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Strategic questions of a modal and thematic nature

Strengthening border crossing facilitation (Harmonization Convention, eTIR project and other Customs transit facilitation measures)

Note by the secretariat

Summary

This document contains a summary of the activities of the Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport (WP.30), of its subsidiary expert groups and of the secretariat towards enhancing border crossing facilitation and relevant legal instruments under the auspices of WP.30 (Harmonization Convention, TIR Convention, etc.). This includes the computerization of the TIR system in the framework of the eTIR project.

The Committee may wish to **take note** and **endorse** the above activities. The Committee is also **invited to support** the continuation of the eTIR project, and to this end to (a) **prolong** the mandate of the Ad hoc Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure (WP.30/GE.1) to the year 2017 and (b) **consider the issue of financing** the initial and development costs of the eTIR international system (see also ECE/TRANS/WP.30/288, paras. 14 and 19).

I. Background and mandate

1. At its previous session, the Committee noted and supported the activities of the Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport (WP.30) with a view, in particular, to strengthen the Harmonization Convention, 1982 and the TIR Convention, 1975 (ECE/TRANS/254, para. 119-127).

2. This document has been prepared in accordance with the Programme of Work of the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) (ECE/TRANS/254, para. 156 and ECE/TRANS/2016/31, programme activity 02.10: Customs questions affecting transport). It reports on the progress made in 2016 by the Contracting Parties, WP.30 and the secretariat in the area of border crossing facilitation, including among others:

- Developments in the International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods, 1982 (Harmonization Convention), as well as monitoring and capacity-building initiatives to assist in the proper application of this Convention at the national level;
- Activities and developments regarding the TIR Convention and the functioning of the TIR system, including the recent allegations of financial mismanagement by the International Road Transport Union (IRU);
- Progress made in developing the technical aspects of the eTIR project, the status of the efforts towards the development of the appropriate legal instrument to frame the operationalization of the computerized TIR procedure and the status of the UNECE-IRU Pilot project between Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Turkey;
- 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’;
- Developments in drafting a new Convention on the facilitation of border crossing procedures for passengers, luggage and load-luggage carried in international traffic by rail;
- Developments in the Customs Convention on Containers, 1972;
- The World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement and the TIR and Harmonization Conventions;
- Publications;
- Invitation of the Committee to its subsidiary bodies to assess their regional and global activities;
- Tribute to Mrs. Helen Metaxa-Mariatou.

II. Harmonization Convention

3. The Committee may wish to note that the Secretary-General of the United Nations, acting in his capacity as depositary, has issued depositary notification C.N.887.2016.TREATIES-XI.A.17 informing that Turkmenistan has acceded to the International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods, 1982 ("Harmonization Convention") on 27 November. The Convention will enter into force for Turkmenistan on 27 February 2017 in accordance with its Article 17 (2). The accession of Turkmenistan brings the number of Contracting Parties to the Harmonization Convention to fifty-eight.

A. Biennial survey on the implementation of Annex 8 on road border crossings

4. At its seventy-eighth session (2015), the Committee was informed that, in accordance with Annex 8, Article 7 of the Harmonization Convention, the secretariat is required to carry out a survey every second year, on the implementation of Annex 8 on road border crossings at the national level. The Committee may wish to note that the latest survey was launched by the secretariat in November 2016 and that Contracting Parties had been invited to respond by 31 January 2017. The results of the survey will not be finalized before the 145th session of WP.30 in February 2017. The Committee will be briefed about the main conclusions of the survey at its eightieth session (February 2018).

