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

Ninth session of the SPECA Governing Council
(Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 5 December 2014)

REPORT

I. Introduction

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, Turkmenistan. The 2014 SPECA Economic Forum entitled “Improving connectivity: a key contribution of SPECA to the success of the Transformation Decade of Afghanistan” was held on 4 December 2014 just prior to the session of the Governing Council.

II. Participants

Representatives of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, as well as the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Deputy Executive Secretary of UNECE, Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (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 from other United Nations member States, United Nations agencies, international and regional organizations, as well as the academic community also participated as observers. The List of participants of the ninth session of the SPECA Governing Council and the 2014 SPECA Economic Forum is attached (Annex I).

III. Opening of the session

The ninth session of the Governing Council was chaired by Mr. Atiqullah Atifmal, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Chair country of SPECA in 2014.

In his opening statement, the Chairperson underlined that SPECA, in order to develop its full potential, needs to attract more high-level decision-makers for policy discussions on key issues of regional cooperation. Strategic discussions are indispensable, since they remind policymakers of the tremendous political, security and economic advantages offered by such cooperation. Discussions at the Economic Forum helped a great deal to generate political will to strengthen regional cooperation by pointing to its importance for the economic development and also for the security and stability of the whole region. SPECA needs to make more efforts to advertise the importance of the “software” it offers to
support the efficient and professional operation of the “hardware” represented by the rapidly developing regional transport, trade and communications infrastructure. The United Nations Regional Commissions supporting SPECA offer a wealth of relevant legal instruments, norms, standards and recommendations that can guide the development of unified regional regulatory frameworks. This promotion through SPECA will help mobilize more resources for technical assistance provided in the framework of the Project Working Groups.

The Executive Secretary of the UNECE in his opening statement invited delegates to provide strategic guidance on the issues in the agenda and, in particular, on: the potential role of SPECA in the overall accountability framework for the Sustainable Development Goals; strengthening the ownership of the Programme by its participating countries; and its more active involvement in improving connectivity between Afghanistan and other SPECA countries. Clearly formulated needs and the more active participation of SPECA countries in donor coordination would help in raising the funds necessary for more active work by SPECA.

The Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP noted that the realization of new Sustainable Development Goals will only succeed, if they are supported in a concerted way by all actors – national governments, international organizations, donors, the business sector and civil society. In this regard, SPECA could play a very important role by providing necessary guidance for strategy, best practices and lessons learned. It could also become a subregional mechanism for accountability in the implementation of the SDGs and the Post-2015 Development Agenda. He also emphasized that there is a need to undertake effective monitoring, evaluation and reporting, for better accountability, on progress in the implementation of the sustainable development goals. In this respect, it is important to agree and establish measurable goals and targets that can capture the multidimensional nature of sustainable development, and to create a framework for the implementation of those objectives with stable sources of financing.

The Heads of Delegation of SPECA participating countries expressed their support to the Programme. SPECA, with its impressive body of knowledge on regional connectivity can effectively facilitate policymaking on regional cooperation. The Programme needs to focus on strategic issues of regional cooperation and conduct more policy discussions in order to build confidence. SPECA provides capacity-building and other forms of technical assistance in the most important areas of regional cooperation and contributes to the development of unified regulatory frameworks in these areas. The thematic scope and priorities of the Programme have been shaped by its participating countries and reflect their needs and priorities. Effective support by the two United Nations Regional Commissions to the Programme is highly appreciated and should continue.

IV. Adoption of the agenda

The Governing Council adopted the provisional agenda of its ninth session.
V. Outcomes of the 2014 SPECA Economic Forum “Improving connectivity: a key contribution of SPECA to the success of the Transformation Decade of Afghanistan” (Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 4 December 2014)

The Chairperson invited Mr. Shun-ichi Murata, Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP and the ESCAP Coordinator of SPECA, to present the summary and conclusions by the Chairperson of the 2014 SPECA Economic Forum (Annex II). After discussion, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision under agenda item 3:

“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. SPECA work plans should give priority to capacity-building and other forms of technical assistance to Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries that strengthen regional trade, transport and telecommunication links and improve border crossing. The Governing Council calls upon the donor community to increase funding to such projects in the SPECA framework. It emphasizes that the development of regional infrastructure should be complemented with capacity-building and assistance to the modernization and harmonization of relevant regulatory frameworks for facilitating the safe and efficient use of this infrastructure”.

The proposed draft decision was adopted as amended (see Annex V - Decision 1).

