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**EVALUATION OF THE UNECE  
INTERNATIONAL TRADE FACILITATION FORUMS\*/**

**"Trade Facilitation: Simpler Procedures for World Trade Growth and Development" (2002)**

**"Sharing the Gains of Globalization in the New Security Environment"(2003)**

**DOCUMENT FOR INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION**

Note by the secretariat

This paper presents an evaluation of the first and second international forums on trade facilitation, which were held in May 2002 and in May 2003 in conjunction with the annual sessions of the UNECE Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development.

It outlines the general background to the Forums, gives a statistical overview of the participation; and reviews the replies to questionnaires distributed during the Forums as well as to a follow-up questionnaire in 2004.

\*/ The present document has been submitted after the official documentation deadline by the Trade Development and Timber Division due to resource constraints.

## **Introduction**

1. The Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development organizes thematic forums as part of its annual sessions to draw the attention of its member States to salient policy topics in international trade.
2. In order to examine the usefulness of these policy discussions and ways in which they might be improved, the secretariat undertook a two-phase evaluation of the first two forums, held in 2002 and 2003.
3. The first phase included the collection of the views of participants during the forums. The second phase was conducted by mail. It was based on detailed questionnaires covering the physical and intellectual organization of the forums, as well as the relative importance of the themes and the manner they had been addressed.
4. The results show that the majority of the participants appreciated both forums. They found them timely and well organized, and were interested in participating in similar forums in the future.
5. The delegates appreciated the availability, friendliness and responsiveness of the UNECE staff and found that the materials and policy recommendations from the Forum would be useful in further follow-up activities.
6. At the 2002 Forum, the concept of trade facilitation and defining the trade facilitation agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> century were considered to be the most interesting and useful topics. At the 2003 Forum, sharing the benefits of trade facilitation in a fairer manner and the new security initiatives and trade facilitation policy were regarded as the most interesting and useful ones.
7. Participants in the survey suggested that the following topics should be included in future forums: Single Window clearance for exports and imports; standards for trade facilitation and trade security; striking a balance between trade facilitation and enhanced security, and achieving integrated management of information flows in international trade; and trade facilitation and WTO Development Agenda.
8. Some delegates had reservations regarding the usefulness of the background documents and the analytical level of the presentations and discussions and some were also less positive regarding their ability to use the information from the Forum and the value of networks of professional contacts gained at the Forums.
9. Despite the solid progress in building momentum for trade facilitation, challenges remain. These include developing public interest in and commitment to trade facilitation, seeking stronger support from governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), public and private sectors, maintaining positive relations with the media, and carrying out and supporting research.

### **I. Participation statistics**

10. In 2002, delegates from 77 United Nations Member States attended the Forum. In 2003, 82 countries were represented

11. In 2002, European member States of the UNECE represented 40 % of the total number of delegates, with 14.2 % of all delegates coming from EU Member States. In 2003, these percentages were 38 % and 12.4% respectively. Delegates from North America represented 2.5 % of participants in 2002 and 3.2 % in 2003.

12. As a reflection of the global nature of the Forums, in 2002 delegates from Asia represented more than 11% of all participants and delegates from Africa accounted for approximately 9 % (table 1). In 2003, delegates from Asia represented more than 10 % and African countries 7 % of all participants.

**Table 1 - 2002 and 2003 Forum delegates, by geopolitical grouping**

<i>Country groupings</i>	<i>2002 Forum</i>		<i>2003 Forum</i>	
	<i>number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>%</i>
Future EU 25	76	21.2%	77	17.40%
EU 15	51	14.2%	55	12.40%
Future EU 10 new Member States	25	7.0%	22	5.00%
South-East Europe	26	7.2%	35	7.90%
CIS 12	29	8.1%	38	8.60%
CIS European countries	20	5.6%	22	5.00%
Central Asian countries	2	0.6%	6	1.40%
Caucasus	7	1.9%	10	2.30%
Other Europe	11	3.1%	17	3.84%
Latin America	10	2.8%	13	2.90%
North America	9	2.5%	14	3.20%
Australia, New Zealand	4	1.1%	3	0.70%
Africa	31	8.6%	31	7.00%
North Africa	9	2.5%	5	1.10%
Sub-Saharan Africa	22	6.1%	26	5.90%
Asia	41	11.4%	46	10.40%
West Asia	14	3.9%	16	3.60%
South and East Asia	27	7.5%	30	6.80%
<u>Official delegations – total</u>	237	66.0%	274	61.85%
<u>Other invited participants</u>	122	34.0%	169	38.15%
<b>Total participants</b>	<b>359</b>		<b>443</b>	

