

2021 SPECA Economic Forum  
“Connectivity: Sustainable Transport and Trade Facilitation for a Green and  
Inclusive Economy after Pandemic”  
*(Tashkent, 17-18 November 2021)*

**Statement**

**Deputy Head of the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for  
Central Asia, Mr. Phil Saprykin**

Opening of the Forum

Dear Chairperson, dear Ladies and Gentlemen,  
I am delighted to participate today in the 2021 SPECA Forum and I would like to thank the Government of Uzbekistan, the UNECE and ESCAP, and other partners for organizing this important event.

The Economic Forum offers an extraordinary opportunity to positively contribute to innovative approaches to some of the outstanding – and long-standing – challenges throughout the Caspian and Central Asian regions. It is essential to put sustainable development, connectivity, inclusive growth together with mitigating climate change into the broader context of peace and security in the region.

The Caspian region and Central Asia have long been connected not only through historical trade routes, cultural similarities, but also, they are united by common geopolitical threats and challenges – such as threats to peace and security, terrorism and extremism, drug-trafficking and organized crime, preserving water/maritime resources, ensuring economic growth.

The states of Central Asia have dedicated much time and attention to improving inter-connectivity and economic development at both the national and multilateral levels. We should be grateful to the Central Asian countries for the vigorous transport diplomacy, for example, as shown by the United Nations General Assembly’s resolutions on sustainable transport in recent years. I would also like to complement efforts of the Central Asian countries in advancing a

number of important regional initiatives, which are essential for widening the intra - regional trade.

New transport corridors and throughways are highly important for economic growth and trade, sustainable development, people's mobility, including the needs of vulnerable groups such, as women, children, youth, elderly people, disabled people, indigenous communities, and more, and in the long run are conducive to ensuring prosperity, peace and security. Let alone, it helps better cooperate, coordinate and share benefits of growing confidence between countries to ensure lasting peace and prosperity.

So far, the Central Asian states tend to have their main trading partners outside the region. In itself, this is a positive trend as it means more opportunities to benefit from large markets of China, Russia and India, and to integrate into broader regional initiatives such as the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the free trade zone of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Eurasian Economic Union. At the same time, the intra-regional trade can bring even more benefits as it helps to diversify economies and create new industries and jobs through increasing trade in higher value-added products.

Let me highlight also that the issue of environmental degradation has been recently one the outstanding topics on the regional agenda. The current global pandemic posed challenges for water and climate in the world, which also holds back on economic growth and social development. Against this backdrop, the overall growth of aridity and the declining availability of water resources is observed in Central Asia. As the UN Secretary General noted in his Annual Report (2020): "Recovery from the COVID-19 should go hand in hand with Climate Action."

For the UNRCCA, with its regional preventive diplomacy mandate, it is therefore extremely important to support your work. Our Centre was established 14 years ago to foster regional cooperation among the five Central Asian

countries to address the most pressing challenges before the region. We are working to build cooperation in areas such as counter-terrorism, regional connectivity, trans-boundary water management and addressing climate change in the hopes that this will bolster peace and security in the region and beyond.

In concluding, I would like to note that the political will of the leaders of the Central Asia states to find solutions to all outstanding regional issues is truly commendable. This was clearly displayed, as USG Olga Algayerova has already mentioned, at the recent 3<sup>rd</sup> Consultative meeting of Central Asian Leaders, last August in the Turkmen coastal city of Awaza, and at the previous Summits in Tashkent and Nursultan. The Ashgabat Initiative, the Bishkek Declaration as well as the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy and Principles of Sustainable Trade, also lay robust foundations for generating economic development and prosperity in the Central and Caspian regions.

Thank you!