B. New Annex 10 to the Harmonization Convention on seaports

5. At its seventy-eighth session (2014), the Committee supported the decision of the Administrative Committee of the Harmonization Convention (AC.3) to consider the possibility of developing a new annex to the Convention on border crossing procedures at seaports (ECE/TRANS/248, para.106). A first draft of Annex 10 had been discussed at the 141st session of WP.30 (October 2015). On the basis of this draft, WP.30 invited all Contracting Parties to liaise with the relevant agencies, port authorities and business operators about the ongoing efforts for this new annex, with a view to providing further comments on the draft to assist in and expedite its finalization. Further to comments received, WP.30 considered (a) detailed changes to the text from the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC); (b) comments on the text from Ukraine; (c) a general proposal on referencing the IMO FAL-65 Convention from the Federation of National Associations of Ship Brokers and Agents (FONASBA) and (d) a comment by EEC that the new Annex 10, in certain cases, stipulates commitments that go beyond the scope of the Convention itself and, therefore, proposed a review of the text of the Harmonization Convention to increase coherence between the body of the Convention and its Annexes.

6. At the June 2016 session of WP.30, the delegation of the European Union (EU) expressed its general concern about the necessity and purpose of developing an Annex dedicated to seaports, as customs procedures only account for a minor part of the wide range of controls and procedures that take place in ports. It further pointed out that there are various inconsistencies in the text of the draft itself as well as in relation to the body of the Convention. Considering that various articles in Annexes 8, 9 and 10 are identical, the question was raised whether it would not be appropriate to incorporate such identical provisions in the body of the Convention.

7. At the October 2016 session, WP.30 considered a revised draft. The delegation of Ukraine underlined, once more, the relevance of this new draft for the customs and border controls of transports at seaports and referred back to the report of experts on hinterland connections from 2008 (ECE/TRANS/210), which had led the Committee to request WP.30 to develop a specific Annex for inclusion in the Harmonization Convention. The Chair of the Administrative Committee for the Harmonization Convention (AC.3) supported this position. The delegations of the Russian Federation and of EU, on the other hand, challenged the legal and practical merits of the draft, in its current state as well as in general, with particular reference to the IMO-FAL 65 Convention which already covers some of the issues of controls at seaports. Recapitulating the discussion and recalling the great efforts that had been made to establish consensus on the necessity and the text of draft Annex 10, the Chair of WP.30 stated that there seemed to be, as yet, insufficient support to continue this activity. The delegations of Azerbaijan and Ukraine expressed that they could not agree with this assessment and requested that the issue be further discussed at the next

session. In order to have sufficient input for discussions, all delegations, that had not yet done so, were invited to submit written comments or considerations to the secretariat not later than by 15 November 2016. Not having received any written comments or considerations, the WP.30 may decide not to continue its discussions on draft Annex 10. ITC will be briefed orally by the Chair of the findings of WP.30 at its February 2017 session.

III. The TIR Convention

8. On 15 July 2016, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, acting in his capacity as depositary, issued depositary notification C.N.503.2016.TREATIES-XI.A.16, informing that on 5 July 2016 the Government of the People's Republic of China had deposited its instruments of accession to the TIR Convention, 1975. In accordance with its Article 53, paragraph 2, the date of entry into force for the Convention for China is 5 January 2017. With the accession of China, the TIR Convention has seventy Contracting Parties. Furthermore, on 7 October 2016, the Secretary-General of the United Nations issued depositary notification C.N.742.2016.TREATIES-XI.A.16, informing that none of the Contracting Parties had raised an objection to the proposals to amend Annexes 2, 6 and 7, (depositary notification C.N.124.2016.TREATIES-XI.A.16 of 4 April 2016). As such, the date of entry into force of these amendments is 1 January 2017 for all Contracting Parties.

9. In 2016, WP.30 and the TIR Administrative Committee (AC.2) sustained their efforts towards considering and finalizing a comprehensive set of amendment proposals to the TIR Convention. In the course of 2016, both bodies reached provisional agreement on a number of proposed amendments that are currently pending formal adoption. The Committee may wish to note some of the main issues of discussion:

(a) In October 2015, IRU informed the TIR Contracting Parties that, pursuant to deliberations with the relevant institutions, the guarantee chain would be able to raise the maximum guarantee coverage to 100,000 euros per TIR Carnet, as of 1 July 2016. Pending formal adoption of an amendment to Annex 6, Explanatory Note 0.8.3 to that extent, already various countries from outside the European Union, such as, but not limited to, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Serbia and Ukraine have already started applying the new recommended guarantee amount of 100,000 euros.