*Source:* UNECE secretariat estimates based on Forum attendance statistics and Contacts database.

*Note:* Countries included in the geopolitical groupings:

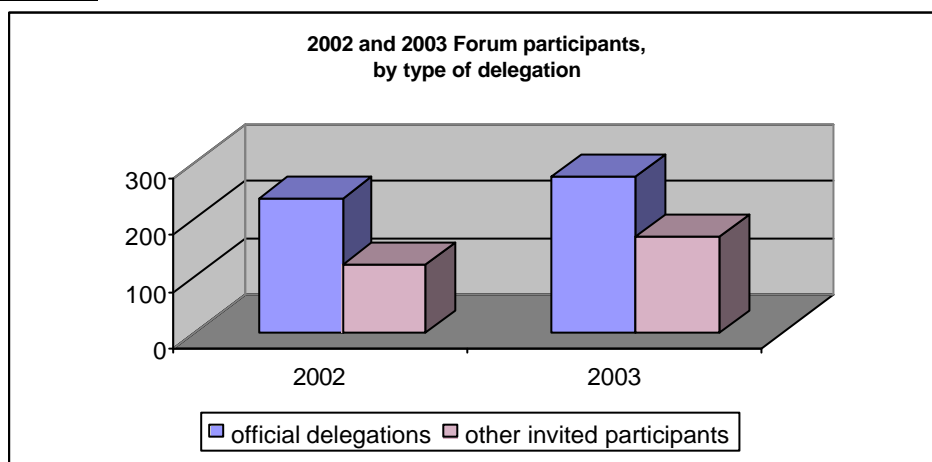
- EU 15: Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.
- EU 10 new Member States: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.
- South-East Europe: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey.
- CIS European countries: Belarus, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, and Ukraine; Central Asian countries: Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan; Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia
- Other Europe: Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland.
- Latin America: Bolivia, Chile, Cuba, Jamaica, Paraguay, and Uruguay; North America: Canada, United States.

*Note (Con'td)*

- North Africa: Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia.
- Sub-Saharan Africa: Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Madagascar, Mauritius, Senegal, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania.
- West Asia: Iran (Islamic Republic of), Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan, Syrian Arab Republic.
- South and East Asia: China, Hong Kong SAR (China), India, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Nepal, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Thailand.

13. Sixty-six per cent of the participants were official country delegations. Other invited participants, representing mainly international organizations, NGOs, business organizations, independent experts, etc., formed the remaining 34%. In 2003 these percentages were respectively 62 % and 38 % of the total number of participants (chart 1).

