



Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**Seventy-fifth session**

Bangkok, 27–31 May 2019

Item 5 of the provisional agenda**

Subregional perspectives on the theme topic:**“Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”****Report of the Governing Council of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia on its thirteenth session***Summary*

At its thirteenth session, the Governing Council of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia noted with satisfaction the outcomes of the 2018 Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia Economic Forum, “Twenty years of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia: a new stage in regional cooperation for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 20 and 21 September 2018. The Council adopted the Forum’s conclusions and recommendations to provide support to the efforts of its participating countries at national and regional levels to (a) strengthen connectivity in trade, transport, energy, and information and communications technology, (b) accelerate structural economic transformation and (c) enhance partnerships in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024 and other internationally agreed goals.

The Council decided that (a) the thematic working group on water, energy and environment; the thematic working group on sustainable transport, transit and connectivity; and the thematic working group on trade would support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals that are regional and cross-border in nature; (b) the thematic working group on knowledge-based development would consider its terms of reference; and (c) the thematic working group on gender and the Sustainable Development Goals and the thematic working group on statistics would support the other thematic working groups on cross-cutting issues. The Council also requested its participating countries to nominate their focal points and to consider financial and in-kind contributions for the Special Programme’s activities.

The fourteenth session of the Council is scheduled to be held in Ashgabat in 2019 with the Government of Turkmenistan acting as Chair.

* Reissued for technical reasons on 18 February 2019.

** ESCAP/75/L.1.

I. Decisions

1. At the thirteenth session, the Governing Council of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia took the following decisions:

Decision 1 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/1)

The Governing Council of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia notes with satisfaction and adopts the conclusions and recommendations of the 2018 Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia Economic Forum, “Twenty years of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia: a new stage in regional cooperation for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 20 and 21 September 2018.

The Council calls upon the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), and other United Nations agencies and programmes, as well as its international development partners, to provide support to the efforts of the participating countries of the Special Programme at national and regional levels to (a) strengthen connectivity in trade, transport, energy, and information and communications technology, (b) accelerate structural economic transformation and (c) enhance partnerships in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024 and other internationally agreed goals.

Decision 2 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/2)

The Council takes note of the progress reports on the activities of the thematic working groups of the Special Programme since its last session and expresses satisfaction with the implementation of the activities covered in the reports.

The Council also expresses its appreciation to the participating countries of the Special Programme for supporting and hosting the thematic working groups’ sessions, as well as to the Governments of Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation and to the Islamic Development Bank for financial support for the activities of the thematic working groups.

Decision 3 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/3)

The Council welcomes the road map for elaborating a Special Programme innovation strategy for sustainable development and the draft outline of a Special Programme innovation strategy for sustainable development prepared by the thematic working group on knowledge-based development and requests the Special Programme participating countries, ECE and ESCAP to finalize the Special Programme innovation strategy for sustainable development.

Decision 4 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/4)

The Council notes with appreciation the report of the expert group meeting on the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 11 and 12 June 2018, as well as the final evaluation report for the Special Programme submitted to the meeting.

Name of the Special Programme

With regard to the proposal to change the name of the Special Programme, the Council decides to consider this issue at its next session.

Focal points for the Special Programme

The Council requests the participating countries of the Special Programme to nominate focal points for the Special Programme in writing for submission to the ESCAP and ECE secretariats.

Thematic working groups

The Council decides that the thematic working group on water, energy and environment; the thematic working group on sustainable transport, transit and connectivity; and the thematic working group on trade should continue to work towards supporting the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets that are regional and cross-border in nature.

The Council notes that the thematic working group on knowledge-based development will consider its terms of reference at its next session and report to the Council at its fourteenth session.

