framework for the sustainable development goals, on strengthening the ownership of the Programme by its member countries and on more active involvement of the Programme in improving connectivity between Afghanistan and other member countries. Clearly formulated needs and more active participation of member countries in donor coordination would help to raise the funds necessary for more active work of the Programme in those areas.

6. The Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP noted that the realization of new sustainable development goals would only succeed if they were supported in a concerted way by all actors — Governments, international organizations, donors, the business sector and civil society. In that regard, the Programme could play a very important role by providing the necessary guidance for strategy, best practices and lessons learned. It could also become a subregional mechanism for accountability in the implementation of sustainable development goals and the development agenda beyond 2015. He also emphasized the need to undertake effective monitoring, evaluation and reporting for better accountability on progress in the implementation of the sustainable development goals. In that respect, it was important to establish measurable goals and targets that could capture the multidimensional nature of sustainable development, and to create a framework for the implementation of those objectives with stable sources of financing.

7. The heads of the delegation of the Programme’s participating countries expressed their support for the Programme and the hope that the decisions to be taken by the Governing Council would provide guidance to further strengthen it.

V. Adoption of the agenda

8. The Governing Council adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Adoption of the agenda.
4. Outcomes of the follow-up meeting to the 2013 SPECA Economic Forum: The potential role of SPECA in the implementation of the sustainable development goals in Central Asia.
5. Outcomes of the brainstorming session on strengthening the ownership of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia.

6. The Programme’s activities since the previous session of the Governing Council.

7. Project proposals supporting connectivity between Afghanistan and Central Asia.


9. Cooperation between the Programme and regional organizations and institutions.

10. Election of the next Chair country of the Programme, and date and venue of the 2015 SPECA Economic Forum and the tenth session of the Governing Council.

11. Other business.

12. Closing of the session.


9. The Chair invited the Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP to present the summary and conclusions by the Chair of the 2014 SPECA Economic Forum. After an ensuing discussion, the Governing Council adopted decision 1 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/1) under agenda item 3.

VII. Outcomes of the follow-up meeting to the 2013 SPECA Economic Forum: “The potential role of SPECA in the implementation of the sustainable development goals in Central Asia”

10. The Chair invited the Executive Secretary of ECE to report on the main conclusions of the follow-up meeting to the 2013 SPECA Economic Forum. After an ensuing discussion, the Governing Council adopted decision 2 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/2) under agenda item 4.

VIII. Outcomes of the brainstorming session on strengthening the ownership of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia

11. The Chair invited the Deputy Executive Secretary of ECE to deliver a report on the outcomes of the brainstorming session on strengthening the ownership of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia. After the ensuing discussion, the Governing Council adopted decision 3 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/3) under agenda item 5.

12. The delegation of Azerbaijan proposed that the Council consider changing the name of the Programme to more explicitly include Afghanistan and Azerbaijan. It was agreed to discuss that matter at the upcoming session of the Governing Council.
IX. The Programme’s activities since the previous session of the Governing Council

13. The Chair invited the Head of the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office to present progress reports on the work carried out by the Programme’s working groups since the previous session of the Governing Council.\(^1\) After the ensuing discussion, the Governing Council adopted Decision 4 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/4) under agenda item 6.

X. Project proposals supporting connectivity between Afghanistan and Central Asia

14. The Chair invited the Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division of ECE to introduce project proposals supporting connectivity between Afghanistan and other participating countries of the Programme.\(^2\) After the ensuing discussion, the Chair proposed that the Governing Council adopt decision 5 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/5) under item 7 of the agenda.

XI. Report on the work of the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office since the previous session of the Governing Council

15. The Head of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia and the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office presented a report on the work of the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office since the previous session of the Governing Council.\(^3\) After a discussion, the Governing Council adopted decision 6 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/6) under item 8 of the agenda.

XII. Cooperation between the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia and regional organizations and institutions

16. The SPECA Deputy Coordinator at ECE, presented an oral report on cooperation between the Programme and regional organizations and institutions. After the ensuing discussion, the Governing Council adopted decision 7 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/7) under item 9 of the agenda.

XIII. Election of the next Chair country of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, and date and venue of the 2015 SPECA Economic Forum and the tenth session of the Governing Council

17. The Head of the delegation of Kazakhstan, speaking on behalf of the Programme’s participating countries, expressed sincere gratitude to the Government of Afghanistan for the excellent chairmanship of the Programme in 2013 and 2014 and proposed that a decision be adopted in that regard. The Governing Council then adopted decision 8 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/8).

18. With regard to agenda item 10, the Governing Council adopted decision 9 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/9).

\(^{1}\) The progress reports are available from [www.unece.org/index.php?id=37178#/](http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=37178#/).

\(^{2}\) The project proposals are available from [www.unece.org/index.php?id=37178#/](http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=37178#/).

\(^{3}\) The report is available from [www.unescap.org/events/9th-session-speca-governing-council](http://www.unescap.org/events/9th-session-speca-governing-council).
XIV. Other business

19. The Chair thanked the Government of Turkmenistan for the excellent organization of the Programme events and its generous hospitality. He also expressed his gratitude to the two regional commissions, in particular the Executive Secretaries of ECE and ESCAP, for their devoted support to the Chairmanship of Afghanistan and the Programme as a whole. The Governing Council adopted decision 10 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/10) and decision 11 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2014/11) under item 11 of the agenda.

XV. Closing of the session

20. In his closing statement, the Chair of the session thanked the participants for their intensive and productive work. The decisions adopted by the Governing Council would provide guidance to the Programme on its potential role in monitoring and accountability for the development agenda beyond 2015 at the subregional level, as well as on possible measures to strengthen ownership by the Programme’s participating countries. The Governing Council had confirmed the importance of more active involvement of the Programme in improving connectivity between Afghanistan and other participating countries. The Chair thanked again the Government of Turkmenistan for the warm hospitality and excellent support extended to the Programme’s events in Ashgabat.