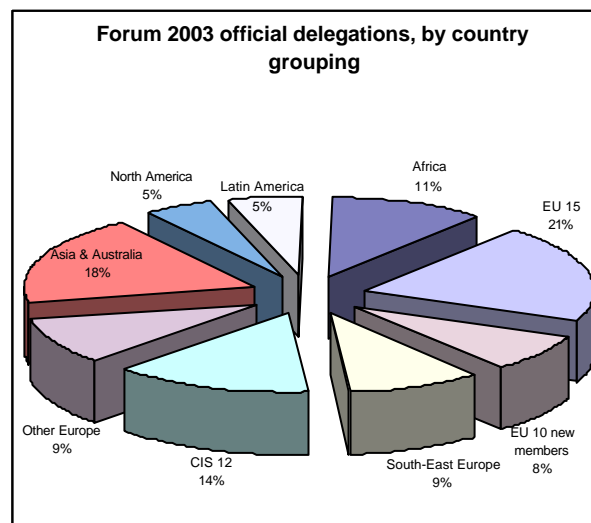
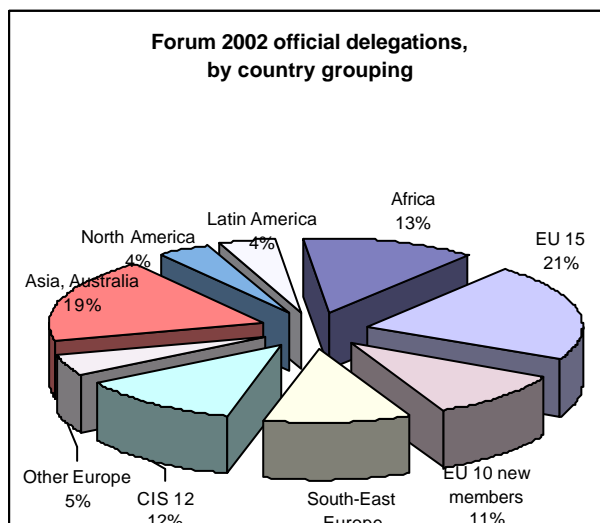
**Chart 1**



Source and note: see table 1.

14. The EU 15 Member States formed the largest grouping of official delegates at both forums, accounting for around 21 % of all delegates. The second largest number of official delegates came from Asian countries, accounting respectively for 19 % in 2002 and 18 % in 2003 (chart 2).

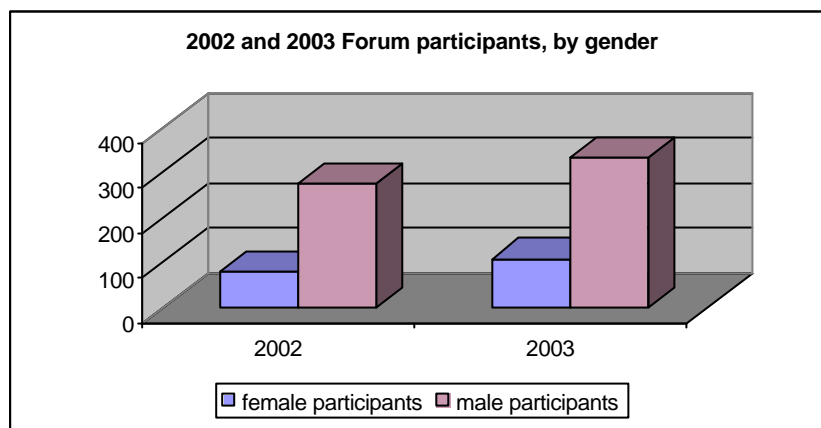
**Chart 2**



Source and note: see table 1.

15. In 2002, the delegations from the African countries, CIS, and southeast European countries formed similar groupings, accounting for respectively 13 %, 12 %, and 11 % of the total number of delegates. The number of delegates from the CIS and other European countries increased in 2003 reaching respectively 14 % and 9 %. African, southeast European countries and the 10 future EU members' delegations decreased respectively to 11 %, 9%, and 8 % of the total number of delegates.

**Chart 3**



Source and note : see table 1.

16. Male participants represented 78 % and female delegates represented 22 % of all participants in 2002, and in 2003 the percentages were respectively 72 % and 28 %. Female participation in 2003 compared to 2002 increased by 27 percent (chart 3).

## II. General background, objectives and outcomes of the forums

### 2002 Forum "Trade Facilitation: Simpler Procedures for World Trade Growth"

17. The first International Forum on Trade Facilitation was organized in an economic climate of slowing growth and increased security concerns when the need for efficient, simple and reliable international trade procedures in an open and inclusive trading system had taken on a dramatically increased importance. The Forum therefore provided an opportunity for Governments, international organizations and businesses to raise practical concerns, particular to their field of activity and geographical area.

18. It addressed specific problems of developing transition and landlocked economies and of small and medium sized enterprises. It also gave further insights into trade facilitation issues that went beyond purely customs or market access matters. In addition, it addressed transparency and integrity in international trade, the role of rules and codes, trade facilitation techniques in ports, harmonization of electronic data interchange standards, and the costs and benefits of implementing trade facilitation.

