



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

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**PROGRESS REPORTS ON THE ACTIVITIES
OF THE SPECA PROJECT WORKING GROUPS**

I. WATER AND ENERGY RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

The focus of the work in 2015 continued to be on water and dam safety cooperation between SPECA countries. Important developments in the region linked to the SPECA activities are the start of exchange of hydrology data on the Pyanj river between Afghanistan and Tajikistan in 2015 as well as support to the establishment of a national agency in Tajikistan responsible for the safety of hydro-technical infrastructure.

Main work on energy focused on energy efficiency, renewable energy resources and “Sustainable Energy for All” including the implementation of the outcomes of the Asian and Pacific Energy Forum as well as exchange views and good practices between SPECA countries and others.

The directions of work include the following:

Dam Safety in Central Asia: Capacity-building and Subregional Cooperation

The project aiming to improve safety of dam operations in Central Asia started in 2006. Project results of previous phases include a model national law on safety of large hydraulic facilities, including dams, intended to be a base of national harmonized legal frameworks for dam safety; a draft regional agreement on cooperation on dam safety, which stipulates, inter alia, exchange of information and notification of other countries in case of accidents with dams; expertise provided to the development of dam safety legislation in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as well as joint training for experts in the region.

The third project phase started in 2012 with the focus on cooperation on training of experts and students in the region and to continue the work to safeguard the safety of individual dams. A safety monitoring system funded by the UNECE project on the Ortotokoi dam in Kyrgyzstan on the transboundary Chu river was inaugurated in September 2015. In 2015, work on the regulation of low-pressure dams and the renewal of Rules for Exploitation for hydraulic infrastructure continued as was work on national institutions and policy in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. Presently a grant from the Russian Federation provides the main funding of the project.

A regional project meeting will take place in Bishkek on 3-4 December 2015. Information about the project can be found at: <http://www.unece.org/env/water/damsafety.htm>.

Development of Cooperation on the Chu and Talas Rivers

In 2006, the Kazakh-Kyrgyz Chu and Talas Rivers Commission was inaugurated with the support of UNECE and ESCAP. The establishment of the Commission created a mutually beneficial way for Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan to share responsibility and funding of water infrastructure used by both countries. Project support has also contributed to the further broadening of cooperation to improve the joint management of the Chu and Talas rivers.

Funds have been approved for support by the Global Environmental Facility to broaden the bilateral cooperation, including on environmental issues, and after the development of the project document in 2014 the project has been initiated in 2015. UNDP and UNECE are responsible for the implementation of the project. The project inception meeting was held in May and the first major set of activities was initiated in connection with a bilateral meeting held 16-18 September at Issyk Kul.

Information about the work under the Commission can be found at <http://www.chutalas-commission.org/>.

Promoting Cooperation to Adapt to Climate Change in the Chu-Talas Transboundary Basin

A follow-up of a previous project on climate change adaptation with the objective to develop a joint strategy for climate change adaptation is being initiated during 2015. This UNECE-UNDP project aims to further improve the adaptive capacity of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, to support dialogue and cooperation on assessing impacts of climate change on water resources and identification of possible adaptation measures in the transboundary context and thereby prevent controversy on the use of water resources.

Regional Dialogue and Cooperation on Water Resources Management in Central Asia

The Programme “Transboundary Water Management in Central Asia” was launched in 2008 by the Government of Germany. A Programme component “Regional dialogue and cooperation on water resources management” has been implemented since 2009 by the UNECE, with the aim to empower the countries of Central Asia to develop and implement mutually acceptable, long-term solutions to improve cooperation on transboundary water resources. Enhancing the regional dialogue and strengthening the capacity of regional institutions for water resources management are the major objectives.

Phase III of the project was initiated in 2015 with the main focus on the development of a shared information space for water and environment in Central Asia and further capacity-building on international water law. A meeting of a coordination group for the shared information space involving regional organizations was held 1-2 September 2015 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. For more information see <http://www.unece.org/env/water/cadialogue/cadwelcome.html>.

Water Quality in Central Asia, second phase

A follow-up to the previous water quality project funded by the United Nations Development Account and implemented 2009-2012 is being initiated in October 2015. The project will be implemented in cooperation with the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC).

In cooperation with authorities from all countries the project, funded by Finland, aim to further develop regional cooperation on water quality.

Strengthening Cooperation on Transboundary Watershed Management between Afghanistan and Tajikistan in the Upper AmuDarya River Basin

The project supports Afghanistan and Tajikistan in the development of hydrology and environment cooperation in the upper Amu Darya basin. The Ministry for Water and Energy and the National Environmental Protection Agency of Afghanistan and the Committee for Environmental Protection and the Hydromet of Tajikistan are project partners. On the basis of existing bilateral agreements the two countries aim to strengthen their cooperation and information exchange.

