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Matters arising since the twenty-fourth session

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And other International Developments

Summary

The secretariat will report on matters arising since the twenty-fourth session. This document also provides a summary of the main international developments relevant to the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) and an overview of the outreach and support activities of the secretariat to enhance the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and UN/CEFACT recommendations, standards and tools for trade facilitation and electronic business.

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I. International developments

A. UNCTAD eTrade Initiative

1. E-commerce continues to grow in the global economy. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) 2017 Information Economy Report, the value of global e-commerce increased to an estimated US\$25 trillion in 2015—up from US\$16 trillion in 2013. The world is on the cusp of a new digital economy, which will have transformational impacts on the global economy, creating both opportunities and challenges for government, business and people alike. In the evolving landscape of e-commerce and the digital economy, various forms of digital platforms play a central role, facilitating e-commerce, payments, labour opportunities and cloud work as well as social interaction.

2. In 2017, at E-Commerce Week, UNCTAD formally launched the multi-stakeholder initiative “eTrade for All”, which currently includes twenty-nine international organizations. The goal of this initiative is to support effective cooperation in delivering coordinated assistance to beneficiary countries in the area of international electronic commerce. This initiative is expected to provide direct benefits by enhancing coordination and the ability to respond in an effective and efficient way to countries’ requests for support, in line with respective mandates and expertise, while preventing duplication of efforts. Within this initiative, an International Group of Experts (IGE) produces policy recommendations, while UNCTAD supports the drafting of Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessments for least developed countries and national e-commerce strategies. The United Nation Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) is a partner in the initiative. This will allow the further dissemination and uptake of its recommendations, standards and tools through the work of other organizations.

3. The 2018 E-Commerce Week put emphasis on the development dimension of digital platforms. In the context of this conference, UN/CEFACT organized two sessions: 1) “Fostering effective trade logistics in a digital world” (organized jointly with UNCTAD and the International Trade Centre) to share views and experiences concerning the challenges and opportunities for international transport and trade facilitation arising from the e-commerce and trade logistics interface—especially for Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs); and 2) “Blockchain for trade facilitation”, which featured several use cases for this advanced technology (e.g. to reduce hunger, to help small business invoice financing innovation, to support the 3Ds of the energy industry¹, and to facilitate supply chain management). These are key development areas for UN/CEFACT experts who are working on new projects, including the publication of a White Paper on Blockchain Technology for Trade Facilitation (See Section II.A).

B. WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement

4. The World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) entered into force on 22 February 2017, after two-thirds of the WTO membership completed their domestic ratification process. This marked an important milestone in the history of the WTO and remains one of the most important international developments for the work of UN/CEFACT. The first multilateral trade agreement concluded since the WTO was

¹ Digitization, Decentralization, and Decarbonization.

established twenty years ago, it has the potential to greatly reduce the regulatory and procedural barriers to trade. Estimates show that the full implementation of the TFA could reduce trade costs by an average of 14.3 per cent and boost global trade by up to US\$1 trillion per year, with the biggest gains in the poorest countries. For the first time in WTO history, the requirement to implement the Agreement is directly linked to the capacity of a country to do so. A Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility (TFAF) has been created to help ensure developing and least-developed countries obtain the assistance needed to reap the full benefits of the TFA. As of 4 January 2019, 138 countries have ratified the TFA.

5. The Agreement provides a legal framework for the implementation of many of the UNECE and UN/CEFACT recommendations, standards and tools developed over the past fifty years, all of which are freely available to Member States. It also provides a powerful boost to the political will to implement these measures and to the ability of developing countries to obtain technical assistance for their implementation.

6. Key supporting UNECE Recommendations and UN/CEFACT Standards for the WTO TFA include:

- UNECE Recommendation No. 1 on the United Nations Layout Key;
- Revised UNECE Recommendation No. 4 on National Trade Facilitation Bodies;
- UNECE Recommendation No. 18 on Facilitation Measures related to International Trade Procedures;
- UNECE Recommendations No. 33 to No. 36 on Single Window;
- UNECE Recommendation No. 40 on Consultation Approaches; and
- UN/CEFACT Standards that can support implementation such as the Core Components Library (UN/CCL); the United Nations Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport (UN/EDIFACT); Code Lists and various Business Requirement Standards (BRS) and Requirements Specification Mappings (RSM).