#### Objectives, target audience and outcomes

19. The 2002 Forum defined practical new measures to promote the progress of trade facilitation in the future. There was a special need for such innovative approaches in a time of uncertainty in order to curb the negative effects of recession and the increasing costs of moving goods across borders. The Forum's main objectives were:

- enhance the understanding of the benefits from trade facilitation for the public and private sectors, and particularly, economic benefits, including job creation
- enhance the concept of transparency
- discuss ways to improve competitiveness through trade facilitation
- highlight the role of trade facilitation and the use of ICT in supporting e-business
- identify opportunities for better cooperation among Governments, international organizations and the private sector
- stress the need for coordination among inter-governmental organizations to take advantage of their respective competencies and make the best use of scarce resources
- suggest harmonized methods for measuring progress and “knowledge sharing” in the implementation of trade facilitation
- decide on follow-up action and implementation.

20. The Forum brought together government policy makers, customs services, government representatives; business executives and large trade associations; representatives of international and non-governmental organizations, donor agencies, national trade facilitation bodies, and trade associations; academics as well as individual experts specializing in international trade, trade facilitation and globalization.

21. The most important outcomes of the Forum were:
- promotion of the implementation of necessary practical measures for trade facilitation in the future
  - overview of the current achievements in trade facilitation
  - increased political will for implementing trade facilitation in the various groups of countries, as witnessed in part, by the growing importance of trade facilitation in the international political agenda
  - input to the multilateral negotiations on trade facilitation
  - overview of public-private partnerships in trade facilitation.

### **2003 Forum "Sharing the Gains of Globalization in the New Security Environment"**

22. The second International Forum on Trade Facilitation focused on trade and transport facilitation and customs cooperation. Special attention was given to the perspectives and needs of development as well as to heightened security requirements. The Forum discussed, in particular, the effect of the new security challenges on global supply chains.

23. As the security emphasis during 2002 and 2003 had shifted from “threats to trade” to “threats from trade”, the conduct of international trade had undergone fundamental changes. Some major actors in international trade focused on identifying and minimizing risks to the security of international flows of goods (especially in container trade). Others were concerned with the new security requirements, which might impose an additional burden on fragile economies. There was, therefore, a risk that this might prevent countries in transition and developing countries from fully sharing the benefits of globalization, and that they might become further marginalized. There was also concern that the weakest participants in the global trading system might suffer more severe consequences from these challenges and changes. The purpose of this Forum was to address these problems by providing a neutral forum for discussion and by looking into the development of new international instruments in the area.

24. The Forum built upon the broader definition of trade facilitation developed at the 2002 Forum. Addressing the problems of the weaker stakeholders was also one of the principal objectives of the Forum.

### **Objectives, target audience and major outcomes**

25. The Forum highlighted possible ways of constructing equitable mechanisms for facilitating trade, where small and large countries and businesses will share the benefits. It pointed to innovative methods for resolving the dilemma between heightened security measures and the necessity for faster movement of goods, services and information. Its main objectives were to:

- provide a neutral platform for an exchange of views and a policy debate among the various stakeholders in trade facilitation, especially on the issues of sharing the benefits and the balance between advancing security and trade facilitation
- offer a meeting place for representatives of Governments, business and international organizations, who can then influence the decision making processes in their countries or institutions
- enhance the public and private sectors' understanding of the benefits of trade facilitation, which include: (a) improving efficiency; (b) creating jobs; (c) promoting transparency; (d) enhancing government revenue and (e) boosting competitiveness
- put an emphasis on promoting mechanisms for capacity building in developing and transition economies in order to give substance to the Doha Development Agenda of the WTO
- underline the multidimensional aspects of trade facilitation
- emphasize the necessity for more work on the legal aspects of trade facilitation
- identify areas where new instruments, including standards, are needed
- enhance the mechanisms of cooperation among Governments, international organizations and the private sector.

26. The Forum encouraged greater participation of developing and transition economies in the global trade facilitation debate.