During 2015 the cooperation intensified. In August a technical bilateral meeting was held and a joint expedition organised. A high-level bilateral meeting took place in October in Dushanbe. Two major developments in 2015 are the start of exchange of hydrology data on the Pyanj river between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, and the negotiations of a separate bilateral environmental agreement.

Project activities are funded by Russia and Finland. More information including an “Atlas of cooperation” can be found at <http://www.unece.org/env/water/centralasia.html>.

Application of clean, renewable and/or alternative energy technologies for rural areas in Central Asian countries

The objective of the project is to strengthen national capacities of the Central Asian countries to enhance access to clean, renewable and/or alternative energy through off-grid, micro- and mini-grid solutions in rural and remote areas.

The objective of the project has been achieved through the following strategy:

- Conducting national assessments for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on access to clean, renewable and/or alternative energy provided by off-grid solutions with the focus on rural and remote areas, and on identifying potential renewable energy sites close to productive use loads in rural and remote areas.
- Developing a prefeasibility study for future implementation as a pilot project.
- Organizing an end-of-the-project workshop for experts and governmental officials from Central Asian countries to present the results/recommendations of the project.

Promoting Renewable Energy Investments for Climate Change Mitigation and Sustainable Development

Under the framework of this project, 15 experts from 5 SPECA countries participated at the “International Training Course on Business Planning for Renewable Energy”. The training was designed to help representatives of private and public companies better prepare and implement renewable energy (RE) projects. It also aims at raising awareness about RE investments, including through public-private partnerships, among financing organizations. Participants improved their financial engineering and business planning skills to identify, select and develop RE investment projects and prepare bankable project proposals.

Database of Policies and Regulations on Sustainable Use of Energy and Renewable Energy Sources in Countries of North and Central Asia

As one of the outcomes of the ESCAP project “Enhancing energy security through regional cooperation” funded by the Russian Federation, the Database of policies and regulations on sustainable use of energy and renewable energy sources in countries of North and Central Asia has been developed and is now openly available online at www.asiapacificenergy.org.

The database currently contains over 1000 documents from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It is continuously updated and reflects the current policy and regulatory framework for energy efficiency and renewable energy sources development in North and Central Asia.

The database has been developed to serve as an information tool for policymakers and researchers to compare policy and legal frameworks of the countries covered by the project and to identify the trends in their development. It can be a useful source of information on the experiences and the approaches of the countries in developing relevant national policies and legislation. There are plans for further expansion of database to cover more countries of the subregion.

The **Inter-regional Workshop and Study Tour on Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Projects and Policies**, held from 8 to 12 February 2015 in Israel, was jointly organized by the UNECE and MASHAV – Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation and ESCAP. For the UNECE, this event was organized in the framework of the United Nations Development Account (UNDA) projects “Promoting energy efficiency investments for climate change mitigation and sustainable development”, and “Promoting renewable energy investments for climate change mitigation and sustainable development”. Nine government officials and experts from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan participated in the event. The Workshop aimed at strengthening capacity of decision-makers and practitioners from these countries to increase share of renewable energy in energy mix and improve energy efficiency. In this context, the participants learnt about the experience of Israel in promoting and implementing energy efficiency and renewable energy policies and measures.

The Sixth International Forum on Energy for Sustainable Development was held in Yerevan, on 29 September - 2 October 2015. The Forum was organized in cooperation with ESCAP and other UN Regional Commissions and became one of the important events of the UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All, 2014-2024. Over 270 delegates, including representatives of five SPECA countries, attended the Forum.

Under the framework of the Forum, UNECE held a Workshop on Access to Energy in Remote Areas, which focused on the most effective institutional, legal, financial, technical and other mechanisms to improve energy access, in particular in remote rural areas. National experts from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan presented national assessments on access to energy services provided by off-grid solutions with the focus on rural and remote areas, and on identifying potential renewable energy sites close to productive use loads in rural and remote areas.

Enhancing regional cooperation on sustainable energy including the implementation the outcomes from the Asian and Pacific Energy Forum

As one of the outcomes of the ESCAP project “Enhancing energy security through regional cooperation” funded by the Russian Federation, the Database of policies and regulations on

sustainable use of energy and renewable energy sources in countries of North and Central Asia has been developed and is now merged with the Asia and Pacific Energy Portal and the information related to sustainable energy policies and strategies from SPECA countries are available online at www.asiapacificenergy.org

Representatives of the SPECA countries also participated in the work of the annual sessions of the following UNECE Groups of Experts held in Geneva in 2015:

- Group of Experts on Cleaner Electricity Production from Fossil Fuels
- Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane (CMM)
- Group of Experts on Energy Efficiency
- Group of Experts on Renewable Energy
- Group of Experts on Resource Classification
- Group of Experts on Gas

II. TRANSPORT AND BORDER CROSSING

Efficient international and regional transport plays a key role in addressing the economic development challenges faced by landlocked SPECA countries. Therefore, transport infrastructure development, facilitation of border-crossing and transit procedures and improvement of road safety is a priority for cooperation in the SPECA subregion. Since 1998, UNECE and ESCAP have been supporting these developments as alternating secretariat to the SPECA Project Working Group on Transport and Border Crossing (PWG-TBC).