7. In addition, the UNECE secretariat has been active in supporting the implementation of the Agreement. Specific activities include the following:

- UNECE has been playing an active role in the meetings of the Annex D+ Organizations², organized by the WTO to coordinate the efforts of international organizations to support the WTO TFAF. In this context, UNECE co-organized—in cooperation with WTO, the World Customs Organization (WCO), the World Bank Group, UNCTAD, the World Economic Forum (WEF), and the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)—the first regional Forum of the National Trade Facilitation Committees in Africa, on 21-23 November 2018, with the purpose of facilitating the exchange of best practices, lessons learned and key success factors for the effective operation of such bodies in the implementation of trade facilitation reforms. UNECE plans to organize a similar forum for the UNECE region in 2019.

² On 1 August 2004, the WTO General Council adopted a Decision on the Doha Agenda work programme. Annex D to that Decision relates to the Modalities for negotiations on trade facilitation. Those Modalities recognize the importance of technical assistance and capacity building support for developing and least-developed countries, to enable them to fully participate in and benefit from the negotiations. To make technical assistance and capacity building more effective and operational, and to ensure better coherence, certain relevant international organizations have been invited to undertake a collaborative effort in this regard. The international organizations concerned are referred to as the “Annex D+ Organizations”. At present the Annex D+ group is comprised of the following organizations: IMF, ITC, OECD, UNCTAD, UNECE, UNIDO, WEF, World Bank Group, WCO.

- UNECE has been participating in international workshops and meetings to demonstrate the role of UN/CEFACT in supporting the Agreement. In particular, UNECE contributed to the meeting of the Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, held in Belgrade in July 2018, to brief parliamentarians on the outcomes of the eleventh Ministerial Conference held in Buenos Aires in December 2017; to introduced them to the WTO TFA, its benefits and implementation requirements; and provided them with an overview of progress in the implementation of the Agreement according to the 2017 United Nations Regional Commissions Report on Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade, with a focus on countries of the Mediterranean region.

8. The main focus of international organizations and donors in the trade sector over the coming years will be to assist countries to analyse priority measures under the Agreement and to support them in their actual implementation. Coordination of such support for the WTO TFA amongst international organizations is key to ensuring efficiency of delivery and avoidance of overlaps.

9. To this end, UNECE will continue to work closely with its partners, and especially UNCTAD and the International Trade Centre (ITC), to develop and deliver joint products and support services. During 2018, UNECE joined forces with ITC to support the Tajik National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) in implementing the WTO TFA, including through the development of a national Roadmap for Trade Facilitation Implementation (See Section II.E).

10. Such joint efforts will include the continued delivery of the Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide (TFIG) under a joint banner, as a United Nations tool which will incorporate tools and products from other United Nations agencies. In this context, a joint project has been undertaken with the ITC to enhance the content of the TFIG in relation to the implementation requirements for the TFA and to develop a new itinerary on trade facilitation for MSMEs, to be completed in 2019 (See Section II.D).

C. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

11. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), whose implementation started in January 2016, put significant emphasis on the role that trade can play for sustainable and inclusive development. Over the next fifteen years, with these new Goals that universally apply to all, countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind (A/RES/70/1).³ The work of UN/CEFACT can directly contribute to the achievement of several SDG targets, including SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production, SDG 14 on life below water, SDG 15 on life on earth, and SDG 17 on partnerships for the goals.

12. The five Regional Commissions are mandated to convene Regional Forums for Sustainable Development, which support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (including its follow-up and review process) and to provide regional inputs to the High Level Political Forum (HLPF). Focusing on practical, value-added and peer learning, such forums create a regional space to share policy solutions, best practices and challenges in SDG implementation and help identify major regional and sub-regional trends.

