

Third Technical Cooperation Workshop for the Western Balkans
Single Window and Data Sharing in the Western Balkans

(5 min)

Online seminar for the Western Balkans, 27-28 October 2020, 14:00 – 17:00 CET

**Statement of Ms. Elisabeth Tuerk,
Director, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, UNECE**

Dear
Mr. Tanàsoski
Mr. Veteròvski
Mr. Gain
Mr. Saadàoui
Ms. Karadzà
Ms. Probert

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished speakers,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this third annual seminar on Trade Facilitation, the Single Window and Data Sharing in the Western Balkans.

Unfortunately, the COVID19 pandemic is preventing us from organizing this seminar physically in your beautiful region. A region where we have always felt the hospitality and entrepreneurial spirit of your people.

Yet we are not giving up!

Together with our colleagues from North Macedonia, with the countries of the region and with our development partners, we will carry out the seminar online, during two consecutive afternoons.

Let me begin by expressing our gratitude to our partners:

1. First, I would like to thank our virtual hosts for their support for trade facilitation and the Single Window concept.
 - a. In UNECE, we consider the Single Window project in North Macedonia as one of our great success stories.
 - b. I understand we have a long history together, going back as long as a similar regional seminar in December 2006, in Òhrìd.
 - c. That is where we planted the seeds together, and our colleagues grew a big tree: the EXIM Single Window project. At that time this was the second Single Window project in Europe after one in Sweden.
2. Second, I would also like to thank our partners from the World Bank, the European Commission, CEFTA, UN/CEFACT, and UNCTAD.
 - a. I wish to thank them for their support and readiness to exchange views and work together to support this fast-developing region.
 - b. Here we are looking at a region that seeks advanced solutions for its integration into the European and the world economy.

- c. Adoption of advanced trade facilitation instruments, such as the Single Window for import, export and transit clearance and projects for data harmonization have a key role to play in this regard.
3. Third, I would also like to thank all participants from the other Western Balkan countries and Moldova for their engagement and for their interest and time dedicated to the topics of this seminar.

I truly believe it's worth the time we are spending to organize and join the seminar. There are several reasons for this.

4. I just mentioned that the North Macedonian SW is the oldest in Europe. It was launched in 2009. It has demonstrated resilience over time, but this also means that the system needs review and modernization.
 - a. So, here is where UN/CEFACT is coming in.
 - b. The standards and reference data models of UN/CEFACT can be among the sharpest tools in your box, when you work on the modernization of trade procedures, to achieve better connectivity and interoperability.
5. Over the last year, UN/CEFACT has significantly advanced the work on trade facilitation and e-business standards.
 - a. Several reference data models, suited to the concrete business requirements, building on the semantic reference standards of UN/CEFACT, such as the Core Components Library, have been developed.
 - b. There is much potential synergy in this initiative, and I wish that we can build on it together – to clarify what standards and tools can be best used for the benefit of the countries, their Single Window and data exchange projects, as well as for their bid to accede to the European integration.
6. In addition, paradoxically, the COVID-19 pandemic has given us a window of opportunity.
 - a. Now more than ever we see the importance of harmonizing data exchange among various agencies, the public and private sectors and among different modes of transport.
 - b. In today's world of global and regional supply chains, criss-crossing the planet, we clearly see the benefit of seamlessly exchanging information between documents, sectors, or modes of transport.
 - c. This is essential for ensuring the resilience of supply chains. If this can be done electronically, without paper, and without person-to-person contacts, the benefits in today's COVID-19 situation are even clearer.
 - d. UNECE takes part in an important multiagency United Nations project on the rapid response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - e. One segment in this project is dedicated to finalizing and implementing a package of standards for a digital multimodal data exchange among different modes of transport and sectors, using the UNECE and UN/CEFACT tools as the common denominator allowing for interoperability and resilience of supply chains.
7. In conclusion, I invite the Western Balkans and development partners to use our new standards for the digitalization of trade and transport in relevant pilot projects.
 - a. For Western Balkan countries that are candidates to the EU, it would be particularly interesting to focus on the implementation of UNECE standards that are supported by the EU:
 - i. for example, the Cross-Industry Invoice for government procurement,
 - ii. as well as some certificates, like the phytosanitary and veterinary certificates based on our revised eCERT standard.
 - b.

8. As mentioned before, dematerialization – the move from paper-based processes to digital process - is important in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic right now.
9. As the Director of the UNECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division I am proud of what UNECE has achieved in cooperation with you in the past.
10. I very much hope that we can build on this and achieve even more – together with our partner countries and development partners.
11. I sincerely wish you all success in your endeavours. I thank you for the attention, and I thank the UNECE Team, particularly Mr. Mario Apostolov, Regional Adviser, UNECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, as well as Mr. Zlatko Veterovski from the Customs Administration of North Macedonia for all their efforts and dedication in making this happen.