27. In addition, all the targeted groups who participated in the Forum benefited from the sessions outputs:

- *policy makers* participated in a network of decision makers and experts who might influence the definition of the trade facilitation agenda for the future and obtained information that could help them to make informed decisions in formulating national strategies and trade policy
- *leaders of the business community* made their position heard among policy makers and ambassadors to the UN and WTO, and interacted with other major players in trade facilitation
- *intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations* became involved in a wide, cross-sector network of government and business leaders
- *academics and experts* contributed to and became part of the development of concepts and strategies for the future of trade facilitation.

### III. Evaluations and follow-up surveys

#### Overview

28. The UNECE secretariat distributed an evaluation form during the meetings in order to evaluate the interest of participants in the various sessions. Tables 2 and 3 represent average ratings based on the answers received during the Forum.

29. Participants were also requested to evaluate the quality of the presentations and the usefulness of information from the sessions (table 4).

**Table 2 - Interest in sessions**

<b>2002</b>	<b>Average</b>
1: The concept of trade facilitation - quality of presentations	1.96
2: Defining the trade facilitation agenda for the 21 <sup>st</sup> century - quality of presentations	2.24
3: The role of business community - quality of presentations	2.08
4: Achieving an open and inclusive environment - quality of presentations	2.36
5: The stake of developing and transition economies in trade facilitation - quality of presentations	1.96
<b>2003</b>	<b>Average</b>
1: Sharing the benefits of trade facilitation in a more fair manner	2.12
2: Trade facilitation policy and new security initiatives	2.20
3: Mechanisms of cooperation: the role of the business community	2.40
4: Open regionalism	2.11
Seminar on UN electronic trade documents project UNeDocs	2.22
Workshop Intellectual property rights and trade facilitation	2.17

*Ratings: 1 = Excellent; 2=Very good; 3= Acceptable = Poor; 5 = Unsatisfactory.*

*Source: UNECE secretariat figures based on the evaluation forms submitted during the meetings.*

**Table 3 - Forum organization and the UN staff assistance to the participants**

	1	2	3	4	5	No opinion	Average rating
<b>2002</b>							
Helpfulness	46	92	9	2	0	0	1.78
Availability	48	84	16	0	1	0	1.81
Friendliness	66	75	8	0	0	0	1.61
<b>2003</b>							
Helpfulness	37	18	2	0	0	3	1.39
Availability	34	19	4	0	0	3	1.47
Friendliness	37	18	3	0	0	2	1.41

*Ratings: 1 = Excellent; 2=Very good; 3= Acceptable = Poor; 5 = Unsatisfactory*

*Source: UNECE secretariat figures based on the evaluation forms submitted during the meetings.*



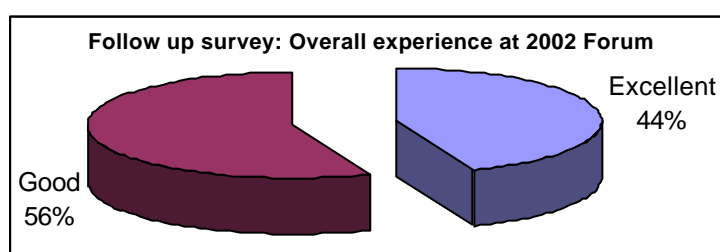
### Follow-up surveys

30. In August 2004, follow-up questionnaires were sent to the participants in the 2002 and 2003 Trade Facilitation Forums. The majority of the participants that replied represented governmental organizations. Delegates from the business community and from international organizations were also well represented in the survey, as were participants from research institutes and NGOs.

### Overall experience from the Forums

31. The delegates' overall experience with the trade facilitation Forum 2002 was an important indicator. There were five possible ratings, ranging from excellent to very poor, including a "no opinion" option. The survey participants were generally positive about the Forum (chart 4). NB. The lack of any negative answers to this question might be due to delegates having negative comments probably choosing not to reply to the questionnaire.

**Chart 4**



Source: UNECE secretariat evaluation.

### General views of the participants

32. The survey participants were asked to give a numeric value to different statements related to the Forums' appropriateness, organization, topics, presentations, proceedings and follow-up activities. Availability, friendliness and responsiveness of UNECE staff at the Forum received the most positive ratings. The majority of participants rated the Forum as timely and well organized. The meeting room and facilities were also found to be comfortable and appropriate.