13. As part of the UNECE Regional Forums for Sustainable Development of March 2018 and March 2019, the Trade Facilitation Section led the organization of roundtables on

³ A/RES/70/ Available at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production, and SDG 8 on decent work and inclusive growth, respectively. Such roundtables, organized in collaboration with other United Nations Agencies such as the ITC, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) featured case studies from several Member States to facilitate the sharing of experiences and best practices in achieving specific targets under these SDGs (e.g. approaches to enhancing transparency and traceability of sustainable value chains, moving from linear to circular production and consumption patterns, leveraging the potential of innovative technologies for inclusive trade and growth, etc.). Policy recommendations and highlights from the roundtables were reflected in the Chair Briefs submitted to the High Level Political Forum in New York.

14. The United Nations 2030 Agenda emphasizes the role that innovation plays in support of sustainable development. An important emerging innovation is blockchain/distributed ledger technology. At the High Level Political Forum of July 2018, the Trade Facilitation section, in collaboration with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the Dutch Blockchain Coalition and the Government of Slovenia, organized a side event on “Blockchain Transformation towards Sustainable and Resilient Societies”. At the event, experts from Member States and the private sector were invited to showcase how blockchain technology can help in achieving specific SDGs targets, and provided recommendations on how to make the application of this technology inclusive. As a follow-up, the secretariat was invited to contribute to the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on the “Role of Public Institutions in the Transformative Impact of New Technologies”—multi-stakeholder and multidisciplinary experts and practitioners meeting convened on 6-7 December 2018 at United Nations headquarters, with support provided by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG).

15. Governments and the trade community are increasingly looking to traceability standards to confirm that the production, transport and distribution of goods and services is conforming with high-level policy objectives and civil society values, which directly relate to SDG 12. The UN/CEFACT agriculture expert group has already developed an international technical standard to trace important business processes in the animal and fish supply chain. UN/CEFACT is now working on a transparency and traceability framework (including a policy recommendation and technical standards) to provide a structured approach for tracking and tracing sustainable textile and leather value chains.

16. In this context, a brainstorming session was jointly organized with the ITC and the European Commission Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) during the 2018 European Union Development Days in June in Brussels, and another at a conference during the Hangzhou Forum in China in October. The purpose was to present the findings of a study produced by the secretariat (which engaged more than 130 companies of the garment and footwear industry and other key stakeholders of the sector) and to discuss the key requirements of the transparency and traceability framework. Based on this work, the secretariat has been engaged in a project which has received approximately US\$2.5 Million in funding from DG DEVCO. The formal launch of the project is to be announced at the joint UNECE/ITC session at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Due Diligence Forum for the Garment and Footwear Industry in February 2019, in Paris.

17. Overfishing and illegal, unreported or unregulated fishing (IUU) accounts for one-fourth of the fish resources taken from the oceans and costs a staggering US\$23 billion. As a result, future fish stocks are at risk of depletion, ocean biodiversity is negatively impacted, and the economic security of legitimate fishery workers is at stake. This is a global challenge to which SDG 14 (target 14.4) directly responds. An essential step in the

effective management of fish resources is the timely acquisition of information on vessels, stocks and catches, as well as the exchange of such information between stakeholders.

18. To advance action in support of this target, the UNECE has established a Team of Specialists (ToS) on Sustainable Fisheries.⁴ The aim of the ToS is to promote and facilitate the implementation of the UN/CEFACT Fisheries Language for Universal eXchange (FLUX) standard or other sustainable fisheries data standards on a global scale. The FLUX standard is already being used in twenty-three European Union (EU) Member States, and countries in other regions of the world (including Thailand, Brazil and Peru) are about to implement it.

19. The ToS on Sustainable Fisheries met twice in 2018: once during the UN/CEFACT Forum of Geneva (in April) and once in Hangzhou (in October). The second session of the ToS was held on 31 January and 1 February 2019 to review the implementation of the 2017-2019 Programme of Work; to discuss the extension of its mandate; and to present the communication activities undertaken by the ToS with funding from the European Commission Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (approximately US\$120,000). The ToS also contributed (jointly with UNCTAD, UNEP, and the FAO) to the organization of the second Oceans Forum on the Trade-related Aspects of SDG 14 (July 2018) in Geneva.