The Council approves the recommendations of the thematic working group on gender and economy made at its most recent session, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 19 September 2018, and decides to change the working group's name to Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia thematic working group on gender and the Sustainable Development Goals. The Council decides that the thematic working group on gender and the Sustainable Development Goals should continue to work on gender mainstreaming and transformative policies in the following areas: (a) non-discriminatory labour market policies in the course of hiring and work environments free of discrimination and exploitation; (b) policies to promote the participation of women in public and private companies; (c) policies to prevent stereotypes in education and research to advance the participation of women in research and development sectors; and (d) policies for building support systems for women's entrepreneurship development. In addition, the thematic working group will contribute to the monitoring and reporting for the regional review process of the 25-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well as for the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Council notes that the thematic working group on statistics has not yet met in 2018. The Council decides that the working group, at its next session, in October 2018, should consider, with support from the ESCAP and ECE secretariats, where regional coordination is needed in relation to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in its focus area (notably on monitoring and measuring progress in the implementation of the Goals and targets) and submit its conclusions to the Council at its next session, in 2019, for its consideration.

The Council decides that the thematic working group on gender and the Sustainable Development Goals as well as the thematic working group on statistics should support the other thematic working groups on cross-cutting issues.

The Council requests all thematic working groups to submit their terms of reference to the Council at the next session.

The Council agrees that sessions of the thematic working groups should take place any time before or concurrent to the annual sessions of the Council.

Focal points for the thematic working groups

The Council requests the participating countries of the Special Programme to nominate focal points for each thematic working group in writing for submission to the ESCAP and ECE secretariats.

Financing

The Council invites the participating countries of the Special Programme to explore possibilities for financial and/or in-kind contributions for the activities of the Special Programme. The Council requests the ESCAP and ECE secretariats to send an official letter with a calendar of events, including dates and venues, to the participating countries for their consideration for financial and/or in-kind support.

Decision 5 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/5)

The Council notes the offer by the Government of Kazakhstan to host the secretariat of the Special Programme in the new United Nations common premises in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The Council requests the Government of Kazakhstan to send an official letter proposing the function and financing of the secretariat for further consideration by the participating countries. The Council also decides to consider this issue further at its next session, in 2019.

Decision 6 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/6)

The Council welcomes the offer by the Government of Turkmenistan to act as the Chair of the Special Programme in 2019 and elects Turkmenistan as the Chair country of the Special Programme for 2019. The Council also welcomes the concept note on the Government of Turkmenistan and its time as Chair of the Special Programme in 2019.

Decision 7 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/7)

The Council decides that its fourteenth session and the 2019 Economic Forum will be held in Ashgabat in November 2019. The exact dates, venue and theme of these events will be agreed upon and communicated through diplomatic channels.

Decision 8 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/8)

The Council welcomes the proposal by the Government of Kyrgyzstan to act as the Chair of the Special Programme in 2020 and to host the Economic Forum and the session of the Council in 2020.

Decision 9 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/9)

In light of its decisions at its thirteenth session, in 2018, the Council decides to consider the terms of reference of the Special Programme at its fourteenth session, in 2019.

Decision 10 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/10)

The Council expresses its sincere gratitude to the Government of Kazakhstan for acting as the Chair as well as for the excellent organization and

hospitality offered to the participants of the 2018 Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia Economic Forum and the thirteenth session of the Council.

Decision 11 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/11)

The Council expresses its deep appreciation to the ESCAP and ECE secretariats for their continued support for the implementation of the activities of the Special Programme.

II. Proceedings

A. Outcome of the 2018 SPECA Economic Forum

(Agenda item 2)

2. The representative of Afghanistan proposed including the banking system and capital markets issues and strengthening financial integration in the region of the Special Programme on the programme of the 2019 Economic Forum.

B. Activities of the SPECA Thematic Working Groups since the twelfth session of the Governing Council

(Agenda item 3)

3. The secretariat of ECE presented (a) the progress reports on the activities of the thematic working groups (SPECA/GC/13/2); (b) the road map for elaborating a SPECA innovation strategy for sustainable development (SPECA/GC/13/INF/2); and (c) the draft outline of a SPECA innovation strategy for sustainable development (SPECA/GC/13/INF/3) for consideration.

4. Each thematic working group was invited to present its activities.

5. The representative of the thematic working group on water, energy and environment highlighted its achievements over 20 years, focusing on the interlinkage among its three areas of work.

6. The representative of the thematic working group on sustainable transport, transit and connectivity requested more active participation and the nomination of focal points for the working group from each participating country.