The 20th jubilee session of SPECA Project Working Group on Transport and Border Crossing took place in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 10-11 September 2015. The session was hosted by the Ministry for Investment and Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan and co-organized by UNECE and ESCAP. Representatives of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan participated, alongside with the Islamic Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, TRACECA and members of national transport institutions and the private sector. The aim of the session was to take stock of the progress of the SPECA transport cooperation, and to address topics related to sustainable development of transport systems, with special emphasis on connectivity and more efficient international transport. During the meeting PWG members presented their plans in transport infrastructure development, activities undertaken to remove bottlenecks (both physical and non-physical), and progress related to accession to and implementation of UN transport conventions. Actions to improve road safety in the region were discussed as well. The PWG encouraged SPECA countries:

- To harmonise transport infrastructure development plans relying on established frameworks (Euro-Asian Transport Linkages; Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway network, Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway network, the Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports).
- To further facilitate international road and rail transport.
- To take actions to respond to the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety, 2011-2020.

The quality and reliability of transport data remains to be a concern in most SPECA countries. As transport is included as target under several Sustainable Development Goals, addressing this issue is rather timely. Thus, it was agreed that future technical assistance activities will give priority to data collection and processing in the transport sector, but with a special attention to road safety. All

documents and presentations of the 20th session are available at http://www.unece.org/trans/main/speca/speca_20.html.

During the SPECA Road Safety Capacity-building Workshop (Almaty, September 2015), which was held back-to-back to the 20th SPECA PWG-TBC, SPECA countries presented their current road safety situation, shared experiences on developing road safety legal and regulatory architecture, as well as on developing their national strategy, and setting up a road safety management system. Collection and analysis of road safety data for monitoring and evaluation was considered to be one of the key challenges.

Representatives of SPECA countries presented their efforts in improvement of two-wheelers road safety at the Round table on exploring the use of UN road safety legal instruments to address powered two-wheeled vehicles safety policies in low and middle income countries (Geneva, March 2015). Round table was initiated by the Governments of France, Italy and United States, supported by UNECE and held in conjunction with the 70th session of Working Party on Road Safety. In the conclusions, member countries were invited to do more in improvement of road safety legal framework, to strengthen the capacities of national transport research institutes, to focus on the most critical issues for power two-wheelers and to use modern technologies to address road safety problems (<http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trans/doc/2015/wp1/ECE-TRANS-WP1-149-e.pdf>).

In 2015, SPECA countries have benefited from several UNECE workshops and advisory missions. The capacity-building workshop on UN legal instruments on Inland Transport (accession procedures and benefits of the conventions) was organized back-to-back to the Inland Transport Committee Annual Meeting (Geneva, February 2015). Presentations and discussions during the workshop reaffirmed the need to access and implement UN legal instruments in order to create more efficient, safer and environmental friendly transport systems ([http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=38839#/#/](http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=38839#/)).

During the III International Transport Logistics Forum “New Silk Way” (Astana, May 2015) UNECE moderated “New Silk Way – the economic integration of East and West” panel where representatives of international financial institutions, transport organizations and enterprises exchanged experience on development of Euro-Asian transport links. Panellists discussed the prospective and challenges for the development of inland transport corridors, position and possibilities for the landlocked countries in global transport routes and the latest trends in the development of regional transport systems.

UNECE organized a Regional Seminar on the application of the TIR Convention in Dushanbe (May 2015) with the participation of officials from Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Azerbaijan, among others. Afghanistan has resumed its TIR operations only in 2013. The Seminar demonstrated the increased use of TIR in Central Asia, as well as the readiness of many countries in the region to proceed with computerization of customs procedures and establishment of single window concepts. The main message that emerged from the Seminar is that several countries in the region are now mature in their policy goals and strategic plans to achieve deeper integration and modernization of their trade and transport processes, especially border crossing procedures (<http://www.unece.org/tir/seminar/dushanbe-tajikistan/sem-tajikistan-english.html>).

The United Nations Development Account Project “Capacity Building for Control Authorities and Transport Operators to Improve Efficiency of Cross-border Transport in Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries”, implemented by ESCAP and completed in 2014, assisted Kazakhstan,

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on the application of the ESCAP transport facilitation toolkit and, in particular, to support the clusters' activities for practical implementation of action plans on transport facilitation at both national and corridor levels. SPECA countries were encouraged to use the above-mentioned toolkit and other ESCAP transport facilitation models.

