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Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport

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Geneva, 5–8 February 2014
Item 8 (b) (i) of the provisional agenda
Customs Convention on the International Transport of
Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets (TIR Convention, 1975):
Revision of the Convention –
Preparation of Phase III of the TIR revision process

Report of the Informal Ad hoc Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure on its twenty-third session*

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* This document was submitted late due to the timing of the session.

I. Attendance

1.   The Informal Ad hoc Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure (further referred to as "the Expert Group") held its twenty-third session on 20 and 21 November 2013 in Brussels, at the kind invitation of the European Commission.

2.   The session was attended by experts from Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Turkey and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Experts representing the European Commission (EC), the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the International Road Transport Union (IRU) also attended the session.

3.   On behalf of the European Commission, Mr. Michael Rathje, Head of Customs Transit / Status Sector, delivered an introductory statement. He expressed the general support of the European Commission for the activities undertaken within the framework of GE.1 and confirmed that, for the future, the European Commission would continue to provide technical support to the eTIR Project. Taking into account that GE.1 is in the process of finalizing the tasks entrusted to it in accordance with its Terms of Reference, he called upon all stakeholders, meeting within the context of the Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport (WP.30) and the TIR Administrative Committee (AC.2), to make substantial progress in the discussions on the political, financial and legal aspects of computerization of the TIR procedure. Finally, he encouraged participants to inform the widest audience possible, both at national and at international level, about the achievements of GE.1 and the principles of the eTIR Project. In particular, he invited the UNECE TIR secretariat to present the eTIR Project to the European Union's Electronic Customs Group (ECG), at one of its forthcoming meetings.

II.   Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 1 (2013)

4.   The Expert Group adopted its provisional agenda as contained in Informal document GE.1 No. 6 (2013) and agreed to discuss Informal document GE.1 No. 10 (2013) under agenda item 3.c.

III. New information and communication technology developments in the TIR system (agenda item 2)

5.   IRU presented their continuous efforts to further computerize the private aspects of the TIR procedure. More specifically, IRU presented the latest developments of their CUTE-Wise, TIRCUTEweb and AskTIRweb, Real Time SafeTIR (RTS) and TIR-Electronic Pre-Declaration (TIR-EPD) applications. To date, 27 countries accept pre-declarations made through TIR-EPD and 18 countries transmit termination data using RTS. The Expert Group also welcomed the initiative of the IRU to start a project on issuing electronic guarantees.

6.   The Expert Group welcomed a presentation by the EC on the New Computerised Transit System (NCTS) Reference data management system. It noted that the system allows receiving automatically updates of any reference data by means of a subscription mechanism and pointed out that such services would allow maintaining the eTIR reference data up-to-date, in particular the TIR Customs offices database, whose development will be considered by AC.2 at its February 2014 session.

7. The Expert Group confirmed that its meetings remain an important platform for experts to share information and best practices on developments and experiences regarding information and communication technology (ICT) usage in the framework of the TIR procedure and encouraged participants and interested parties to inform the Expert Group about new developments at its future sessions.

IV. Reference Model of the TIR procedure (agenda item 3)

A. Contributions by the network of eTIR focal points

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 7 (2013), Informal document GE.1 No. 8 (2013)

8. The Expert Group took note of Informal document GE.1 No. 7 (2013), in particular that 31 countries have nominated at least one eTIR Focal Point.[1]

9. The Expert Group also welcomed Informal document GE.1 No. 8 (2013), containing a proposal by the secretariat to further define the roles and responsibilities of eTIR focal points. While agreeing with the proposal, the Expert Group asked the secretariat to send the document for comments to the eTIR focal points before submitting it to WP.30 for consideration.

