
CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES STRENGTHEN COOPERATION TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC RECOVERY POST-COVID-19

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High-level officials at the SPECA Economic Forum, which opened today, also called for strengthened regional cooperation in the areas of trade, transport, and digital connectivity, according to UN ESCAP.

Over the next two days, they will further identify potential opportunities for enhanced cooperation to support sustainable and inclusive socio-economic recovery efforts in the subregion.

Overcoming the COVID-19-induced developmental setback provides a unique opportunity for SPECA member States to repurpose policy priorities in making economies more resilient to future pandemics and crises. In this context, harnessing regional cooperation, especially among SPECA member States and with its neighbors, must be focused to promote the SDGs and other internationally agreed development goals, said United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana in her opening remarks. ESCAP, in close collaboration with UNECE, is committed to move forward the recommendations of the Forum to build back better and advance the SDGs for SPECA member States and beyond.

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a devastating impact on our economies, with a particularly strong impact on the poor and the most vulnerable, said United Nations Under-Secretary-General and UNECE Executive Secretary Olga Algayerova. I strongly support the decisions of the Governing Council in recent years to turn SPECA into a platform for subregional cooperation to achieve the SDGs. UNECE stands ready, alongside ESCAP, to help with our numerous tools: conventions, standards and best practice recommendations, to recover from the crisis and get on track for the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement – including, crucially, by accelerating the shift to a circular economy.

This year's Forum will review complementarities between the implementation of short- to medium-term measures to support socioeconomic recovery and responding to the call for action to accelerate implementation of relevant international agendas such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Vienna Programme of Action.

SPECA countries are expected to consider accession to relevant regional and international agreements to strengthen trade and transport connectivity such as the Asia-Pacific Trade

Agreement, Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross Border Paperless Trade, Asian Highway Network, Trans-Asian Railway Network and IA on Dry Ports. SPECA countries will also discuss innovative financing strategies for resource mobilization efforts, and the development of national policies and action plans to step up digitalization and innovation. Recommendations emerging from the 2020 SPECA Economic Forum will be submitted for adoption to the 15th session of the SPECA Governing Council on 20 November 2020.

SPECA was launched in 1998 to strengthen subregional cooperation in Central Asia and its integration into the world economy. It also provides a platform for cross-border cooperation for the achievement of the SDGs. The countries of SPECA are Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. ESCAP and UNECE jointly provide support to SPECA.

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