20. Equality and women's empowerment is a key driver of economic and social development and is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Despite progress, women still face numerous challenges while participating in trade and other economic activities across countries: from limited access to assets to insecure conditions in cross-border activities, and unequal opportunities for training and managerial positions in trade policymaking bodies. The UNECE is seeking to support SDG 5 on gender equality through its project on women and trade facilitation, and UN/CEFACT experts have drafted a White Paper, whose findings and recommendations were presented at the first Regional Forum for NTFCs in Addis Ababa in November 2018. In the future, this may lead to a separate project to develop a Policy Recommendation.

II. Outreach and support services

A. United Nations Regional Commissions joint approach to trade facilitation

21. The United Nations Regional Commissions have taken a joint approach to trade facilitation, which was decided in Beirut in January 2010 by the Executive Secretaries of the five Regional Commissions, and subsequently endorsed by all five Regional Commissions. In 2015 they launched a Survey on Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade. In 2017, the UNECE, jointly with the other Regional Commissions, conducted the second Global Survey, which covered 120 countries from the five regions of the world and whose preliminary results were presented at a joint event during the WTO Aid for Trade Global Review, held in Geneva in July 2017. The Global Report and the five Regional Reports were released in November 2017 and were officially launched at the eleventh WTO Ministerial Conference, during a side event on 9 December 2017.

22. The third Global Survey was launched in January 2019 and is now named the United Nations Regional Commissions Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, to

⁴ Executive Committee (EXCOM) at the 92nd meeting on 23 June 2017.

better feature global trade trends and the link to the 2030 Agenda. Like the second edition, the third Global Survey countries' implementation rates are calculated based on thirty-eight indicators for general trade facilitation measures that are part of the WTO TFA provisions, along with additional measures on automation and cross-border paperless trade transaction, and measures attempting to gauge the inclusiveness of trade facilitation reforms. The latter ones focus on trade facilitation for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), agriculture, women in trade, and trade financing.

23. The third Global Survey will be conducted in close collaboration with other global and regional bodies engaged in trade facilitation and digital trade like UNCTAD, the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The Survey will lead to the production of a Global Report and five Regional Reports, to be presented at the WTO 2019 Aid for Trade Review, in July in Geneva.

B. Cooperation with Other Regional Bodies

24. The UNECE secretariat has been cooperating with several European Commission Directorate-Generals (DGs) over the past years. In 2018, UNECE participated regularly in The Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport (DG-MOVE) Digital Transport and Logistics Forum (DTLF) subgroup workshops, studying the documentary requirements in transport and logistics and their dematerialization. The UNECE secretariat became a full member of the DTLF in November 2018. DG-MOVE was invited to present their work at the fourth UNECE Single Window Conference.

25. The European Union Directorate-General for Taxation and the Customs Union (TAXUD) has been very supportive of the UN/CEFACT work on recommendations. TAXUD and EU Member States have been active in the revision of Recommendation 33 on Single Window and how this will apply to a Regional European Single Window(s).

26. The Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG-MARE) has been actively engaging with the work of the UNECE Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries and has pledged a financial contribution to support the implementation of its programme of work in the biennium 2018-2019 (approximately US\$120,000).

27. The secretariat is also engaging with the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG-DEVCO) on work to advance the sustainability of value chains in the garment and footwear sector, in EU Member States, and other regions of the world.

28. The secretariat has been actively engaging with the EEC, with whom it has been jointly organizing a series of workshops to train trade agencies on supply chain management and simplification of import and exports procedures. The secretariat presented a workshop on Single Window implementation, in Kyrgyzstan in May 2018.

C. Electronic Business Memorandum of Understanding (ebMoU) and ISO Technical Committees

29. The signatories to the Electronic Business Memorandum of Understanding (eB-MoU)—the UNECE, the International Standards Organization (ISO), the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC)—met several times in 2018 to discuss the future organization of the group. A new streamlined organization has been created to ensure better information sharing and to encourage joint work. The Management Group of the ebMoU met on 5 December 2018 and

successfully deployed the new objectives with the participation of the four signatories, plus OAGi Alliance, OASIS and GS1.⁵ The four signatories also planned to organize webinars on topics of mutual interest. The first of these took place on 12 September 2018 and allowed for effective information sharing on the work of each organization on the topic of the Internet of Things (IoT).

