



REPORT

United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) 22nd Session of the Working Group on Water, Energy and Environment

(9 October 2018, Astana, Kazakhstan)

Organization

1. The 22nd Session of the SPECA Working Group (WG) on Water, Energy and Environment of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) (hereinafter referred to as SPECA WG or WG) was held 9 October 2018 in Astana, Kazakhstan (see Programme in Annex 1).
2. Thirty participants attended the meeting including delegations of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Representatives of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC), GIZ, the Government of Switzerland (Blue Peace), the World Bank Group, the Interstate Commission for Sustainable Development (ICSD) of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea participated in the meeting (see List of participants in Annex 2).
3. Mr. Marat Zheenbekov, Kyrgyzstan, was elected to chairperson the Session.

Meeting elaborations

Background and Expectations

In 2015, the UN member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to address crucial issues facing the global community. It became clear that it was important to define a limited number of achievable SDG targets, which would need cross-border collaboration in the SPECA setting. To this end, at the 10th session of the SPECA Governing Council (Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 11 November 2015) representatives of SPECA participating countries adopted a Declaration reiterating their commitment to the Programme as a platform for promoting cooperation in the SPECA subregion and achieving sustainable development. To reflect these changes and its support to the implementation of the SDGs, the WG agreed at its 21st session (Astana, Kazakhstan, 14 June 2017) that it:

- Would provide a platform for supporting progress towards achieving SDGs with a focus on the SDGs directly related to water, energy and environment (including, but not limited to SDG 6 on Clean Water and Sanitation and SDG 7 on Affordable and Clean Energy);
- Would improve awareness of SPECA countries on the water-, energy- and environment-related SDGs, provide information and share best practice experiences with regard to the implementation of these SDGs, including taking into account interlinkages between the SDGs; and
- Will become a platform for identification and coordination of technical issues within the scope of WG competence. This might further promote strengthening of mutual trust at political level.

To this end, the objective of this Session was to identify the areas for the Group to better address water, energy and environment challenges in the SPECA region, and to develop a vision for its draft ToR.

Agenda item 3: Programme implementation in the area of water-energy-environment in 2017-2018

4. Representatives of UNECE (Batyr Hajiyeu, Viktor Badaker) and ESCAP (Aneta Nikolova, Lana Basneen Zaman) reported on activities and progress made on the projects since June 2017. Presentations were made on ESCAP's technical assistance in integrated implementation of SDGs, VNR preparation and stakeholder engagement support, SINGG support, support of energy data and planning and progress toward achieving SDG 7 in Central Asia, while UNECE presented the outcomes and findings of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in the Syr Darya basin project and energy and water related activities in Central Asia implemented under auspices of SPECA. In addition, Christina Leb, the World Bank, presented the CAEWDP project on enabling environment to promote energy and water security at regional level and in the countries to address energy security; energy-water linkages.

Agenda item 4: Transboundary cooperation in the area of water, energy and environment management in the SPECA region – overview of past and ongoing activities

5. This agenda item focused on activities in the area of water, energy and the environment implemented by key stakeholders in the region. It started with a presentation on *Stocktaking of intersectoral activities in water, energy and environment areas* made by Talaibek Makeev, UNECE. Serik Bekmaganbetov, representatives of IFAS and Batyr Mammedov, Secretariat of ICSD presented the

progress made on the development of the Aral Sea Basin Programme – 4 and the Regional Environment Programme for Sustainable Development in Central Asia respectively. Both documents are important for Central Asian countries to jointly address transboundary water and environmental challenges. In her presentation, Annukka Lipponen, UNECE, *Assessment of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus: the synthesis publication and implementing solutions identified in the Syr Darya River Basin* informed about the publication of a consolidated methodology for nexus assessments (forthcoming in Russian) and called for feedback on solutions recommended by the Syr Darya assessment. In his presentation Iskandar Abdullaev, Executive Director, CAREC, highlighted the importance of regular dialogue and discussion, multi-level engagement, and bottom-up and top-down approaches for effective and productive water cooperation. Andre Wehrli, Regional Water Adviser for Central Asia, Switzerland, informed about the Blue Peace initiative which is aimed at promoting transboundary water cooperation as a tool for peace-building combining policy level with technical work on the ground. Multifaceted activities covering the policy level regional institutional strengthening (IFAS and ICSD) and the grassroots capacity-building and pilot initiatives by GIZ were presented by Alexander Nikolayenko.