VI. 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” (Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 5 December 2014)

The Chairperson invited Mr. Christian Friis Bach, Executive Secretary of the UNECE, to report on the main 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”. The Conclusions of the Follow-up meeting to the 2013 SPECA Economic Forum are attached to the report (Annex III). After discussion, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision under agenda item 4:

“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. Because SPECA is a neutral regional framework under the United Nations umbrella, it could offer a platform for the exchange of best practices and capacity-building as well as for harmonization and validation initiatives for meeting data and reporting requirements in order to support the regional dimension of monitoring and accountability for the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Due to its limited mandate and resources, SPECA alone cannot serve as a framework for comprehensive monitoring and accountability for the SDGs, at the same time it could play an important role in a region-wide monitoring and accountability framework”.
The proposed draft decision was adopted (see Annex V - Decision 2).

VII. Outcomes of the Brainstorming session on strengthening the ownership of SPECA (Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 5 December 2014)

The Chairperson invited Mr. Andrey Vasilyev, Deputy Executive Secretary of the UNECE and the UNECE Coordinator of SPECA, to deliver a report on the outcomes of the Brainstorming session on strengthening the ownership of SPECA. The Conclusions of the Brainstorming session on strengthening the ownership of SPECA are attached to the report (Annex IV). After discussion, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision under agenda item 5:

“The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the outcomes of the Brainstorming session on strengthening the ownership of SPECA held in Ashgabat on 5 December 2014. It calls upon the UNECE and ESCAP to translate the ideas and initiatives voiced during this session into concrete proposals and circulate them among the participants”.

The proposed draft decision was adopted (see Annex V - Decision 3).

The Delegation of Azerbaijan proposed to consider changing the name of the Programme to more explicitly include Afghanistan and Azerbaijan. It was agreed to discuss this matter at the next session of the SPECA Governing Council.

VIII. SPECA activities since the last session of the Governing Council (Almaty, Kazakhstan, 22 November 2013)

The Chairperson invited Mr. Nikolay Pomoshchnikov, Head of the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office, to present the Progress Reports on the work carried out by the SPECA Project Working Groups since the last session of the Governing Council. The Progress Reports can be found at: www.unece.org/SPECA/Governing Council/9th session. After discussion, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision under agenda item 6:

“The Governing Council notes with appreciation the Progress Reports on the work carried out by the SPECA Project Working Groups (PWGs) since its last session. It expresses satisfaction with the scope of activities and its appreciation to the donors who have supported projects under the PWGs”.

The proposed draft decision was adopted (see Annex V - Decision 4).

IX. Project proposals supporting connectivity between Afghanistan and Central Asia

The Chairperson invited Ms. Virginia Cram-Martos, Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division of the UNECE, to introduce project proposals supporting connectivity between Afghanistan and other SPECA countries. The project proposals can be found at: www.unece.org/SPECA/Governing Council/9th session. After
discussion, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision under the item 7 of the agenda:

“The Governing Council calls upon the UNECE and ESCAP to continue their activities assessing the needs of participating countries and elaborating project proposals that support connectivity between Afghanistan and Central Asia with a view to including them in the SPECA Work Plan for 2015-2016 to be adopted by the next session of the Council”.

The proposed draft decision was adopted as amended (see Annex V - Decision 5).

X. Report on the work of the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office since the last session of the Governing Council (Almaty, Kazakhstan, 22 November 2013)

Mr. Nikolay Pomoshchnikov, 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. The PowerPoint presentation of the report can be found on the website of the Office (http://www.unescap.org/events/9th-session-speca-governing-council). After discussion, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision under item 8 of the agenda:

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

The proposed draft decision was adopted (see Annex V - Decision 6).

XI. Cooperation between SPECA and regional organizations and institutions

Mr. Marton Krasznai, SPECA Deputy Coordinator at the UNECE, presented an oral report on cooperation between SPECA and regional organizations and institutions. After discussion, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision under item 9 of the agenda:

“The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the report on cooperation between SPECA and regional organizations and institutions. It supports the further strengthening of coordination and cooperation with partner organizations and donors in strategic areas of regional cooperation”.

The proposed draft decision was adopted (see Annex V - Decision 7).

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

The Head of Delegation of Kazakhstan, speaking on behalf of the SPECA participating countries, expressed sincere gratitude to the Government of the Islamic Republic of
Afghanistan for the excellent chairmanship of the Programme in 2014 and proposed the adoption of the following decision under item 10 of agenda:

“The Governing Council expresses its sincere gratitude to Afghanistan for its active work as the Chair country of SPECA between 2013 and 2014”.

