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Inland Transport Committee

Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport

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Item 3 (c) (i) c of the provisional agenda

Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets (TIR Convention, 1975):

Application of the Convention:

eTIR:

Activities of the Informal Ad hoc Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure

Report of the Informal Ad hoc Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure on its thirty-first session

Contents

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. Attendance.....	1–3	3
II. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)	4	3
III. Election of officers (agenda item 2)	5	3
IV. New information and communication technology developments in the TIR system (agenda item 3)	6–8	3
A. National and regional developments.....	6	3
B. Projects related to the Memorandum of Understanding between ECE and IRU..	7	3
C. Progress report on the development of the eTIR international system	8	4
V. Annex 11 of the TIR Convention (agenda item 4)	9–14	4
VI. eTIR conceptual, functional and technical documentation (agenda item 5).....	15–43	5
A. Contributions of the network of eTIR focal points	15–16	5
B. eTIR conceptual, functional and technical documentation	17–18	5
C. Amendments.....	19–43	6
VII. Other business (agenda item 6)	44–47	9
A. United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business	44	9



B. World Customs Organization activities	45	9
C. Other activities of interest.....	46	9
D. Date and place of next session	47	9

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 thirty-first session on 10 and 11 March 2020 in Geneva.
2. The session was attended in person by experts from Belgium, Latvia, Netherlands, Serbia, Turkey and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as well as experts from the International Road Transport Union (IRU). Experts from Czech Republic, Denmark, the European Commission (EC), Slovakia and Turkey also attended the session at distance via web conference.
3. The Expert Group welcomed the efforts by the secretariat to accommodate the remote participation of those experts who were not able to travel because of the COVID-19 outbreak and took good note of the relevant health-related information provided by the secretariat.

II. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 1 (2020)

4. The Expert Group adopted its provisional agenda as contained in Informal document GE.1 No. 1 (2020). Additionally, the Expert Group took note that the final version of the consolidated draft eTIR legal framework (in English, French and Russian) was published in Annex I of the report of the seventy-second session of the TIR Administrative Committee (AC.2) (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/147). The Expert Group also took note that Informal document GE.1 No. 7 (2020) had been submitted by IRU for discussion under agenda item 5 (c) and that the customs administration from Belarus had submitted a list of questions which could possibly be considered under agenda item 4.

III. Election of officers (agenda item 2)

5. The Expert Group elected Mr. Predrag Arsic (Serbia) as Chair for the year 2020.

IV. New information and communication technology developments in the TIR system (agenda item 3)

A. National and regional developments

6. No national or regional developments on new information and communication technology developments in the TIR system were brought to the attention of the Expert Group under this agenda item.

B. Projects related to the Memorandum of Understanding between ECE and IRU

7. The Expert Group took note of the latest information regarding the ongoing eTIR projects carried out under the five-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation between the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and IRU in the field of computerization of the TIR procedure and of the supporting Contribution Agreement (CA) towards enhancement of the full computerization of the TIR procedure, signed on 6 October 2017:

- 300 eGuarantees have been issued in the context of the eTIR pilot project between Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Turkey. Both governments are still working on a MoU aimed at the extension of the project.

- Ten eGuarantees have been used by Iranian transport operators in the context of the eTIR project between Azerbaijan and Iran (Islamic Republic of). Georgia is looking into a legal basis allowing them to join the project.

C. Progress report on the development of the eTIR international system

8. The Expert Group welcomed a presentation by the secretariat on the recent developments of the eTIR international system, in parallel to the pilot projects. The secretariat informed the Expert Group that it had completed the implementation of all the messages of version 4.1 of the eTIR specifications and had developed a non-regression testing mechanism to ensure a good reliability of the system. The Expert Group was also informed about the progress made with other aspects, such as, finding issues from the eTIR specifications and bringing them to the attention of the Expert Group, reviewing the eTIR database and taking first actions towards implementing a non-repudiation functionality for the eTIR international system. The secretariat further informed the Expert Group about its development practices, which had been aligned with the Information Technology industry best practices regarding the use of a Continuous Integration (CI) system, the use of static code analysis tools and the creation of an internal Knowledge Management System (KMS). The secretariat finished the presentation with introducing its next priorities, namely the upgrade of the implementation of all messages to version 4.3 of the eTIR specifications and continuing to write the technical documentation for customs authorities to interconnect with the eTIR international system.

V. Annex 11 of the TIR Convention (agenda item 4)

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/2019/9/Rev.2, Informal document GE.1 No. 3 (2020)

9. The Expert Group welcomed the adoption by AC.2 on 6 February 2020 of new Annex 11 and the related amendments to the TIR Convention. It noted that the consolidated draft eTIR legal framework was contained in Annex I of the report of the seventy-second session of AC.2 (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/147) and it had been sent to the Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) of United Nations Secretary General. On 26 February 2020, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, acting in his capacity as depositary, circulated the depositary notification C.N.71.2020.TREATIES-XI.A.16 to all Contracting Parties to the TIR Convention.