30. The UNECE secretariat has closely followed the official Category-A liaisons with ISO Technical Committees (TCs). These include ISO TC 154 (Processes, data elements and documents in commerce, industry and administration), ISO TC 204 (Intelligent Transport Systems), ISO TC 307 (Blockchain) and ISO TC 308 (Chain of Custody). This completes the Category-A liaison already established with ISO PC 245 (Cross-border trade of second-hand goods), ISO PC 295 (Audit data collection) and the Category-B liaison with ISO TC 68 (Financial services).

31. The secretariat and UN/CEFACT Chair have been active with liaison ISO TC 154 both via conference call and at their Plenary on 8-12 October 2018. Several items have been advanced during this period such as the United Nations Trade Data Element Directory (UNTDDED) and Electronic Data Interchange for Administrations, Commerce and Transport (EDIFACT) syntax. New joint work is being proposed on transport documentation standards, which is still under discussion; UNECE proposes to align ISO business needs to the Multi Modal Transport Reference Data Model.

32. The UNECE secretariat has also been very active in the ISO TC 307 on blockchain and distributed ledger technologies and was represented at their plenary meetings in London (May 2018) and in Moscow (October 2018). The secretariat has submitted the work on its blockchain-related White Papers for their consideration. There has not been much reciprocal input.

D. Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide

33. The United Nations Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide (TFIG) is a web-based interactive knowledge management and training tool that supports countries in the implementation of trade facilitation reforms. It helps public and private-sector actors better navigate the wide array of existing trade facilitation instruments in order to identify possible paths for achieving their objectives. It contains information about major trade facilitation instruments and tools and links to external references and data sources from all key international organizations involved in trade facilitation. It also contains material and country case stories sharing best practices and solutions to support trade facilitation. The Guide is currently available in Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish. It is a key tool to support the implementation of the WTO TFA.

34. In 2016, a TFIG Training Manual was released to complement the Guide. The manual was developed to support the implementation of workshops based on the contents of the Guide. It provides guidelines, tools and learning activities for three-day workshops on the Guide. In addition, it helps trainers to prepare for their sessions, shows them how to structure the training, and gives pedagogical and didactic guidelines for achieving the participants' learning objectives.

35. With the support of the Swedish Government (the original sponsor of the project), the secretariat undertook a major review of TFIG. This included a complete update of all

⁵ OSGi Alliance was formerly known as the Open Services Gateway initiative; OASIS is an XML interoperability consortium; and GS1 is a not-for-profit organization that develops and maintains global standards for business communication.

material from key organizations in the Guide and two new itineraries (the first on how to establish a National Trade Facilitation Committee and the second on how to develop a National Trade Facilitation Roadmap) which were added to the Guide in 2016.

36. TFIG has become a major reference resource for government officials and traders around the world. At the same time, it is a core tool for trade facilitation planning and training. Since its launch in September 2012, use of the Guide has grown exponentially. In 2015, TFIG received over 6.7 million hits and over 302,000 visits. By the end of 2017, the TFIG platform received over 10,5 million hits and over 445,000 visits.

37. UNECE is raising funds to maintain and enhance the TFIG, to develop additional domains, itineraries and sections; to establish this tool as the central portal for information on trade facilitation in support of the implementation of the WTO TFA (thus facilitating coordination among key players in trade facilitation) and to include in the TFIG a One United Nations inquiry point on trade facilitation for countries. A project proposal has been developed to this end for submission to potential interested donors. The ITC has supported (with funds for approximately US\$30,000) the enhancement and update of the existing itinerary on the WTO TFA and the establishment of a new itinerary on trade facilitation for MSMEs; these were completed in early 2019. With funding from the United Nations Development Account Project (UNDA) eleventh tranche (approximately US\$70,000), the Single Window itinerary has been updated to reflect new developments on Single Window interoperability (e.g. in the EU), and to include references to new instruments and tools recently developed by key players for trade facilitation implementation, including by the WTO, ITC, UNCTAD, UNESCAP, the World Bank, and the World Customs Organization.