B. International declaration mechanisms

Documentation Informal document GE.1 No. 9 (2013)

10. The Expert Group took note of Informal document GE.1 No. 9 (2013), containing a revised comparison between the data contained in message E9 and national data requirements for the TIR procedure. After having compared the mapping undertaken by Austria, Belgium, Hungary and Poland, the Expert Group requested the secretariat to seek further clarifications from these countries about certain differences and stressed the possible need, at a later stage, to organize workshops aimed at ensuring uniform mappings across all countries implementing eTIR. The Expert Group also noted that eTIR focal points had intentionally not included data elements required for safety and security purposes in their replies. The Expert Group recalled that all data elements identified in the WCO SAFE as required for safety and security in the framework of transit had already been included in the eTIR messages. Nevertheless, the Expert Group took note that, while implementing TIR-EPD, the IRU had had to adapt its system to allow TIR Carnet holders to provide numerous data elements, which had not been foreseen in the WCO SAFE. The Expert Group questioned whether it would still be possible to completely harmonize the data requirements for TIR, including those related to safety and security, knowing that so many countries already have a fully functional IT system in place with safety and security data defined nationally. The Expert Group decided to ask WP.30 if it should pursue its efforts to fully harmonize the eTIR data requirements or whether it has now become unavoidable to accept that transport companies would be required to electronically send safety and security related data directly to (all) customs administrations (involved in a TIR transport), despite the complications the Expert Group had previously underlined on the electronic submission of electronic information in foreign countries.

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[1] The list of eTIR focal points is on the eTIR web site: www.unece.org/trans/bcf/eTIR/focals.html.

C.   eTIR Reference Model, version 4.0

Documentation Informal document GE.1 No. 4 (2013), Informal document GE.1 No. 10 (2013)

11.   The Expert Group welcomed version 4.0a of the eTIR Reference Model. It took note of the various changes introduced in this version, in particular: the inclusion of the latest references to decisions by the Expert Group and WP.30 in the Introduction, the alignment of all message to the WCO data model v.3.3 (including Customs to Customs (C2C) messages), the reorganization of the various Chapters containing the message descriptions, the introduction of figures to better visualize messages, the integration of Chapter 4 and its Annex as well as the insertion of a new Annex entitled "Cost Benefit Analysis of the eTIR system: summary, limitations and recommendations". The Expert Group expressed its great appreciation for the extensive contribution by Mr. Hans Greven (Netherlands) in preparing the descriptions of the eTIR messages.

12.   Furthermore, the Expert Group reconsidered if it was necessary to keep UN/EDIFACT message descriptions for a newly devised system such as eTIR, in particular considering that it could ultimately further complicate the process envisaged to ensure the integrity of the data submitted, i.e. the use of hash codes. Taking into account that some countries will use legacy systems based on UN/EDIFACT to allow for the submission of eTIR data (e.g. Belgium) the Expert Group decided to keep UN/EDIFACT as a possible option for communicating TIR data to customs administrations. As a consequence and while taking into account the outcome if its discussion under agenda item 3.b, the Expert Group decided it should consider if the direct submission of TIR data by the transport operator to customs administrations could replace the hash code mechanism to ensure the integrity of the data. The Expert Group acknowledged that, today, this is a current practice in all countries requiring the submission of electronic advance cargo information, either using nationally provided declaration mechanisms or the TIR-EPD system of the IRU. The Expert Group requested the secretariat to present an informal document on this issue to WP.30 at its February 2014 session and ask WP.30 whether the eTIR project should abandon the objective to request the submission of electronic information only in countries with Customs offices of departure. It also requested the secretariat to analyse the consequences of such a change on the eTIR reference model as a whole, including on the fall-back scenarios.

13.   The Expert Group also considered Informal document GE.1 No. 10 (2013), containing a proposal by the secretariat to include in the eTIR Reference Model tables cross-referencing the functional message descriptions and the tags used in XML schemas. The Expert Group recognized the usefulness of such tables and requested the secretariat to include them in Chapter 4.2.3.1. The Expert Group also pointed out that UN/EDIFACT message descriptions (Chapter 4.2.3.2) should be amended and be aligned to the WCO data model v.3.3. It requested the secretariat to issue a version 4.1a of the eTIR Reference Model that would include the changes requested above, for consideration by WP.30, possibly at its June 2014 session.

V.   Next steps (agenda item 4)

14.   The Expert Group considered all tasks and activities listed in its Terms of Reference (TRANS/WP.30/2002/11, Annex 1). After extensive discussions, the Expert Group was of the opinion that the eTIR Reference Model fully covers the mandate that WP.30 had entrusted it with. At the same time, the Expert Group was conscious that, ultimately, it is the task of the WP.30 to endorse the eTIR Reference Model and consider if the Expert Group has satisfactorily fulfilled its mandate.