**Table 4 - Forum organization, documents and UN staff assistance**

	Average 2002	Average 2003
Forum was timely and well organized	1.25	1.35
Meeting room and facilities were comfortable and appropriate for facilitating discussions	1.44	1.45
UNECE staff at the Forum were available, friendly and responsive	1.31	1.15
Topics covered the main issues of trade facilitation	1.88	1.70
Presentations were interesting and comprehensible	1.80	1.80
The analytical level of the presentations and discussions was good	2.07	2.00
I have been able to use the information from the Forum	2.31	2.05
Participation in the Forum contributed to building my network of professional contacts in trade facilitation	2.56	2.15
Materials and policy recommendations from the Forum should be used in further follow-up activities	1.63	1.85
Proceedings of Forum are interesting and useful	1.69	1.55

Ratings: 1 = Excellent; 2=Very good; 3= Acceptable = Poor; 5 = Unsatisfactory  
Source: UNECE secretariat, based on 2004 follow-up survey replies.

**Usefulness and ratings of the Forum sessions**

33. The survey participants were asked again their level of interest in the different Trade Facilitation Forum sessions.

**Table 7 - Participants' interest in the Forum sessions**

<b>2002</b>	<b>Average</b>
1: The concept of trade facilitation	1.50
2: Defining the trade facilitation agenda for the 21 <sup>st</sup> century	1.75
3: The role of business community	2.13
4: Achieving an open and inclusive environment	2.13
5: The stake of developing and transition economies in trade facilitation	2.25
<b>2003</b>	
1: Sharing the benefits of trade facilitation in a more fair manner	1.40
2: Trade facilitation policy and new security initiatives	1.35
3: Mechanisms of cooperation: the role of the business community; technical tools for trade facilitation & trade security	1.70
4: Open regionalism	2.10
5: UN electronic trade documents project UNeDocs: digital paper for secure and efficient supply chains	1.90
6: Intellectual property rights and trade facilitation	2.00

*Ratings: 1 = Excellent; 2=Very good; 3=Acceptable = Poor; 5 = Unsatisfactory*

**Table 8 - Participants' interest in Forum's thematic focus**

<b>2002</b>	<b>Average</b>
Balance between trade facilitation and enhanced security	1.75
Integrated management of information flows in international trade	1.63
Economic integration issues in Europe and in the CIS	1.93
Regional trade agreements and arrangements	1.81
Single window clearance for exports / imports	1.50
Standards for trade facilitation and trade security	1.63
Trade facilitation and the WTO Development Agenda	1.75
Trade logistic chains	2.19
<b>2003</b>	<b>Average</b>
Balance between trade facilitation and enhanced security	1.85
Integrated management of information flows in international trade	1.60
Economic integration issues in Europe and in the CIS	2.05
Regional trade agreements and arrangements	2.05
Single window clearance for exports / imports	1.65
Standards for trade facilitation and trade security	1.60
Trade facilitation and the WTO Development Agenda	1.80
Trade logistic chains	2.15

*Ratings: 1 = Excellent; 2=Very good; 3=Acceptable = Poor; 5 = Unsatisfactory*

*Source and notes: UNECE secretariat, based on the evaluation surveys.*

**Topics to be included in a future Forum on Trade Facilitation**

34. In the survey participants were asked what they felt would be the most interesting topics for the agenda of any future forums on trade facilitation. The replies are set out in table 9.

