Conclusions and Recommendations

from the technical workshop

*“Single Window Implementation Approach and Data Sharing:*

*Connectivity for the Western Balkans*”

Skopje, 15-16 November 2018

As part of the overall work on improving the connectivity in the Western Balkans, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Customs Administration of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) organized a technical cooperation workshop *“Single Window Implementation Approach and Data Sharing: Connectivity for the Western Balkans*”, in Skopje from 15 to 16 November 2018. The target audience were experts from the Western Balkans dealing with projects on Single Window for export and import clearance, with a view to link these and related projects to the work on Single Window in the European Union and the United Nations. Interoperability of Single Window and other IT systems facilitating international trade in the broader European space can only be achieved by using in these systems the same semantic standards for data sharing in the process of regulation of international trade.

This was an interactive workshop where representatives from the Western Balkan countries presented their work on the Single Window, digital Customs, interagency and international data exchange. Experts from UNECE, the Directorate General for Taxation and Customs Union (DG TAXUD) of the European Commission, and the Chair of the UN Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) presented current work on the Single Window in the European Union and the UNECE region, and how to use international standards and data models. They carried out practical exercises, including on the EU Customs Data Model (a customization of the World Customs Organization Data Model), and the UN/CEFACT Multimodal Transport Reference Data Model, which is one of the Buy-Ship-Pay Reference Data Models developed by UN/CEFACT. The Chair of UN/CEFACT shared her experience in the development of the WCO, EU Customs, and UN/CEFACT Multimodal Transport Reference Data Model.

Mr. Gjoko Tanasoski, Director General of the Customs Administration of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia noted that this workshop was very timely, and responded to the need of the countries to reconnect to the work in the European Union on the Single Window, at a time when a World Bank project to support Single Window and trade facilitation was prepared.

The participants put forward the following recommendations:

1. This workshop should support the Western Balkan countries to engage further in the work to implement national cross-border trade Single Windows, as defined in UNECE Recommendation 33, with the use of international standards, for data modelling.
2. The Western Balkan country teams, the European Commission and the UNECE and its subsidiary body UN/CEFACT should build a network of experts in support of regular cooperation on the national Single Window and data harmonization issues.
3. Whilst doing so, cooperation and convergence towards the EU Single Window environment for customs could be a strategic objective. Notably, the Western Balkan countries could usefully pursue the use of the EU Customs Single Window CERTEX (EU CSW-CERTEX) Guide for the integration of electronic certificates and licenses in each of their national Single Windows.
4. The Western Balkan countries should continue working on implementing fully automated electronic Customs declarations. They should intensify efforts to involve all relevant regulatory agencies participating in the Single Window. They should also use Business Process Analysis, data modelling and other tools presented at the workshop.
5. Existing systems, such as the EXIM Single Window, should be updated to integrate paperless Customs declaration with the licensing module, and use the WCO Data Model version 3.7 or newer, the UN/CEFACT Reference Data Models, the EU CSW-CERTEX specifications as well as the United Nations Trade Data Elements Directory (UNTDED), the UN/CEFACT Core Components Library (CCL), recommendations, codes and other tools of UN/CEFACT. Capacity-building on these tools should be envisaged.
6. The participants recommended deepening the collaboration between the country teams, UNECE, UN/CFACT, DG TAXUD, the World Bank project on trade facilitation and Single Window and CEFTA, so that the World Bank’s support to the Western Balkan countries can be aligned with the countries’ general orientation to European integration.
7. Arrange a smart train the trainer exercise on data harmonization and the use of the EU CDM for relevant experts from the Western Balkan countries. Request the World Bank and CEFTA to support this work.
8. Organize a follow-up meeting (physical or virtual) in 2019 to review progress. Consider a project approach to the above issues, in collaboration with the World Bank, CEFTA, DG TAXUD, USAID, and other partners.