Agenda item 5: Emerging challenges and opportunities in the area of water, energy and environment in the SPECA region

6. Objective of this session was to present emerging challenges that may have adverse impacts on water and energy resources and the environment and opportunities these challenges may bring. The Belt and Road Initiative is posed to spur economic development of the region as well as to have significant impact on natural resource endowment of Central Asia. A presentation was made on how implementation of regional MEAs may help countries avoid environmental repercussions of the Initiative. Tulegen Sarsenbekov, independent expert, provided a comprehensive overview of the energy supply system that existed in Central Asia. Noting the new developments, including in energy interconnectivity, notably CASA 1000, he considered it timely for the energy-water situation to be studied and for the SPECA to position itself. It was noted that during the last years countries of the region resumed a dialogue on re-establishing a unified energy system of Central Asia. The IFAS Summit once again reiterated countries' commitment to addressing water and environmental challenges for the wellbeing of people of the region and that the Memorandum of Understanding between UNECE and ICSD is aimed at streamlining activities of both organizations in helping States to achieve environmental SDGs, greening the economies and addressing the climate change challenges. A research paper on *Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus in SPECA countries from the Perspective of Sustainable Trade* presented by Bo Libert, UNECE consultant, revealed that there is potential to reduce water use for agriculture purposes and improve regional energy cooperation if improved and sustainable trade policies were in place in the region. Aneta Nikolova, Environmental Affairs Officer of ESCAP, presented an innovative tool for assessment of the interlinkages between the SDGs using systems thinking approach and focusing on SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation, as well as its application to Asia-Pacific countries.

Agenda item 6: The role of the SPECA –the scope of the Working Group

7. Some participants lamented that awareness of the role, mandate, mission, scope and mode of work of SPECA and its Thematic Working Groups revealed to be very low

among participating countries. It should also be pointed out that there is a lack of continuity between the Sessions of the Group.

8. Proposal was made that the Group should focus on high-level policy and strategic issues related to water and energy (SDG 6 and SDG 7) and their interlinkages taking into account environmental challenges as cross cutting area. Following this a recommendation was made that countries should nominate one focal point for water and one focal point for energy area respectively. However, some country representatives noted the importance of environmental issues for the Group and insisted that there should be a focal point on environment as well.
9. Participants unanimously agreed that the draft ToR of the Group should be channeled to the countries via foreign ministries. The Group requested to explore opportunities to develop a new SPECA Strategy (or a strategic study) on water, energy and environment covering also Afghanistan, mainstreaming SDGs and reflecting new development challenges in the SPECA region, e.g. the “Belt and Road Initiative”.

Recommendations

10. The following areas were considered by the Session and recommended for consideration by the participating countries to be included in the ToR of the Working Group.

In line with the overall objectives of SPECA to facilitate economic cooperation in the SPECA region as well as integration of the SPECA participating countries into the world economy for their attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Working Group shall:

- *Provide a platform for supporting progress on strategic issues related to water, energy and environment, and towards achieving the respective SDGs with a focus on the SDGs (including, but not limited to SDG 6 on Clean Water and Sanitation and SDG 7 on Affordable and Clean Energy);*
- *Aim at improving awareness of SPECA countries on the water-, energy- and environment-related SDGs, provide information and share best practice experiences with regard to the implementation of these SDGs, including taking into account interlinkages between the SDGs. Promote consideration of energy and water cooperation opportunities and intersectoral and transboundary impacts in the SDG implementation and related action plans;*
- *Promote compliance with relevant international legal instruments, norms, guidelines, standards and recommendations in the fields of competence of the Working Group;*
- *Act as a platform for identification, development, support and coordination of technical programmes and projects within the scope of the Working Group competence thereby building capacity, promoting best practices and strengthening mutual trust at political level among the SPECA participating countries.*

11. The Group requested to explore opportunities to develop a new SPECA Strategy (or a strategic study) on water, energy and environment mainstreaming SDGs and reflecting new development challenges in the SPECA region, e.g. the “Belt and Road Initiative”.