7. The Chairperson of the last session of the thematic working group on trade reported on its review of four studies on (a) regional strategies for trade facilitation; (b) regional cooperation for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals related to trade; (c) the link between water management, trade and environment in the region of the Special Programme; and (d) non-tariff measures in trade in the region. The participating countries of the Special Programme were invited to comment on the studies for finalization.

8. The representative of the thematic working group on statistics, from Kazakhstan, suggested that the working group on statistics should work with the other thematic working groups to address the demand for data and measurement.

9. The representative of the thematic working group on knowledge-based development, from Azerbaijan, reported that the working group on knowledge-based development had held a discussion to promote regional coordination in its areas of work and agreed to review its terms of reference at its next session.

10. The representative of the thematic working group on gender and economy, from Azerbaijan, presented recommendations from the meeting of the working group on gender and economy as recorded in SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/4. The working group proposed its new name – working group on gender and the Sustainable Development Goals – in order to include the gender dimension as a cross-cutting issue in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and asked the Council to approve that proposal.

11. The representative of Afghanistan suggested that national focal points for each thematic working group be nominated for coordination among different ministries engaged in the activities of the working group at the national level.

12. Each thematic working group was invited to review its terms of reference at its next session and prepare updated terms of reference by using a template to be shared by the ECE secretariat.

13. The representative of Turkmenistan requested the ESCAP and ECE secretariats to submit background papers for the thematic working groups well in advance of meetings in order for the participating countries of the Special Programme to have enough time to review and comment on the papers.

C. Evaluation of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia

(Agenda item 4)

14. The report of the expert group meeting on SPECA (SPECA/GC/13/5) and the final report on the evaluation of the Special Programme (SPECA/GC/13/INF/5) were considered by the Council (see decision 4 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/4)).

15. The representative of Afghanistan emphasized that the Special Programme should focus on strengthening subregional economic cooperation, capacity-building activities and realization of joint projects to assist Special Programme participating countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

16. The representative of Tajikistan requested clarification regarding the timing of the sessions of each thematic working group. After discussion, the Council agreed that the sessions of the working groups should take place any time before or concurrent to the annual sessions of the Council.

D. Election of the next Chair country of SPECA

(Agenda item 5)

17. The representative of the Government of Turkmenistan expressed the willingness of his Government to act as the Chair of the Special Programme in 2019 and to host the fourteenth session of the Council and the 2019 Economic Forum. In his presentation on the concept note on the priorities of the Government of Turkmenistan during its time as Chair of the Special Programme, the representative stated that his Government viewed the Special Programme as a unique platform for international cooperation and proposed that the 2019 Economic Forum should focus on the expansion of transport

infrastructure and the simplification of procedures for the movement of goods, services and people across State borders in the Special Programme region. Furthermore, his Government suggested the organization of two expert meetings on improving the work of the Special Programme.

E. Date, venue and theme of the 2019 SPECA Economic Forum and fourteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council

(Agenda item 6)

18. See decision 7 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2018/7).

F. Other matters

(Agenda item 7)

19. The representative of the Government of Kyrgyzstan expressed the willingness of the Government to act as the Chair of the Special Programme in 2020 and to host the fifteenth session of the Council and the 2020 Economic Forum.

III. Organization

A. Opening, duration and organization of the session

20. The thirteenth session of the Council of the Special Programme was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 21 September 2018. The session was chaired by Mr. Kairat Torebayev, Director of the International Cooperation Department, Ministry of National Economy, Kazakhstan.

B. Attendance

21. Representatives of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as well as the ESCAP and ECE secretariats attended the session. Representatives from other countries interested in supporting the Special Programme, United Nations agencies and programmes, international and regional organizations, international financial institutions and academia took part in the session as observers.

C. Agenda

22. The Council of the Special Programme adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the session:
 - (a) Opening addresses;
 - (b) Adoption of the agenda.
2. Outcome of the 2018 SPECA Economic Forum.
3. Activities of the SPECA Thematic Working Groups since the twelfth session of the Governing Council.
4. Evaluation of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia.
5. Election of the next Chair country of SPECA.

6. Date, venue and theme of the 2019 SPECA Economic Forum and fourteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council.
 7. Other matters.
 8. Adoption of decisions.
 9. Closing of the session.
-