(b) Finalization of new provisions for Annex 8, Article 1 and Annex 9, Part III of the TIR Convention aimed at strengthening, on the one hand, the competencies of AC.2 to mandate or conduct in-depth examinations or audits of the annually submitted audit reports by the authorized international organization and, on the other hand, at reinforcing the requirements for accountability and transparency of TIR operations carried out by the latter to manage the international guarantee system and to print and distribute TIR Carnets.

(c) Undertaking a comprehensive editorial review of the TIR Convention for the sake of consistency and clarity throughout the text. In 2016, AC.2 agreed on a number of such amendments, which now await final adoption once full consent over the composition of a so-called amendment package has been reached.

(d) Proposal to amend the text of Article 2, with the word "customs" so as to unequivocally clarify that the TIR Convention does not apply on the territory of customs unions with a single customs territory. Having reached agreement on such amendment in WP.30, this issue remains under discussion of AC.2 where the Republic of Kazakhstan has reopened discussions, making it clear that it would formally object to any amendment of such nature.

(e) After more than ten years of discussions, WP.30 reached general consensus on increasing the maximum number of places of loading and unloading per TIR transport from four to eight and transferred the proposal to AC.2 for further consideration. However, due to a reservation from the Russian Federation, the Committee could not yet finally adopt this amendment.

A. International TIR Data Bank and electronic tools of the TIR secretariat

10. In 2015 the secretariat began a project to develop a new International TIR Data Bank (ITDB), envisaged to consolidate all electronic applications currently managed by the TIR secretariat. In 2016, the first phase of the project was initiated, aimed at replacing the current applications (ITDBonline+, ITDB Web Services and UNECE Register on Customs Seals and Stamps). After having successfully conducted a series of tests involving various volunteering stakeholders (customs authorities and national associations), the applications will be available for all Contracting Parties as of 2017. Further applications, such as the database of customs offices, are currently under development.

B. National and regional TIR workshops and seminars

11. Since the Committee's previous session in February 2016, the TIR secretariat had participated in: the ninth Joint African Union Commission (AUC) - Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Annual Meeting of the AU Conference of Ministers of the Economy and Finance and ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (Addis Ababa, 3 April 2016); the National Workshop on the Mainstreaming of the Vienna Programme of Action for landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) (Ulaanbaatar, 27-28 April 2016); a global seminar on the importance of key Trade and Transport Conventions, organized by UNECE and the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island States (UN-OHRLS) (New York, 9 May 2016) and Geneva, back to back with the meeting of Trade Ministers of LLDCs at the World Trade Organization (WTO) (24 June 2016); the Grails European Conference (Copenhagen, 1-3 June 2016); the third Global World Customs Organization (WCO)-Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) Conference (Cancun (Mexico), 11-13 May 2016); the WCO IT Conference (Dakar, 1-3 June 2016); the WCO transit workshop (Abidjan, 27 June - 1 July 2016); the Informal Group of Experts on the development of a new Convention on facilitation of border crossing procedures for passengers and baggage by rail (Warsaw, 26 and 27 July 2016); the twenty-fourth OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum (Prague, 15 September 2016); the OSCE-WCO Workshop on Enhancing Trade Facilitation through the Improvement of Regional Transit in Central Asia (Astana, 27-29 September 2016); International Conference on laying the foundation in the UNECE region for economic integration and sustainable development towards 2030 (Minsk, 26-27 October 2016); Workshop on the WCO Transit Guidelines (Lusaka, 31 October - 4 November 2016); WCO ATA/Istanbul Administrative Committee (Brussels, 14 November 2016); International Forum, Mexico Logistical Platform of the Americas (Mexico City, 22-23 November 2016); the Global Sustainable Transport Conference that had been convened by the United Nations Secretary-General (Ashgabat, 26-27 November 2016).

