**CONCEPT NOTE**

**Ministerial meeting of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) on the sidelines of the 80th session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**

*(23 April 2024, CR-4, Level 1, United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok)*

**Background**

The United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) was established by the Tashkent Declaration of 1998, signed by the Presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. They were later joined by Turkmenistan, as well as Afghanistan and Azerbaijan. SPECA is a country-owned and country-run programme under the auspices of the UN – supported by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). It aims at facilitating economic cooperation in the SPECA region, integration of the SPECA participating States into the world economy and fostering cross-border cooperation for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. SPECA provides a neutral United Nations platform for discussions on strategic issues of regional economic cooperation among the SPECA participating States as well as their integration into the world economy. The Programme is chaired by the participating States on an annual basis.

In 2024, the chairing country is the Republic of Tajikistan, which has the ambition to raise the profile of the Programme based on support of the SPECA participating States, to facilitate integration of SPECA States to the European and Asian markets, as well as, among SPECA States.

**Purpose and objectives**

As the Chair of SPECA in 2024, Tajikistan, together with ESCAP and UNECE, is proposing to convene the SPECA ministerial meeting in Bangkok, on the sidelines of the 80th session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

The proposed meeting at the level of ministers responsible for economic activities will provide an opportunity for SPECA participating States to discuss key emerging issues related to green development and give new impetus to enhancing trade and economic cooperation in the SPECA region.

In this context, the proposed ministerial meeting will contribute to:

1. Follow up on the outcomes of the SPECA Summit in Baku on 24 November 2023, including:

* Taking measures to implement the Roadmap for Digitalization of Multimodal Data and Document Exchange along the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor using UN legal instruments and standards;
* taking measures to create the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund “SPECA Fund”.

1. Strengthening the commitment of participating States and putting SPECA on the path to becoming an even more effective and efficient platform for regional cooperation.
2. Setting the stage for the events under Tajikistan’s chairmanship of SPECA in 2024.
3. Developing a common vision for the SPECA participating States ahead of the UN Future Summit and other key events in 2024.

**Thematic focus**

Thematic clusters that could be addressed at the meeting include:

1. Steps towards shaping a SPECA Agenda 2030.
2. Green development and strengthening cooperation to respond to climate change.
3. Effective use of economic corridors in the SPECA region and beyond, including trade facilitation and transport connectivity through digitalization (in line with the Road Map).
4. Trade and economic cooperation between SPECA participating States, including on issues related to the WTO.
5. Establishment of the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund “SPECA Fund”, including agreement on the Terms of Reference of the Fund.

Discussions at this ministerial-level meeting will feed into the work undertaken during the Chairmanship of Tajikistan to raise the profile of the Programme internationally as a platform for regional cooperation in the pursuit of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

**Format**

The meeting is envisaged as a special ministerial event on the sidelines of the 80th session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).