10. The Expert Group further noted that the objection period of one year to the proposed amendments would run until 25 February 2021 and that the period of three months before the entry into force of the these amendments on 25 May 2021 could be used by contracting parties not interested in implementing Annex 11 to notify the Secretary-General in writing of their non-acceptance of Annex 11, in line with the provisions of the new Article 60 bis.

11. The Expert Group also noted, with interest, that the EC would publish in the coming weeks an eTIR-NCTS¹ business case, with the aim of including eTIR in phase 6 of NCTS. In this regard, the EC stressed the need to coordinate efforts between ECE and the EC, in particular on the eTIR technical specifications.

12. With regard to the possible introduction of the concept of trusted third parties (TTP) in relation to the authentication of the holder, the Expert Group, considering that the delegation of the Russian Federation was absent and had not provided any additional information, in particular with regard to the financial impact on the overall eTIR project, decided to postpone the discussion on this topic to a future session.

13. The Expert Group considered Informal document GE.1 No. 3 (2020), containing a list of questions, originally prepared by the EC, on the application of various provisions of the TIR Convention for TIR transports carried out under the eTIR procedure, the answers proposed by the Expert Group at its last session, additional answers provided by the secretariat, comments by eTIR focal points and new questions which had been sent by TIR

¹ New Computerized Transit System

and eTIR focal points, further to a decision by the Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport (WP.30) to allow customs administrations and national associations to add questions to the list. Pending a few amendments, the Expert Group requested the secretariat to submit the list of questions and answers to WP.30 for its approval, before posting it on the eTIR website under a new section on Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). Furthermore, it requested the secretariat to prepare a draft proposal to explain how, in practice, an eTIR intermodal transport could be suspended for certain legs. The Expert Group also decided that accepted types and the maximum size (possibly 20Mb) of attached documents should be defined in the technical specifications. Finally, the Expert Group also requested the secretariat to make a proposal to deal with the provision of Explanatory Note 0.21-3 regarding the notification of the drawing of samples of goods by customs authorities in the course of an examination, possibly using the I7 message to correct the declaration data or using the additional information attribute of the start TIR operation message. With regard to the question on the application of Article 28, the IRU also agreed to consult transport operator to see if they would find useful to receive notifications at the end of the TIR transport directly from the eTIR international system rather than via the IRU and report back at the next session.

14. The Expert Group also noted that, one week before the session, the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Belarus had sent a list of questions and was, therefore, not in a position to consider them. Consequently, it requested the secretariat to prepare draft answers to those questions and circulate the questions and answers to eTIR focal points for their comments so that they could be considered by the Expert Group at its next session.

VI. eTIR conceptual, functional and technical documentation (agenda item 5)

A. Contributions of the network of eTIR focal points

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 4 (2020)

15. The Expert Group took note of Informal document GE.1 No. 4 (2020) and that, after the nomination of an eTIR focal point by China, thirty-nine countries have nominated one or more eTIR focal points.

16. The Expert Group also recalled that eTIR focal points had been requested to review and comment on the answers by GE.1, the secretariat and the EC to the questions on the application of various provisions of the TIR Convention for TIR transports carried out under the eTIR procedure. The comments provided by eTIR focal points were presented in Informal document GE.1 No. 3 (2020) which had been discussed under agenda item 4. The Expert Group recalled that eTIR focal points and TIR focal points had also been requested by WP.30 to send any additional question on the application of various provisions of the TIR Convention for TIR transports carried out under the eTIR procedure. One additional question received before the finalization of Informal document GE.1 No. 3 (2020) was included in the document and additional questions were submitted by the customs administration of Belarus after the finalization of the document.

B. eTIR conceptual, functional and technical documentation

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 5 (2017), Informal document GE.1 No. 6 (2017), Informal document GE.1 No. 7 (2017), Informal document GE.1 No. 8 (2017) and Informal document GE.1 No. 5 (2020)

17. The Expert Group took note of Informal document GE.1 No. 5 (2020) which contains all amendments already approved by the Expert Group at its twenty-seventh, twenty-eighth, twenty-ninth and thirtieth sessions. It noted that those amendments will be included in the next version of the eTIR specifications (4.3), whereas the current version (4.2a) is contained in Informal documents GE.1 No. 5, 6, 7 and 8 (2017).

