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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

INLAND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Working Party on Customs Questions Affecting Transport

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Item 6 (b) of the provisional agenda

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE HARMONIZATION OF
FRONTIER CONTROL OF GOODS (1982)

Application of the Conventions

UNECE questionnaire

Note by the secretariat

I. INTRODUCTION

1. On 6 April 2006, the Executive Committee of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe - during discussions about the cooperation between the UNECE and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in the area of transport - agreed to launch a survey of contracting parties to the International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Control of Goods (1982). The overall purpose of the survey was to gauge progress in implementing the “Harmonization Convention”, identify difficulties as well as measure interest in capacity building measures (if required).

2. The “Harmonization Convention” aims at facilitating border crossing of goods by harmonizing and reducing formalities as well as the number and duration of border controls. The convention establishes border control procedures such as customs controls, medico-sanitary inspections, veterinary inspections, phytosanitary inspections, controls of compliance with technical standards and quality controls. These procedures largely call for national cooperation and coordination of various services as well as for international cooperation between the respective border services. In particular, the convention foresees joint controls of goods and documents through the provision of shared facilities, same opening hours and same types of services at the same border. Finally, the convention also promotes the one-stop-shop principle for border controls.

II. UNECE QUESTIONNAIRE

3. On 21 April 2006, copies of the UNECE questionnaire were sent to the convention’s 47 contracting parties and the European Community (as well as to all 55 UNECE members). As of 30 June 2006, eleven replies had been received (roughly representing a 25 per cent response ratio). The replies originated predominantly from Western Europe and EU-25 members. A very small number of replies from the remaining countries from South-Eastern Europe and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia may have reflected poor knowledge of the “Harmonization Convention” and/or the availability of the questionnaire in English only.

4. The following summarizes the information provided by respondents.

(a) The “Harmonization Convention” as a model

- 70 per cent of respondents stated that the “Harmonization Convention” has been used as a model for implementing integrated border management procedures (both at the national level and with neighbouring countries)

(b) The implementation of major principles contained in the “Harmonization Convention”

- 90 per cent of respondents stated that they use the “Harmonization Convention” principles for the customs services and other control services interventions (at the national level)
- All respondents stated that they have harmonized opening hours of frontier posts between neighbouring countries
- 85 per cent of respondents stated that they have matched the control services available at border posts between neighbouring countries
- 70 per cent of respondents stated that they have matched the acceptance of various categories of goods, the modes of transport and the international Customs transit procedures between neighbouring countries

(c) The main weaknesses of the “Harmonization Convention”

- 20 per cent of respondents stated that the provisions of the convention are not sufficiently relevant and concrete
 - 80 per cent of respondents stated that concepts such as “integrated border management”, “one-stop-shop” and “single window” should be explained more
 - 10 per cent of respondents stated that the Annexes are not sufficiently relevant and concrete
- (d) The main problems in the implementation of the “Harmonization Convention”
- half of the respondents stated that the lack of detailed guidelines/procedures for organizing the cooperation at the national level was a problem while 60 per cent believed it was a problem for cooperation between neighbouring countries
 - 25 per cent of respondents stated that the lack of training in implementing integrated border management procedures at the national level was a problem while 80 per cent believed it was a problem at the international level
- (e) Interest in receiving capacity building training on how to implement the “Harmonization Convention”
- 30 per cent of respondents stated that they were interested in receiving training related to “national harmonization” issues contained in the “Harmonization Convention” while 70 per cent expressed interest in training related to “international aspects” of the convention

III. SUMMARY

5. According to the survey results, the “Harmonization Convention” has been a useful tool for transport facilitation at national and international levels. The majority of respondents have implemented the main principles of the convention, i.e. they have harmonized the domestic controls and international controls. The respondents believe that the convention should provide more information or direction on many aspects of integrated border management. Capacity building training is required and demanded. International cooperation issues should be emphasized during these workshops.

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