IV. Developments in the implementation of the TIR Convention

12. Although, as of 22 January 2016, TIR Carnets started being again accepted at 45 border crossing points of the Russian Federation, various Contracting Parties complained,

inter alia, about the absence of important border crossing points from the list. Thus, critical comments remained on the real improvements in the situation on the ground. However, pending the finalization of the package of amendment proposals submitted by the Government of the Russian Federation, which should facilitate the full functioning of the TIR Convention in its territory, the TIR governing bodies decided, for now, to no longer address this sensitive issue.

13. The year 2016 has also been dominated by allegations made by a former IRU employee against IRU and its management. IRU strongly and categorically rejected all of these allegations and the Presidential Executive of IRU instructed an independent external audit, conducted by Ernst and Young, in order to help clear these allegations. At the same time, a case was filed with the State Prosecutor of Geneva. On 25 November 2016, the IRU President, Mr. Christian Labrot, issued a statement that the independent audit had dismissed allegations made against the current IRU management. In summary, the audit found that (1) all funds were accounted for; (2) IRU constitutional and governance rules were respected; (3) current management had no involvement in the creation of the disputed insurance scheme; (4) significant progress in transparency, internal controls and risk management since new management had taken over in 2013; (5) no major issues had been identified in terms of governance and compliance with general ethical standards and practice.

V. The eTIR project

A. Developments in the Ad hoc Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure (GE.1)

14. The twenty-fifth session of the Informal Ad hoc Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure (GE.1) was held on 19 and 20 September 2016 in Geneva. GE.1 reviewed and welcomed the results from the two ongoing eTIR pilot projects, acknowledging their contributions toward a fully-fledged eTIR system. GE.1 also assessed the first findings of the Group of Experts on the Legal Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure (GE.2) and acknowledged the need of close collaboration between both groups, in particular when dealing with issues such as electronic signatures. Furthermore, GE.1 considered a number of pending amendments to the eTIR Reference model v.4.1a. At its 144th session, WP.30 approved the continuation of GE.1 in 2017, in particular to make the necessary amendments of the eTIR Reference Model v.4.1a and to deal with the technical issues related to proposals made by GE.2. In the context of requesting the Committee to endorse the extension of the mandate of GE.1 to 2017, the Working Party requested the secretariat to also raise the issue of financing the development and maintenance of the eTIR international system at the level of ITC. Against this background, the Committee is invited to consider the importance of the computerization of the TIR procedure and to urge Contracting Parties and relevant stakeholders to make every effort to ensure that the required financing for operationalizing the eTIR project is made.

B. Developments in the Group of Experts on the Legal aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure

15. GE.2 held its second (4-5 April) and third (12-13 December) sessions in 2016. Among the main findings of the Group in the course of its work in the year 2016 was, in the first instance, the necessity to conduct a survey on electronic methods of authentication, including electronic signatures, which was launched in September 2016. The preliminary results of the survey were considered by GE.2 at its third session, on 12-13 December 2016;

the preliminary results indicated that the use of electronic signatures in the context of the eTIR legal framework could present significant technical difficulties, as well as legal impediments. The Group of Experts also concluded that it would be necessary to identify the potential financing mechanisms as a matter of priority and, to this end, decided to develop a substantiated document that would eventually be transmitted for further consideration to the competent TIR intergovernmental bodies. The Working Party agreed that financing the initial and development costs of the eTIR international system would be of the utmost priority, bearing also in mind the joint statement on the computerization of the TIR procedure, adopted by the TIR Administrative Committee in June 2015.