18. However, the Expert Group agreed with a correction of the sequence diagrams contained in Annex I b. and c., where the I8 message should only be sent after all notifications are sent to the following countries along the itinerary (using the I15 and I16 messages). Furthermore, considering that information about the eTIR project will be made available on a web site, it also requested the secretariat to reword Chapter 1.3.2.3 (eTIR website), instead of deleting it. Finally, the Expert Group agreed that further clarification was needed about the replication of the International TIR Data Bank (ITDB) data to be used in cases of fallback. It requested the secretariat to prepare a document for its next session presenting technical details of the replication, such as the replications frequency and how customs administrations would be notified that the ITDB replica is used.

C. Amendments

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 6 (2020), Informal document GE.1 No. 7 (2020)

19. The Expert Group carefully considered the various amendment proposals and considerations contained in Informal documents GE.1 No. 6 (2020) and took the following decisions:

1. Accompanying document and fallback procedure

20. The Expert Group took note that the secretariat had not been in a position to prepare activity diagrams to further clarify the fallback procedures and agreed to consider this matter at its next session.

2. Reconciliation procedure

21. The Expert Group recalled that the TIR Convention (other than Annex 10) and Annex 11 do not provide a legal basis for setting up a general reconciliation procedure and that the relevant fallback procedures are already envisaged in the specifications, i.e. in case a message cannot be sent due to a technical problem, the sender should ensure that the message is sent at a later stage when the problem is resolved. However, the Expert Group agreed with the proposal of IRU to make a presentation at the next session on how it has set up an electronic reconciliation procedure with some customs administrations connected to the Real Time SafeTIR and TIR-EDP systems. The EC reiterated its opinion of the reconciliation procedure described in Informal document GE.1 No. 5 (2018), i.e. to leave the reconciliation procedure on paper and limit any automatic procedure to missing messages.

3. Validations performed by the eTIR international system

22. The Expert Group took note that, due to shifting priorities in the development roadmap of the eTIR international system and also the fact that IRU had just started working with the secretariat to identify potential cases that would require transitional exceptions to the rules contained in the eTIR specifications, this item of the agenda would be postponed for consideration by the Expert group at one of its subsequent sessions.

4. Error codes

23. The Expert Group welcomed a presentation by the secretariat on the proposal for a new code list for errors (CL99). In reply to several questions raised by members of the audience, the secretariat confirmed that this list was a living document that would still evolve as needed and that its latest version was available on a new web site that would serve as a collaboration portal for all stakeholders willing to interconnect with the eTIR international system.

24. The Expert Group agreed with the proposal for the new code list for errors (CL99), subject to the following change in the naming of the error codes 100, 200 and 300 where the word “Bad” would be replaced with “Invalid”. Furthermore, additional error codes should, possibly, be added to verify conditions C003, C006, C007 and C009.

5. Customs offices database

25. The Expert Group welcomed a presentation by the secretariat on the new ITDB web service for the validation of eTIR customs offices. The Expert Group was informed about the workflows, content, technologies and error codes related to the new I19/I20 messages, proposed to validate customs offices. The Expert Group also welcomed a live demonstration of the web services, which showed the current progress and the main features of the proposed implementation. The Expert Group agreed with the proposal to align the error codes with the eTIR error code list proposed by the secretariat (see paragraph 24) and saw no objection to giving access to this new web service to all TIR contracting parties. The Expert Group also supported the idea to have a standard format for the identification of customs offices (similarly to the standard format used for the TIR Carnet holder code) and was of the view that a proposal should be submitted to TIRExB, possibly after consultation with IRU. Finally, the Expert Group requested the inclusion of the new I19/I20 messages in the next version of the eTIR specifications.

6. Declaration data and advance amendment data

26. The Expert Group took note that AC.2, at its seventy-first session, in order to clarify the difference between the data sent to the country of first departure and subsequent amendments to the declaration, had decided to make a distinction between:

- The term "advance TIR data", which shall mean the data submitted to the competent authorities of the country of departure, in accordance with the eTIR specifications, of the intention of the holder to place goods under the eTIR procedure.
- The term "advance amendment data", which shall mean the data submitted to the competent authorities of the country in which an amendment to the declaration data is requested, in accordance with the eTIR specifications, of the intention of the holder to amend the declaration data.

27. As a consequence, the Expert Group decided to introduce the definition of the term "advance amendment data" to the TIR glossary, contained in Annex II to the Introduction of the eTIR conceptual, functional and technical documentation, with a reference to Annex 11 Article 2 (d).

28. Furthermore, the Expert Group decided that in order to better implement this change, the current E9 message should only be used to send advance TIR data and that two separate messages should be created to cancel advance TIR data and send advance amendment data. The Expert Group requested the secretariat to make the required changes in the next version of the eTIR specifications.