12. Participants of the Session considered the results of UNECE pilot project on construction of bio gas unit in Kyrgyzstan. They supported promoting renewable energy (RE) and investment into it, including implementation of RE small-scale infrastructure construction projects in other countries of the SPECA region.

13. Recommendation was made to develop a Work Plan for the Group, while recognizing that any such plans needs to be coupled with exploring potential funding sources.

14. To ensure continuity between the Sessions of the Group as well as to enable the Group to cover the water, energy and environmental challenges in the SPECA region the Group decided to nominate three focal points from each of the countries to represent water, energy and environment areas.

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Programme

Tuesday, 9 October 2018	
09:00–09:15	1. Opening of the session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcome remarks by host representative (Kazakhstan) - Welcome remarks by representative of UNECE - Welcome remarks by representative of ESCAP
09:15–09:30	2. Election of the Chairman and adoption of the agenda <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Election of the Chairman - Adoption of the agenda
09:30–11:00	3. Programme implementation in the area of water-energy-environment in 2017-2018 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in the Syr Darya basin - Annukka Lipponen, UNECE - Presentation on the Central Asia Energy-Water Development Program - Christina Leb, Senior Water Resources Specialist, the World Bank - UNECE activities and projects within the SPECA region – Viktor Badaker and Batyr Hajiyeu, UNECE - Presentations of joint UNECE/ESCAP activities on Energy within SPECA region - Viktor Badaker, UNECE and Lana Basneen Zaman, ESCAP - Brief presentations of ESCAP activities related to water in SPECA countries (SDG 6 integration, VNR support, SINGG support, stakeholder engagement support, etc.) – Aneta Nikolova, ESCAP - Interventions by countries - Interventions by other international organizations and partners
11:00–11:30	Coffee break
11:30–12:30	4. Transboundary cooperation in the area water, energy and environment management in SPECA region – overview of past and ongoing activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stocktaking of intersectoral activities in water, energy and environment areas – Talaibek Makeev, UNECE - Regional Environment Programme for Sustainable Development and the Aral Sea Basin Programme 4 - Batyr Mammedov, ICSD and Serik Bekmaganbetov, Representative of Kazakhstan to the EC IFAS - Assessment of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus: the synthesis publication and implementing solutions identified in the Syr Darya River Basin – Annukka Lipponen, UNECE - Water cooperation in Central Asia: from small basins to regional cooperation - Iskandar Abdullaev, Executive Director, CAREC
12:30–14:00	Lunch
14:00–15:00	Continuation of item 4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regional water activities in Central Asia – Andre Wehrli, Regional Water Adviser for Central Asia, Switzerland - Transboundary Water Management in Central Asia: promoting cooperation and new tools – Alexander Nikolayenko, GIZ - Interventions by countries

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interventions by other international organizations and partners - Discussion
15:00–16:30	5. Emerging challenges and opportunities in the area of water, energy and environment in the SPECA region <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Belt and road initiative and UNECE tools to support the countries to “green” the initiative and the role of SPECA – UNECE - New opportunities in the development of energy cooperation in Central Asia – Tulegen Sarsembekov - Partnership with regional organizations – Outcomes of IFAS summit and a MoU between UNECE and ICSD - Batyr Mamedov, ICSD and Serik Bekmaganbetov, Representative of Kazakhstan to the EC IFAS - How trade policy may contribute to sustainable water and energy management in the SPECA region – Bo Libert, UNECE consultant - Adopting integrated approaches to policy making focusing on SDG 6 implementation, ESCAP and the Central Asia Interstate Commission for Water Cooperation (ICWC) – Aneta Nikolova, ESCAP - Interventions by countries - Interventions by other international organizations and partners - Discussion
16:30–17:00	Coffee break
17:00-17:45	6. The role of the SPECA –the scope of the Working Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>The discussion will aim at defining the role of the Programme to support regional policies in addressing water, energy and environment challenges in the SPECA region and addressing the current challenges. The recommended areas for consideration during the discussion are attached to the agenda. The meeting is also expected to review the current Terms of Reference of the Group in the light of the latest Terms of Reference for SPECA discussed during the last session of the SPECA Governing Council</i>
17:45–17:55	7. Other business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Next session - Other issues
17:55–18:00	8. Conclusions and closing of the meeting
19:00	Dinner



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