16. Furthermore, GE.2 concluded that the eTIR Reference Model should be kept as a separate document with a relevant technical body to update, amend and maintain it with an established simplified procedure. Finally, GE.2 reviewed the possible formats of the eTIR legal framework (i.e. Protocol or optional Annex) and weighed the advantages and disadvantages of each option. In order to make progress, GE.2 requested to start reviewing draft legal text, to be prepared by the secretariat in both formats, in order to start concretely developing the legal framework within its given mandate i.e. until the end of 2017. Against this background, GE.2 submitted its considerations to and sought guidance on the issue of format from WP.30.

C. UNECE-IRU eTIR pilot project

17. On 20 August 2016, the first step of the UNECE-IRU eTIR pilot project between Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Turkey ended. In the course of this first step, thirty-one eTIR transports were conducted successfully. As of that same day, parties agreed to start the second step, which broadens the scope of the project by including additional customs offices, transport companies and opening the possibility of multiple places of loading and unloading, including amending the declaration. This pilot project allows, inter alia, a first important step toward a fully fledged eTIR international system, namely the development and deployment at UNECE of a first lightweight version of the eTIR international system.

D. UNDA project: ‘Strengthening the capacities of developing countries and countries with economies in transition to facilitate legitimate border crossing, regional cooperation and integration’

18. The United Nations Development Accounts (UNDA) project ‘Strengthening the Capacities of Developing Countries and Countries with Economies in Transition to Facilitate Legitimate Border Crossing, Regional Cooperation and Integration’ was successfully finalized on 30 June 2016. The Seminar for the Promotion of Electronic Exchange of Customs Information and the Adoption of Standard Electronic Messages (20-21 June 2016, Geneva) was the last event organized in the framework of this project. The final report of the project was sent to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and published on the UNECE web site together with the external evaluation report.

19. Within the framework of the UNDA project for the ECE region, an eTIR pilot project between Georgia and Turkey was established. Contrary to the eTIR pilot project between Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Turkey, this project does not involve the private sector, as the project focuses on testing the customs-to-customs part of the eTIR Reference Model. Both countries are fine-tuning their Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) system to use the Central Exchange Platform (CEP), which was developed and deployed in the course of the project, to exchange data on all TIR transports between both countries. On 26 January 2016, Mr. Nodar Khaduri, Minister of Finance of Georgia, and

Mr. Bülent Tüfenkci, Minister of Customs and Trade of the Republic of Turkey, signed a Protocol on electronic data exchange in the framework of a joint eTIR Pilot Project, demonstrating the political willingness of both countries to use this project to start a systematic exchange of TIR data and make a significant step toward a fully-fledged eTIR system.

VI. International Convention to Facilitate the Crossing of Frontiers for Passengers and Baggage carried by Rail, of 10 January 1952

20. At the Committee session in 2013, several delegations had argued for the development of a new international agreement that was deemed necessary for facilitating the crossing of national frontiers by rail, that would replace the 1952 Convention which was considered outdated. An informal group of experts on elaborating such a Convention commenced its work in September 2014. The meetings were organized at the initiative of OSJD and under the aegis of UNECE.

21. At its June 2016 session, WP.30 took note of comments by delegations to a revised draft. WP.30 requested the secretariat to review the comments and use them as basis to prepare a new draft, for consideration of at its next session. The Committee, at its seventy-eighth session, had invited WP.30 and the Working Party on Rail Transport (SC.2) to organize an ad hoc meeting in 2016 in cooperation with other interested stakeholders in order to finalize the draft of the Convention and, eventually consider the development of a compendium of good practices for future adoption by ITC and opening for signature by interested countries and to report to the ITC session of 2017 on the progress achieved. In this context, WP.30 took note of a letter by the Russian Railways in support of this ITC decision. However, after extensive discussion, WP.30 concluded that the necessary consensus that would warrant the organization of such joint ad hoc session with SC.2 has not yet been reached. WP.30 Chair reported progress on this issue to SC.2 at its 2016 annual session and will inform the ITC at its 2017 session. WP.30 agreed that it would revert to the organization of an ad hoc meeting depending on the progress made in drafting the new Convention and the consensus among Contracting Parties.