The proposed draft decision was adopted (see Annex V – Decisions 8).

Under the agenda item 10 “Election of the next Chair country of SPECA” and the agenda item 11 “Other business, including date and venue of the 2015 SPECA Economic Forum and 10th session of the SPECA Governing Council”, the Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following decision:

“The Governing Council decides that the Chair country of SPECA for the period 2014 and 2015 will be agreed upon by consultations among interested SPECA participating countries through diplomatic channels. The dates and venue of the 2015 SPECA Economic Forum and the tenth session of the SPECA Governing Council will be communicated in due course”.

The proposed draft decision was adopted (see Annex V – Decision 9).

XIII. Other business

The Chairperson thanked the Government of Turkmenistan for the excellent organization of the SPECA events and its generous hospitality. He also expressed his gratitude to the two United Nations Regional Commissions and, in particular the Executive Secretaries of the UNECE and ESCAP, for their devoted support to the Chairmanship of Afghanistan and the Programme as a whole. The Chairperson proposed the adoption of the following additional decisions under item 11 of the agenda:

“The Governing Council expresses its sincere gratitude to the Government of Turkmenistan for the excellent organization and hospitality offered to the participants of the 2014 SPECA Economic Forum and the ninth session of the SPECA Governing Council”.

and

“The Governing Council expresses its deep appreciation to the secretariats of ESCAP and UNECE and their Executive Secretaries for their efforts to organize these important annual events and also expresses its special appreciation for their active work aimed at strengthening SPECA and their continued support to Programme implementation”.

The proposed draft decisions were adopted (see Annex V – Decisions 10 and 11).
XIV. Closing of the session

In its closing statement, the Chairperson of the session thanked all participants for the 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 Post-2015 Development Agenda at the regional level, as well as on possible measures to strengthen ownership by its participating countries. The Governing Council confirmed the importance of more active involvement of the Programme in improving connectivity between Afghanistan and other SPECA participating countries. The Chairperson thanked again the Government of Turkmenistan for the warm hospitality and excellent support to the SPECA events in Ashgabat.
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The 2014 SPECA Economic Forum discussed how to improve connectivity between Afghanistan and other SPECA countries as a contribution to the success of the Transformation Decade of Afghanistan.

The Representative of Afghanistan, the Chair country of SPECA, emphasized that his country and other SPECA countries were linked by shared challenges and opportunities and needed to join forces in order to combat religious extremism, terrorism and organized crime. Regional cooperation, by providing a strong impetus to economic development, addresses the root causes of these evils. Land-locked or double land-locked, SPECA countries share an interest in improving regional connectivity. The region has the potential of becoming a transport hub between Europe and Asia. During its Transformation Decade, Afghanistan would like to become a catalyst for regional cooperation. SPECA offers an excellent framework for this. Its greatest strength is the combination of policy and expert level work. It hosts strategic discussions on regional cooperation and, at the same time, provides technical assistance in many areas where such cooperation faces challenges.

The Representative of Turkmenistan, as the host country, spoke about the efforts of his country to develop infrastructure that serves both the needs of Turkmenistan and contributes to improved regional connectivity.

The Executive Secretary of the UNECE emphasized that rapid and sustainable economic development is a key priority for supporting Afghanistan’s long-term stability and security. The bulk of Afghanistan’s trade is with Central Asia and other neighbouring countries. The revival of regional and continental trade is the single most important potential engine for positive change in the region. Regional cooperation with Afghanistan provides a multitude of advantages for other SPECA countries. Afghanistan offers a market for energy and local products, alternative, cost-efficient routes to world markets and a transit route from energy-rich Central Asian countries to the energy-deficient South-Asian subcontinent. ESCAP and UNECE offer capacity-building and other forms of technical assistance in the SPECA framework that contribute to the efficient and safe operation of regional transport infrastructures and the identification of bottlenecks. UNECE’s numerous legal instruments provide a solid legal basis for the development of harmonized regulatory frameworks for regional trade and transport.
The Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP underlined the great potential available to SPECA countries if they were to develop their land-linked connections as well as regional and subregional markets, which would provide a major impetus to economic and trade diversification. There are also good prospects for land-locked developing countries to serve as transit countries in order to ensure the seamless movement of goods within and outside the subregion. Improving regional connectivity is, therefore, critical for the SPECA countries to become land-linked, in line with the priorities of the recently adopted Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Next Decade 2014-2024. Improving regional connectivity is particularly important as a means for landlocked developing countries to connect to the rest of the world. By developing key networks such as transport, energy and ICT infrastructure in a coordinated and integrated manner, the benefits from improved connectivity can be spread more evenly across and between countries, with an emphasis on those that are least developed. Consequently, such increases in connectivity could contribute to the process of economic development for countries like Afghanistan.