E. Regional support

38. In the UNECE region, according to the UNECE Regional Report 2017 on Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade, countries are progressing on almost all fronts. In fact, the average rate of implementation of trade facilitation measures including for paperless trade is about 69 per cent, which is seven percentage points higher than in the 2015 survey. In the region, most of the advanced economies have a rate of above 75 per cent. However, transition economies in Central Asia and Eastern Europe still lag behind, with an implementation rate below 60 per cent. The Trade Facilitation section, in cooperation with the Regional Adviser, has been undertaking several advisory services projects to support these countries in implementing trade facilitation reforms.

39. In 2015 UNECE carried out a trade needs assessment in Kyrgyzstan, which identified priority intervention areas for enhancing the country's access to global value chains, including supply chain management, the facilitation of import and exports procedures and Single Window implementation. In 2018 the Trade Facilitation Section, in cooperation with Working Party 6 on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies, launched a project aimed at developing training materials and conducting a series training workshops (two national workshops in Bishkek and two local workshops in Osh and in Jalal-Abad in May in 2018) for trade support institutions, in order to familiarize traders (including women traders, and government officials) with international and national trade-related regulations, policies, trends and issues. The project was completed in June 2018.

40. The Trade Facilitation Section, (jointly with the Market Access Section) continues to support the project, which is funded by the Russian Federation (for approximately US\$ 100,000), to assist Tajikistan to empower their National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) to align with the recommendations of the UNECE study on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade, and thereby enable the Government to fulfil its commitments under the WTO TFA. In 2018 the project delivered a series of workshops to train and coach the members of the NTFC (February, July and October 2018 in Dushanbe) and to support

them by the preparation a technical paper to identify priority trade facilitation measures for the country; and a National Trade Facilitation Roadmap for Exports Diversification, to deepen Tajikistan's integration into regional and global value chains. The project was implemented in close collaboration with ITC and UNCTAD and is expected to be complete in May 2019.

41. The Trade Facilitation Section, in close cooperation with the Regional Adviser of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, continues to support a three-year project, launched in January 2018 and funded under the United Nations Development Account (UNDA) eleventh tranche (approximately US\$500,000). The aim of the project is to strengthen the national capacities of selected transition economies to integrate into the international rules-based trading system. The project aims to enhance countries' exports in their respective subregions by using UNECE trade facilitation policy recommendations, standards and tools for the development of evidence-based policy to support the implementation of the provisions of the WTO TFA directly related to the expertise and experience of UNECE, and the instruments of UN/CEFACT—notably TFA articles 23.2 (national trade facilitation committees); 10.1 (streamlining documentary formalities); 10.3 (use of international standards); and 10.4 (Single Window). As of January 2019, training materials have been developed in connection with Articles 10.1 and 10.2. The project is focused on selected countries with economies in transition—one from each of the following subregions: Southeast Europe, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Georgia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).

42. Finally, the Trade Facilitation Section, in close cooperation with the Regional Adviser of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, has commenced activities under a Russian-funded project (approximately US\$ 300,000) to strengthen the capacity of Central Asian countries to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system. The project aims to enhance the capacity of policymakers and experts in national trade facilitation bodies, regulatory agencies and other relevant stakeholders, to develop and implement trade facilitation policies and measures (notably in the area of WTO TFA in which UNECE has valuable expertise), to improve their capacity to measure progress in the implementation of trade facilitation, and to achieve internal and cross-border policy coherence for the simplification and harmonization of trade procedures. The project is expected to be complete by December 2019.

F. Regional advisory services in 2018-2019

43. The Regional Adviser continued to manage projects and activities supporting countries in the implementation of the UNECE Trade Facilitation Recommendations and Standards.