22. At its October 2016 session, WP.30 was informed that the informal group of experts, which had prepared the original draft of a new convention on the facilitation of border crossing procedure for passengers, luggage and load-luggage carried in international traffic by rail, had conducted another session on 26 and 27 July 2016. At this session, it had reviewed all comments and prepared the outlines of a revised draft. WP.30 took note of the amendments to the text as constituting a substantial effort towards creating a fully-fledged international legal instrument to cover the addressed issues. The delegations of Belarus, Russian Federation and Ukraine reconfirmed their support for the proposed draft, reiterating the relevance of its speedy finalization for the sake of the international transport of passengers and luggage. In order to make progress, OSJD provided the secretariat with a consolidated draft in Russian so that it could be considered at WP.30 next session as an official document in the three UNECE languages. In addition, WP.30 requested the secretariat to submit the informal draft (in English and Russian only) to SC.2, for consideration at its November 2016 session. Finally, WP.30 acknowledged that the finalized draft requires a full review by the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) according to the regular practice, in order to establish whether the Secretary-General of the United Nations could act as its depositary. The delegation of the Russian Federation reminded the secretariat of the urgent need to convene an ad hoc session of WP.30 and SC.2 in order to revise the draft convention, in line with the aforementioned invitation of ITC. The delegations of Azerbaijan, Belarus and Ukraine supported this proposal.

23. On the occasion of the seventieth session of SC.2 (November 2016) delegates of both Working Parties had the opportunity to discuss the draft Convention (for information: only one delegate from WP.30 attended the session). SC.2 agreed with WP.30 that convening a dedicated ad hoc session to the draft text was premature. However, SC.2 agreed on the most feasible road map for further discussing the draft, which is (a) a first substantial review of the draft by WP.30: February 2017; (b) circulation of an amended draft by the secretariat to WP.30 and to OLA: March 2017; (c) finalization of the draft by WP.30: June 2017; (d) circulation of the final text to WP.30 and SC.2: July 2017; (e) adoption of the final text by WP.30: October 2017; (f) adoption of the final text by SC.2: November 2017; and (g) endorsement of the final text by the Inland Transport Committee: February 2018. At the same time, SC.2 acknowledged that such schedule could only be maintained if governments would constructively contribute to further discussions and would unequivocally express their intention to accede to this new legal instrument once endorsed by ITC.

VII. Customs Conventions on the Temporary Importation of Private Road Vehicles (1954) and Commercial Road Vehicles (1956)

24. At its previous session, the Committee was informed that, on 1 April 2015, an amendment proposal to the Customs Convention on the Temporary Importation of Private Road Vehicles (1954) had entered into force for all Contracting Parties, allowing for Carnets de Passage en Douane (CPD) issued for operations within a specific region to be printed in combinations of two United Nations official languages, on the condition that one of the two languages is English or French (depository notification C.N.26.2015.TREATIES-XI.A.8 of 13 January 2015). The Administrative Committee of the Convention on Temporary Admission (Istanbul Convention, 1990), at its meeting in October 2015, agreed to amend Appendix II of Annex A, dealing with the model of the CPD, so as to align it with the latest amendment to the 1954 Convention on the Temporary Importation of Private Road Vehicles. Furthermore, at its 144th session, WP.30 was informed about a project for a CPD database system, new security features of the CPD and key aspects of a tracking and tracing system in the e-CPD system, allowing for real time authentication by customs officials at border posts.

25. Further to a request of the Committee at its seventy-seventh session (February 2015), the secretariat submitted the text of the Customs Convention on the Temporary Importation of Private Road Vehicles (1954) and Commercial Road Vehicles (1956) for translation into Arabic, in order to further promote the accession to and implementation of the Convention. However, due to resource constraints, the competent services of UNOG had not yet managed to finalize the translation.