The Representative of Azerbaijan spoke of his country’s efforts to develop pipelines, road and railroad links, seaports and logistical centers connecting Central Asia, Afghanistan and Azerbaijan with European markets and other continents. The Trans-Eurasian Information Superhighway (TASIM) project and Azerbaijan’s recently launched first telecommunications satellite had as their objective improved ICT services at the regional and global levels. He also mentioned the importance of joint efforts aimed at developing modern transport infrastructure and the implementation of major regional and trans-regional transport projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and construction of the new Baku international sea port of Alyat. He proposed the development of links between major connectivity projects, programmes and initiatives in the region that are aimed at harnessing cross-sectoral synergies, such as the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), Trans-Eurasian Information Superhighway (TASIM), and Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC).

The Representative of Kazakhstan characterized SPECA as an indispensable regional framework for active policy dialogue and practical steps to promote regional cooperation, and has supported successful implementation of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars international railway and Silk Wind projects.

The Representative of Kyrgyzstan underlined that SPECA is focusing on key areas of regional cooperation. The topic of the Economic Forum is very important for the region, which is struggling to transform itself from a land-locked into land-connected region. Large projects, like TAPI, CASA 1000 and regional railroad links play a key role in these efforts.

The Representative of Tajikistan emphasized that the sustainable development of Tajikistan, like that of other SPECA countries, depends heavily on close cooperation with their neighbours. Improved border crossing with Afghanistan thanks to newly build bridges and the unified railroad system now being developed by the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are important steps towards better connectivity.
The Representative of the Russian Federation expressed strong support for SPECA and the work carried out by UNECE and ESCAP in support of regional cooperation in Central Asia. Russia provides extrabudgetary funding to the two Regional Commissions for activities in the region and undertakes substantial efforts to enhance regional development via initiatives within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union.

The United Nations Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative for Turkmenistan, speaking on behalf of the UNDP Assistant Administrator and Regional Director for Europe and the CIS, presented UNDP’s efforts to develop economic corridors, connecting main population centers. Connectivity, in all its aspects featured prominently at the Second United Nations Conference on Land-Locked Developing Countries held last month in Vienna. The goal of increased connectivity and other challenges faced by LLDCs will need to be reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals. UNDP, which is working in several regional frameworks, like CAREC and the “Heart of Asia” Process, is looking forward to working more closely with SPECA in support of people-to-people connectivity in Central Asia, Afghanistan and beyond.

The Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan reminded participants that the SPECA meeting is taking place at a pivotal moment in history for Afghanistan and the region as a whole. In London, the Government of Afghanistan was presenting a comprehensive vision for reform entitled, “Realizing self-reliance: Commitments to reforms and renewed partnership”. There are three priority areas for the revitalization of the Afghan economy: an improved regulatory environment, support to entrepreneurship and better connectivity. Members and observers of SPECA include some of the world’s largest energy exporters as well as the world’s largest energy importers. Bridging this divide requires visionary investment in energy infrastructure. Projects like TAPI and CASA 1000 could play an important role in this area. Infrastructure development in the CAREC framework needs to go hand-in-hand with the improvement of “software” of institutional and policy reforms. Afghanistan is at the intersection of a number of regional bodies like SAARC, CAREC, ECO and the SCO. Cooperation with these frameworks would place SPECA in a broader framework in terms of a larger geographical area stretching from the Caucasus to China and South Asia.

The Regional Director of USAID welcomed this important and timely meeting. The United States strongly supports SPECA and its work for improved connectivity between Afghanistan and Central Asia. The four priority areas of USAID activities in the region are closely allied with SPECA work: development of a regional energy market, trade and transit agreements, accession to WTO, better customs and border operations and improved connections between businesses and people through a regional market. USAID funding of the CASA 1000 Secretariat together with other linked projects are transformational steps toward a regional energy market. SPECA can help open the door for improved connectivity.

The Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP presented a study on regional connectivity between Afghanistan and Central Asia. He underlined that in recent years “connectivity” has broadened and entered into mainstream development discourse as it plays an important role in enabling countries to expand their markets, optimize exchanges and
strengthen collaboration in support of sustainable development and shared prosperity. Connectivity contributes to regional economic integration as integration processes depend critically on the development of infrastructure that will provide connectivity both within and between countries. Connectivity also contributes to sustainable and inclusive development as it helps to exploit more of complementarities and diversities, provides access to economic and social opportunities and narrows the development gaps. Enhancing regional connectivity is particularly important for landlocked developing countries: by developing trade, transport and communication links in a coordinated and integrated manner, the benefits of improved connectivity with the rest of the world can be spread more evenly across and between countries.

The Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division of UNECE presented ongoing work in the framework of the SPECA Project Working Group on Trade and the beneficial fact of simplified and unified procedures – like the introduction of a Single Window – for the speed and cost of export and import transactions.

A presentation on activities of the SPECA Project Working Group on Transport and Border Crossing highlighted the importance of UNECE transport conventions for the development of a unified regulatory base for the SPECA region and pointed to the tangible assistance that this Group provides to the resolution of practical problems in connection with transport and border crossing both within the region and with neighbouring countries. The presentation also highlighted how the Project Working Group helps translating the outcomes of major conferences and high-level events – like the Ashgabat International Conference on the Role of Transport and Transit Corridors in Ensuring International Cooperation, Stability and Sustainable Development and the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries – into concrete action.

In the ensuing discussion, participants presented a broad picture of on-going activities in support of improved trade and transport links as well as plans for the development of energy transit from Central Asia to South-East Asia through Afghanistan. They emphasized the importance of improved connectivity for the achievement of their national development plans.

Some participants highlighted the need to properly address environmental and social concerns in connection with planned investments in further broadening energy transit networks. The broad approach offered by SPECA to key areas of regional cooperation that includes not only trade, transport and border crossing but also water, energy and the environment offers a good opportunity for a complex, holistic approach to problems of regional cooperation.

The UNECE presented selected project proposals in support of connectivity between Afghanistan and other SPECA countries.

The Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division of the UNECE introduced a project proposal on the development of a regional trade facilitation strategy and one on the development of electronic corridors for customs related data.
A project proposal on more efficient use of the TIR system by Afghanistan for transit through Turkmenistan and other SPECA countries and one on the opening up of an ongoing project supporting the joint watershed management of the Amu Darya by Afghanistan and Tajikistan for other Central Asian countries, first of all Turkmenistan, which wants to join it, were also presented.

CONCLUSIONS

• Stronger cooperation and better connectivity between Afghanistan and other SPECA countries has a crucial role to play in achieving the objectives of the Afghanistan’s Transformation Decade and progress towards greater stability, security and prosperity in the whole SPECA region.

• There is a need for a holistic approach to connectivity within the region taking into account transport, trade, ICT and energy which would allow the identification of most effective solutions.

• When developing projects and programmes to foster connectivity due consideration must be given to environmental and social aspects and to finding mutually beneficial solutions for all countries involved.

• SPECA is an important framework for fostering subregional cooperation as it combines policy and expert level discussions and looks at a broad range of interconnected issues.

• SPECA can play and important role in supporting implementation of the expected SDGs in the region and monitoring of progress.

• There is a need to strengthen cooperation between SPECA and other regional and subregional programmes and projects dealing with connectivity, including CAREC, based on complementary roles whereby SPECA provides institutional and human capacity-building (“software”) while financial institutions finance and develop infrastructures (“hardware”).

• SPECA also acts as a forum for the exchange of information on activities and plans of various international organizations and bilateral donors which improves cooperation and the identification of synergies and complementary actions.
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”
(Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 5 December 2014)

CONCLUSIONS

1. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Post-2015 Development Agenda are highly relevant for the SPECA region.

2. SPECA has a strong potential to play an effective role in supporting and facilitating the achievement of SDGs, in measuring and monitoring progress and in the post-2015 accountability framework.

3. There is a need to make full use in the post-2015 monitoring and accountability process of the existing tools and mechanisms established by SPECA countries (IFAS, ICSD and ICWC, CAREC, etc.), the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and the United Nations Regional Commissions (Environment Performance Reviews, Innovation Performance Reviews, Housing Surveys, reporting under environmental and transport conventions, etc.) and explore ways how effectively link them with SPECA.