15.   Version 4.1a of the eTIR Reference model will become the basis for WP.30 on which to judge the relevance of the issues raised in paragraphs 10 and 12 above. Should WP.30 agree with those conceptual changes, the reference model would require one more round of revisions, starting with the high-level business requirements and, possibly, requiring updates in the design of the system.

16.   In conclusion, the Expert Group was of the opinion that it was time to summarize the results of its work (i.e. the eTIR Reference Model). To this end, the Expert Group requested the secretariat to prepare a document, developing on its activities and the results achieved, for discussion and, possibly, adoption at its next session. The requested document should also contain some recommendations to WP.30 on how to further pursue the process of computerization of the TIR procedure, in particular, the construction and transition phases.

VI.   Other business (agenda item 5)

A.   World Customs Organization activities

17.   The Expert Group thanked the WCO delegation for attending the meeting and presenting the latest WCO activities relevant to the work of the Expert Group.

18.   The Expert Group took note that Admission Temporaire/Temporary Admission (ATA) Carnets and procedures are based on two international conventions, i.e. the Istanbul Convention and the ATA Convention. The Administrative Committees of the Istanbul Convention and the ATA Convention are held annually. At the last meeting, the Committee of the Istanbul Convention decided to introduce a new Article[2], allowing the use of both electronic and paper ATA Carnets. Contracting Parties have until May 2014 to review the proposed amendment. If no objection is raised by then, the amendment will enter into force in November 2014. Nevertheless, this amendment might not lead to the full computerization of the ATA procedure, since the amendment will not apply to the ATA Convention and some of the Contracting Parties to the ATA Convention disagreed with the proposed amendment.

19.   The Expert Group also took note that the revised Kyoto Convention sets out detailed standards and recommended practices on Customs transit, including necessary formalities, Customs seals and responsibility of persons. WCO members had expressed their willingness to increase the exchange of practices and experiences in the field of transit, including regional/bilateral agreements and other arrangements covering international transit procedures. To this end, WCO has been organizing meetings and workshops, but more recently, the WCO Permanent Technical Committee decided to go a step further and develop a Handbook on transit.

20.   The Expert Group was reminded that the Globally Networked Customs (GNC) project refers to the voluntary arrangement between two or more members for a seamless exchange of cross border information between Customs administrations using a standardized approach based on existing WCO instruments. The Expert Group took note that the EU and the United States of America, as part of their Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) Mutual Recognition arrangement, agreed to use the GNC concept for the exchange of AEO information. The ATA Administrative Committee also decided that the eATA project should be based on GNC concepts. The Expert Group took note that, as in

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[2] "Article 21a: All formalities for implementing the provisions of this Convention may be carried out electronically by using electronic data-processing techniques approved by the Contracting Parties."

the eTIR project, the peer-to-peer data exchange approach was not the preferred option. The use of a "hub" should allow connecting the various actors more efficiently.

21.   Finally, the Expert Ggroup took note that the eATA Working Group held its second meeting on 13 December 2013, where it is expected to discuss the salient features of eATA, including the information exchange model, the role of the Issuing Authorities and the International Chamber of Commerce.

B.   Other activities of interest

22.   The Expert Group took note of the progress made in the United Nations Development Account (UNDA) project: "Strengthening the capacities of developing countries and countries with economies in transition to facilitate legitimate border crossing, regional cooperation and integration". It took note that, for UNECE, a consultant had been mandated and was currently working on a gap analysis aimed at identifying the technical and legal obstacles in undertaking Customs-to-Customs (C2C) electronic exchange of transit data in Georgia. It also took note that the other regional commissions were at different stages of completing the gap analysis in their region, but that, once the analyses would be completed, the first interregional expert group meeting would be convened. The group will assess for each pilot country, on the basis of the gap analyses, if the resources available in the framework of the project should be used to assist countries in the actual electronic exchange of transit data (technically or legally) or, if they will be used to devise an action plan aimed at filling in the identified gaps.

23.   The Expert Group also took note that the Italian and Turkish customs administrations met on 22 November 2013 to continue their work on the eTIR pilot project. The Expert Group reiterated its support for the project and expressed interest in receiving regular updates on the project at its future sessions.

C.   Date and place of next session

24.   The Expert Group, not being in a position to agree on a specific date for its next session, requested the secretariat to propose tentative dates for its next session, possibly in spring 2014, and transmit them to the participants at the first opportunity.

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