44. In light of the efforts of countries to implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), advisory and training activities were organized to assist transition economies in implementing trade facilitation measures in the TFA. Notably, the assessment of the readiness of Azerbaijan to implement the TFA was finalized and submitted to the Government to be used in its WTO accession negotiations. A seminar supporting the establishment of a National Trade Facilitation Committee was organized from 20-21 June 2018 in Baku. A similar project on the assessment of the readiness of Belarus to implement the TFA was launched through an opening seminar in Minsk on 12-13 December 2018. On 17 July 2018 Kazakhstan notified the WTO secretariat on the B and C measures, i.e. measures in the TFA for which the country needs more time for implementation or more time and international assistance. The notification was fully based on the report of the UNECE-sponsored readiness assessment project.

45. The secretariat continued to provide support to Ukraine based on the WTO TFA readiness assessment finalized in 2015. UNECE co-organized, with the International Port Community Systems Association, a regular seminar in support of the Port Community System in Odessa, and for the national regulatory Single Window, which was officially launched in September 2018. On 27 March 2018, UNECE and the Commercial Law Development Programme (CLDP) of the United States Department of Trade organized a seminar on the B and C category measures implementation. On 25 October, UNECE in collaboration with CLDP, organized a seminar on four measures in the TFA, in which UNECE has comparative advantage, and on the establishment of a National Trade and Transport Monitoring Mechanism (UNECE Recommendation 42).

46. The Regional Adviser concentrated their efforts on promoting the use of UN/CEFACT semantic standards for Single Window interoperability in countries and regions neighbouring the European Union. They organized a seminar on Single Window implementation approach and data sharing in the Western Balkans, in Skopje on 15-16 November 2018. Following up on the Russian contribution project on trade facilitation and the Single Window for the Member States of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU),⁶ the Regional Adviser organized a regional seminar on Single Window and Data Sharing using UN/CEFACT standards in Minsk on 10-11 December 2018.

47. As a result of the Regional Advisory activities and projects in Ukraine and the Eurasian Economic Union, experts from the EEC and Ukraine continue to provide active support to the activities and projects of UN/CEFACT.

48. The Regional Adviser continues to support the work on Trade of the United Nations Special Programme for Central Asia (SPECA). He organized the twelfth meeting of the SPECA Working Group on Trade in Almaty, on 19 September 2018, which focused on four deliverables of the Group: a regional SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy; principles of regional trade development aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals; a paper on the nexus between regional trade and water management; and a paper on non-tariff measures. The 2019 SPECA Economic Forum will take place in Turkmenistan in November 2019, will focus on *Connectivity: Trade and Transport Facilitation in the SPECA region in the age of SDGs*, and will further advance work on these deliverables.

49. The Regional Adviser organized other trainings and advisory missions, including a regional capacity-building event at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Border Management College in Dushanbe, in July 2018.

50. Advisory services were provided to Belarus, Gibraltar, Kazakhstan, Russia, Uzbekistan, and others.

51. The Regional Adviser finalized the third edition of the English-Russian Trade Facilitation Glossary of Terms, with support from UN/CEFACT experts.

III. UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM)

52. At the ninety-ninth meeting of EXCOM on 4 July 2018, the Chair of UN/CEFACT presented her report on the achievements in trade facilitation, e-business and the SDGs (Informal Document N°2018/16). At the meeting, the EXCOM approved the Programme of Work of the Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries (ECE/EX/2018/L.8).

53. At its 102nd meeting of EXCOM, on 14 December 2018, member States approved an extrabudgetary project on “Enhancing transparency and traceability for more sustainable

⁶ Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and the Russian Federation.

value chains in the garment and footwear sector.” The European Union provided a financial support of €2.1 million to support this project.

54. Following the establishment of the UN/CEFACT Contact Group at the 67th EXCOM session, several meetings with the UN/CEFACT Chair have been organized. The secretariat organized a meeting in December 2018. The UN/CEFACT Chair attended this meeting and provided an update to member States of the work within UN/CEFACT.

55. The 2018-2020 United Nations Budget was finalized. The UNECE Trade Facilitation Section will be able to maintain its staff, but the travel budget and consultancy budget has been reduced. This will make outreach and support services a challenge in the future and may also put into question the organization of UN/CEFACT events outside of Geneva.