4. This could enable SPECA (Economic Forums and Project Working Groups) to serve as an important “subregional” bridge between SPECA countries (national and local levels) and the post-2015 arrangements to be established within the UNECE and ESCAP regions, and would thus enable SPECA countries to effectively contribute to the Post-2015 Development Agenda at the regional and global levels.

5. In particular, the SPECA Project Working Group on Statistics can make an important contribution to strengthening statistical capacities and data availability for the post-2015 measuring, monitoring and accountability frameworks.

6. In the context of means of implementation of SDGs and the Post-2015 Development Agenda, UNECE was invited to prepare for the next session of the SPECA Governing Council, subject to availability of extrabudgetary resources, a regional study on procedural and regulatory barriers for trade building on the national studies already prepared for SPECA countries.
ANNEX IV

BRAINSTORMING SESSION ON STRENGTHENING OWNERSHIP OF THE UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL PROGRAMME FOR THE ECONOMIES OF CENTRAL ASIA

(Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 5 December 2014)

CONCLUSIONS

1. While SPECA has made considerable progress since the 2005 Astana International Conference, participants agreed that next year would be a good opportunity to review the Programme with a view of raising its effectiveness and impact, and to increase its “ownership” by participating countries.

2. It was agreed that UNECE and ESCAP, taking into account proposals made and views expressed during the session, would prepare a questionnaire to be filled in by SPECA participating countries.

3. Such a questionnaire will cover, but may not be limited to, the following issues:

   • Thematic scope and priorities for SPECA.
   • Making better link between the technical expertise and expert networks accumulated within SPECA and its Project Working Groups with the political level discussions/processes both within and outside SPECA.
   • Possible change of names and terms of reference of the SPECA Project Working Groups.
   • Role of SPECA in the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the SDGs implementation, measuring, monitoring and accountability (see “Conclusions of the Follow-up meeting to the 2013 SPECA Economic Forum”).
   • Possible links of SPECA with other subregional and regional programmes and projects.

4. Such a questionnaire will be circulated to SPECA countries by 31 January 2015, with the expectation that countries will send their responses by the end of April 2015 so that they can be compiled, analyzed and presented well in advance of the next session of the Governing Council.

5. In addition, UNECE and ESCAP will consider with UNDP and other partners in the UN system, which are active in the SPECA region, what are the possibilities for strengthening within the context of the post-2015 arrangements, links of SPECA with existing arrangements for inter-agency cooperation, such as RCM, UN Regional Development Teams and UNDAFs. The results of these consultations will be presented to the SPECA Governing Council together with the analysis of the questionnaire referred to above.
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. SPECA Work Plans should give priority to capacity-building and other forms of technical assistance to Afghanistan and other SPECA countries that strengthen regional trade, transport and telecommunication links and improve border crossing. The Governing Council calls upon the donor community to increase funding to such projects in the SPECA framework. It emphasizes that the development of regional infrastructure should be complemented with capacity-building and assistance to 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. Because SPECA is a neutral regional framework under the United Nations umbrella, it could offer a platform for the exchange of best practices and capacity-building as well as for harmonization and validation initiatives for meeting data and reporting requirements in order to support the regional dimension of monitoring and accountability for the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Due to its limited mandate and resources, SPECA alone cannot serve as a framework for comprehensive monitoring and accountability for the SDGs, at the same time it could play an important role in a region-wide monitoring and accountability framework.

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

The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the outcomes of the Brainstorming session on strengthening the ownership of SPECA held in Ashgabat on 5 December 2014. It calls upon the UNECE and 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 SPECA Project Working Groups (PWGs) since its last session. It expresses
satisfaction with the scope of activities and its appreciation to the donors who have supported projects under the PWGs.

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

The Governing Council calls upon the UNECE and ESCAP to continue their activities assessing the needs of participating countries and elaborating project proposals that support connectivity between Afghanistan and other SPECA countries with a view to including them in the SPECA Work Plan for 2015-2016 to be adopted by the next session of the Council.

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 role of the Office in project implementation within the SPECA framework.

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

The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the report on cooperation between SPECA and regional organizations and institutions. It supports the further strengthening of 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 SPECA between 2013 and 2014.

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

The Governing Council decides that the Chair country of SPECA for the period 2014 and 2015 will be agreed upon by consultations among interested SPECA participating countries through diplomatic channels. The dates and venue of the 2015 SPECA Economic Forum and the tenth session of the SPECA 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 and hospitality offered to the participants of the 2014 SPECA Economic Forum and the ninth session of the SPECA Governing Council.

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

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