The United Nations Development Account Project “Strengthening the capacities of developing countries and countries with economies in transition to facilitate legitimate border crossing, regional cooperation and integration” – lead by UNECE and implemented in cooperation with ESCAP, aims at increasing Customs-to-Customs electronic exchange of transit related data between, inter alia, Kyrgyzstan and its neighbouring countries to further improve risk management procedures at border crossing and, ultimately, further facilitate legitimate transport. As part of the project, a workshop on Customs-to-Customs Electronic Data Exchange has been organized in Issyk-Kul (Kyrgyzstan) on 7-8 September 2015 and was attended by delegations from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

III. TRADE

The ninth session of the SPECA Project Working Group on Trade was hosted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) on 3 July 2015, at the Palais des Nations, in Geneva. It was combined with the High-Level Seminar on Regional Trade Cooperation. The objective was to identify key issues for trade in the SPECA region; establish dialogue between the SPECA countries and international organizations on re-shaping the SPECA PWG on Trade: how these organizations (UNECE, UNCTAD, ITC, development partners) could support the Group in the medium to long term to unlock hitherto unused resources to develop the region and support efforts to lower high trade costs.

The session identified the following areas for concentration of SPECA work on trade: trade facilitation (notably, a regional trade facilitation strategy); implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA); integration into the global rules-based trading system (Global Goal 17.10); regional mechanism to exchange information on WTO negotiations; monitoring implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in trade; overcoming obstacles to cross-border supply chains in Central Asia; regional and national studies on non-tariff barriers to trade, benefits from regional trade, the economic impact of WTO membership, and trade with major partners outside the region.

The following goals were identified: (a) make SPECA a more action-driven platform to implement projects identified by Central Asian States and to share experiences; (b) connect to other regional economic initiatives, including the Istanbul process of confidence building measures, CAREC, ECO, the Eurasian Economic Union, TASIM, etc.; (c) focus on fostering good governance and robust institutions; (d) use SPECA as a forum for facilitating information exchanges on WTO issues; (e) reinforce the SPECA Aid-for-Trade initiative; (f) organize the next regional trade event in Ashgabat with special focus on WTO. It was suggested to establish a position in the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office in Almaty to support trade work.

Projects and activities

Aid-for-Trade. UNECE supported 19 representatives from SPECA countries to participate in the biannual Aid-for-Trade review meeting and UNECE side events on 1-2 July 2015, as well as a meeting between a Vice Minister of Turkmenistan with the Director General of WTO.

Single Window in Uzbekistan. UNECE provided support and expertise to the Government of Uzbekistan in implementing the second phase of the Single Window project in Uzbekistan through two seminars in 2014.

Capacity-building. The UNECE Regional Adviser offered training on readiness assessments and implementation of the WTO TFA at two seminars: for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in June 2015 and for Kazakhstan in October 2015. UNECE also organized on 24-26 August 2015 in Dushanbe, together with OSCE, training on the UNECE Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide (TFIG) for Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. It also organized, in cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Commission on Trade Facilitation and ESCAP, training on Business Process Analysis and assessing progress in building Single Window mechanisms on 15-16 May and 23-25 September 2015 (see: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=40729#/>)

Study on Regulatory and Procedural Barriers to Trade in Kyrgyzstan

UNECE undertook a study on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade in Kyrgyzstan (<http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=40565>) at the request of the Government. The study uses the UNECE evaluation methodology in order to capture both behind and at-the-border regulatory and procedural barriers to trade; highlight their impact on transaction costs; and detailed recommendations, including for action at a regional level. The Deputy Minister of trade of Kyrgyzstan reported on the steps that the Government would take in order to implement the recommendations emerging from the study. The study also sets the stage for generating synergies between interventions targeting improved productivity and export growth, as stipulated in the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2013-2017 and the Programme for the Transition of the Kyrgyz Republic to Sustainable Development for 2013-2017. The study would be followed by concerted efforts to mobilize the required financial resources for implementation. The Government will develop a prioritized action plan, to be integrated into Kyrgyzstan's United Nations Development Action Framework (UNDAF) and used as a basis for a national Aid-for-Trade (AfT) plan. It would also work with the UNECE to develop multi-agency technical assistance projects to implement the recommendations. The Governments of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan are following up on the recommendations of the studies on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade in these countries. There are no explicit plans for future studies in SPECA countries, even if Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are considering this possibility. The SPECA Governing Council (or the PWG on Trade) might wish to pass a decision on a joint request for a regional study on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade.

Agricultural Quality Standards

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