VIII. Customs Convention on Containers, 1972

26. The Committee should note that the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in his capacity as depository, had issued depository notification C.N.748.2016.TREATIES-XI.A.15 informing of the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the Customs Convention on Containers, 1972. In accordance with its Article 19, paragraph 2, the date of entry into force of the Convention for the Republic of Moldova is 11 April 2017. The accession of the Republic of Moldova brings the number of Contracting Parties to the Container Convention to forty.

IX. The World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement and the TIR and Harmonization Conventions

27. In 2016, the secretariat undertook the promotion of the TIR and Harmonization Conventions as precursors and supporters of the implementation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), including but not limited to capacity-building events. To this end, the secretariat provided a detailed comparison between the WTO TFA and, respectively, the TIR Convention, the Harmonization Convention and the WCO Revised Kyoto Convention and prepared, in cooperation with IRU, a leaflet highlighting the importance and potential benefits of the TIR Convention and Harmonization Convention for countries.

X. Publications

28. The Committee may also wish to note that the UNECE/TIR secretariat substantively contributed to a joint UNECE-UNESCAP-IRU publication 'eTIR: towards Paperless Cross-Border Trade', as well as provided two articles to the September 2016 issue of 'The Asian Journal for Transport and Infrastructure' namely 'The TIR Convention and Benefits of Seamless movement of Vehicles in the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) Subregion' and 'Cross-Border Facilitation in the context of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 70/197: Prospects for the TIR and Harmonization Conventions'.

XI. Invitation of the Committee to its subsidiary bodies to assess their regional and global activities

29. At its 143rd session (June 2016), WP.30 took note that ITC had invited its subsidiary bodies to assess their regional and global activities, the enabling environment and any potential changes that may be deemed necessary for increasing their impact on the ground towards sustainable mobility (see ECE/TRANS/254, para. 13). The Working Party expressed the view that the hybrid approach adopted by its Rules of Procedure, as endorsed by ITC in 2015, provide sufficient basis for the activities of WP.30 at both the regional and the global level. WP.30 further stated that it supports any capacity-building activities by the UNECE secretariat related to the legal instruments under its purview outside the ECE region, as long as sufficient focus on capacity-building within the region remains ensured. It was further noted that WP.30, AC.2 and AC.3 contribute to sustainable mobility by fully engaging in facilitating international border crossing through harmonization of customs and other control procedures and through permanent improvement of the United Nations legal instruments under their purview, thus contributing to seamless and efficient international transport and sustainable mobility (see ECE/TRANS/WP.30/286, para. 14).

XII. Tribute to Mrs. Helen Metaxa-Mariatou

30. In November 2016, Mrs. Helen Metaxa-Mariatou informed the secretariat that, due to professional changes, she would no longer be available as Chair of WP.30. Since 1997, Mrs. Metaxa-Mariatou not only headed the delegation of the Greek customs administration but also chaired the Administrative Committee for the Harmonization Convention (AC.3) in 2000 and 2010, the meetings of AC.2 in 2008, had been a returning and active member of TIRExB (2003-2006 and 2009-2012), including as Chair during its 2011-2012 term of office, and chaired WP.30 in 2015 and 2016. The Committee may wish to thank Mrs.

Metaxa-Mariatou for her relentless efforts, over almost two decades, to promote the benefits of the United Nations legal instruments in the field of transport.

XIII. Considerations by the Committee

31. The Committee may wish to take note of and support the above activities of Contracting Parties, WP.30 and the secretariat. It is also invited to support the continuation of the eTIR project; to prolong the mandate of WP.30/GE.1 to the year 2017 and to provide guidance on the issue of financing the initial and development costs of the eTIR international system. Furthermore, the Committee is invited to encourage all Contracting Parties to the Harmonisation convention to conclude discussion on the New Annex 10 to the Harmonization Convention on seaports.