29. Finally, considering that Annex 11 refers to "declaration data" for data that have been validated by the customs office of departure in the process of accepting the declaration, the Expert Group decided to rename the I7 and I8 messages as "Record declaration data", and "Record declaration data results", respectively. The Expert Group instructed the secretariat to make the necessary changes in the next version of the eTIR specifications, including in the eTIR concept document, where the concept of recording or amending a "consignment" should be changed into recording or amending a "declaration".

7. Message Reference Number and Functional Reference

30. The Expert Group agreed with the proposal to use unique values in the Message Reference Number attribute when sending a message request and mapping the same value in the Functional Reference attribute of the message response. The unique value should be the concatenation of a unique value identifying the sending entity with a Globally Unique Identifier (GUID).

31. The Expert Group also agreed that, in order to avoid potential confusion between the Message Reference Number attribute of the eTIR messages and the Master Reference Number attribute used in some NCTS messages, the Message Reference Number attribute of all eTIR messages should be renamed as "Message Identifier" which also better reflects its purpose.

8. Notifications to customs related to TIR operations

32. The Expert Group noted that according to the data exchange use case diagram (contained in Figure 10 of the eTIR concepts document v.4.2a), information about TIR operations are notified to the guarantee chain but not to customs administrations. The sequence of messages, as contained in Annex I of Informal document GE.1 No.5 (2020), follows the same logic. However, the I15 message (notification to customs) contains sections dedicated to the notification of the start, refusal to start and termination of TIR operations.

33. The Expert Group, while acknowledging the discrepancy, decided that further analysis was required and that it would revert to this issue at its next session.

9. Cancellation of the advance TIR data

34. The Expert Group agreed to remove the restricted code 1 (Cancellation) from the Message Function attribute of the Advance TIR Data class of message I7 since this case cannot happen and thus, should not be implemented.

10. Issues related to cardinalities

35. With regard to the various issues related to cardinalities, the Expert Group took the following decisions:

(i) Declaration - Guarantee

36. The Expert Group noted that Figure 1.17 of the eTIR Functional specifications shows that a declaration can refer to multiple guarantees. This can also be seen in the definitions of the messages in Chapter 2.5, e.g. in message E9, where the cardinality of the guarantee is 0..unbounded. However, Figure 1.18 shows that a TIR operation refers to one and only one guarantee.

37. The Expert Group was of the view that the use of multiple TIR Carnets was a reality in the paper environment, in particular for TIR transport with more than ten TIR operations, but that, in an electronic environment, this is dealt by simply issuing guarantees which allow more TIR operations. Consequently, the Expert Group decided that the class diagrams and the relevant messages should be amended to limit the cardinality of the guarantee to 1..1. It also requested the secretariat to ask WP.30 to confirm this particular change.

(ii) Start - National itinerary

38. The Expert Group could not reach a conclusion on this question and requested IRU to look into a number of archived TIR Carnets to check whether a case had already occurred where more than one customs office had to be declared as the national itinerary for a TIR operation, specified by the customs office of entry.

39. Further to the intervention of an expert from the EC who mentioned that national itineraries were composed of several countries and not customs offices in NCTS, the Expert Group decided to ask the advice of TIRExB on this point in order to determine what forms could take a national itinerary so that it could be properly modelled in the eTIR specifications.

(iii) Start - Customs office

40. The Expert Group decided that one and only one customs office can start a TIR operation. Therefore, the current cardinality on this aspect in message E6 should be corrected accordingly (from 0..unbounded to 1..1).

(iv) Consignment item - UCR

41. The Expert Group decided that zero or one UCR can be attached to a consignment item. Therefore, the current cardinality on this aspect in messages E6 and I15 should be corrected accordingly (from 0..unbounded to 0..1).

(v) *Consignor - Address*

42. The Expert Group decided that a consignor can have zero or one address. Therefore, the current cardinality on this aspect in messages E6 and I15 should be corrected accordingly (from 0..unbounded to 0..1).

43. Finally, the Expert Group took note with interest of the introduction of Informal document GE.1 No. 7 (2020) by IRU and, considering the late submission of the document, decided that it will revert to it at its next session.

VII. Other business (agenda item 6)

A. United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business

44. Taking into account the COVID-19 outbreak and the related recommendation, in an effort to scale down the meeting, the Expert Group decided to deal with this agenda item at a future session.

B. World Customs Organization activities

45. Taking into account the COVID-19 outbreak and the related recommendation, in an effort to scale down the meeting, the Expert Group decided to deal with this agenda item at a future session.

C. Other activities of interest

46. Taking into account the COVID-19 outbreak and the related recommendation, in an effort to scale down the meeting, the Expert Group decided to deal with this agenda item at a future session.

D. Date and place of next session

47. The Expert Group agreed to tentatively hold its next session on 11 June 2020.
