www.unece.org/trans/bcf/etir/background.html

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) administers the TIR Convention, which was established in 1959 and extensively revised in 1975 and which has, at present, 68 Contracting Parties. The TIR Convention provides for an internationally recognized procedure to facilitate the cross border transportation of goods in transit through the use of a standard, internationally recognized Customs document, the TIR Carnet[1], which also serves as proof of existence of an internationally valid guarantee.

For many years the TIR Convention proved to be an efficient facilitation tool. However, with the progress in technology, the use of the paper TIR Carnet is increasingly becoming archaic, in particular when it comes to linking it to the electronic procedures applied by national Customs administrations. At each border crossing, Customs officers are faced with additional work of having to key in up to 50 data elements into their national electronic Customs system. In addition, the current situation does not enable Customs authorities to effectively apply risk management procedures based on advance cargo information, as demanded by an increasingly more security-conscious environment.

The eTIR Project

The Contracting Parties to the TIR Convention launched in 2003 the so-called “eTIR Project”, aimed at providing an exchange platform for all actors (Customs authorities, holders[2], guarantee chains) involved in the TIR system, known as the “eTIR international system”. The eTIR international system aims to ensure the secure exchange of data between national Customs systems related to the international transit of goods, vehicles or containers according to the provisions of the TIR Convention and to allow Customs to manage the data on guarantees, issued by guarantee chains to holders authorized to use the TIR system.

Figure 1 graphically represents the information exchange between the actors in the eTIR system. It shows that that only a part of the information flow, required for the functioning of the TIR procedure, will pass through the eTIR international system. It also indicates that the eTIR international system does not extend to the submission of a TIR declaration by the holder. At the request of Contracting Parties and industry, the technical realization of electronic declaration systems will be left up to initiatives at private or national level. However, the eTIR Project will define the content and format of the national declaration messages.

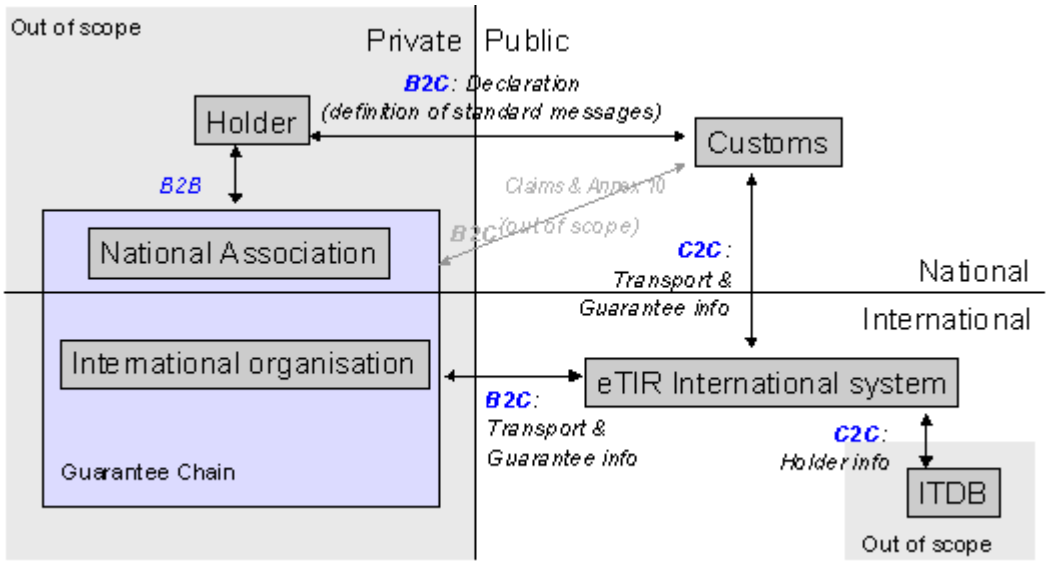

Figure 1: Information flow between the actors3, of the eTIR system

The eTIR system depends on parallel efforts from Contracting Parties and guarantee chains to develop or update and interconnect with national and private systems.

Example of an eTIR transport

In the eTIR system, a holder first requests a guarantee from a guarantee chain to perform a given TIR transport. If the request is granted, the guarantee chain provides the holder with a guarantee reference number. The guarantee chain then registers the issued guarantee with the eTIR international system. As a next step, the holder sends a standard advance cargo information message (i.e. all information contained in the declaration) to the Customs authorities of the office of departure, using a national declaration mechanism, allowing them to perform any required risk

assessment procedures. Then, the holder presents vehicle, goods and guarantee reference at the Customs office of departure for the purpose of lodging the declaration, based on the advance cargo information message already available in the national Customs system. Customs inspect vehicle and goods according to the results of the risk assessment and verify the status of the guarantee with the eTIR international system. If all checks are in order, Customs accept the declaration and forward the relevant TIR transport data (declaration data, results of the checks, seals numbers, etc) to the eTIR international system. The eTIR international system provides all Customs administrations involved in the TIR transport (according to the itinerary as declared by the holder) with the TIR transport information, thus serving as advance cargo information for the subsequent Customs authorities. The guarantee chain, which has issued the guarantee concerned, will be notified of any change in the status of the guarantee and can consult, at any time, the eTIR international system on the status of guarantees issued by it.

Upon arrival at a consecutive Customs office of entry, the procedure is repeated, based on the advance cargo information available through the eTIR international system and the risk assessment performed by the Customs authorities involved. Specific steps are foreseen in case the TIR transport consists of multiple places of loading or unloading.

Each time the TIR transport reaches a Customs office of exit or destination, the Customs authorities inform the eTIR international system of the termination of the concerned TIR operation[4]. The same procedure applies for the notification of the discharge of each TIR operation.

Benefits and challenges

The eTIR system offers benefits to all actors involved in the TIR system. First, it brings additional security and risk management opportunities, thus reducing the risk of fraud. Second, advanced international cooperation will allow all actors to significantly reduce their administrative burden and to maximize the benefits of integrated supply chain management. Finally, the provision of advance cargo information and the exchange of information in real time will speed up the TIR procedure.

Reference material

Complete and chronological information on the eTIR Project and its progress is contained in the Introduction Chapter of the Reference Model.

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[1] A TIR Carnet can be used to cover a single TIR transport, consisting of a chain of TIR operations. At present, TIR Carnets are printed and distributed by the International Road Transport Union (IRU) and issued by national associations to authorized TIR Carnet holders.
[2] Holder = a legal or natural person authorized under the provisions of the TIR Convention to use the TIR system.
[3] ITDB = International TIR Database, a repository of all the persons authorized to use the TIR system
[4] The information on termination is shared with the guarantee chain, providing it with more data than is requested by Annex 10 of the TIR Convention. At present, the SafeTIR system, developed by the IRU to collect the data mentioned in Annex 10, only receives data on the termination of those TIR operations where a partial or final unloading has taken place. As a consequence, all other terminations of TIR operations are not reported to that system.