**Table 9 - Thematic topics to be included in a future Forum on Trade Facilitation**

<b>2002</b>	<b>Level of interest</b>
Balance between trade facilitation and enhanced security	76.9%
Integrated management of information flows in international trade	53.8%
Economic integration issues in Europe and in the CIS	46.2%
Regional trade agreements and arrangements	53.8%
Single window clearance for exports / imports	61.5%
Standards for trade facilitation and trade security	61.5%
Trade facilitation and the WTO Development Agenda	76.9%
Trade logistic chains	23.1%

<b>2003</b>	
Balance between trade facilitation and enhanced security	45.0%
Integrated management of information flows in international trade	50.0%
Economic integration issues in Europe and in the CIS	40.0%
Regional trade agreements and arrangements	45.0%
Single window clearance for exports / imports	50.0%
Standards for trade facilitation and trade security	60.0%
Trade facilitation and the WTO Development Agenda	55.0%
Trade logistic chains	10.0%

*Ratings: 1 = Excellent; 2=Very good; 3= Acceptable = Poor; 5 = Unsatisfactory*

*Source and notes: UNECE secretariat, based on survey.*

35. It should be noted that trade logistics chains received the highest ratings from the CIS and several Asian country delegates although the subject was relatively low on the agenda of other participants (with less than 20 % of participants finding it of interest).

36. Individual participants also proposed several topics for inclusion in future forums on trade facilitation, including:

- Links between fiscal reform and trade facilitation in least-developed countries
- Examples of successful trade facilitation and customs reform in developing countries, focusing on reform elements, costs, impact and benefits/side effects
- Postal issues and e-commerce
- Obstacles, challenges and implications to developing countries implementing trade facilitation mechanisms.

### **Additional comments and suggestions by survey participants**

37. The participants also made additional comments and suggestions about the organization of future forums on trade facilitation. These comments are copied below:

1. More attention to capacity building, which is a challenge in trade facilitation. In a broad cross-border environment, there is a need for symmetry in the levels of trade facilitation among different economies and regions to ensure minimizing the time and cost of doing business. In the end, the vision of installing a single window system (for export and import clearance) locally, then regionally and internationally will have to be pursued by all.
2. Concern about the sophisticated technical nature of some of the UNECE's technological solutions. UNECE should set and maintain practical facilitation standards and recommendations and not go too deeply into technological solutions. that can hardly be used for trade facilitation purposes.
3. Focus UNECE's work on real trade facilitation issues: more practical and pragmatic solutions and examples of real projects using ICT and the facilitation aspects thereof.
4. Concern about the implementation of trade facilitation standards. Trade facilitation means also the change of rules and regulations of Governments e.g. currently many EDI implementations are still waiting for national laws to be changed.
5. Include more information and details on trade facilitation in EU integration. The experience of the recently integrated countries would be very valuable.
6. More inputs from experts on the positive effects for trade facilitation originating from the establishment of private-public forums in each country. How these partnerships influence the adoption of good governance principles in trade facilitation.
7. Organize trade facilitation forums more frequently in order to keep participants from developing and transition countries up to date on these topics.

38. In 2003, additional comments included the following:

- Support the participation of delegates from the poorer developing countries
- Establish stronger links to the WTO negotiating agenda. Any future Forum on trade facilitation should focus on main elements of the WTO negotiating agenda.
- Create a grid of basic technological/documentary/infrastructure needs of transitional and developing economies in support of minimum/maximum standards needed for effective trade facilitation

### **IV. Lessons learned**

39. Despite the strong progress that has been made at the 2002 and 2003 Forums in building momentum for trade facilitation, challenges remain. Among them are: developing and fostering public commitment to trade facilitation, maintaining close alliances and partnerships and seeking solid support from interested institutions, Governments and NGOs, and business organizations, working closely and maintaining positive relations with the media as well as carrying out and supporting research and evaluations.

40. The key lessons to be drawn from this evaluation are as follows:

- The vast majority of survey participants found the forums valuable and interesting, and expressed the hope that they would be continued on an annual basis.
- Since the survey participants highly appreciated the availability, friendliness and responsiveness of the UNECE staff at both Forums, the organization of future forums on trade facilitation should build upon the relations of delegates' trust and respect vis-à-vis the UNECE staff. It might be useful to consider developing and updating a contact network including all interested institutions, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and experts, so as to generate wider support for the Forums.
- The survey of the 2003 Forum revealed that participants found the session on trade facilitation policy and new security initiatives the most interesting and useful. The sessions related to open regionalism and intellectual property rights and trade facilitation were found less attractive. Therefore, for future events, UNECE should focus more on policy- and security-related discussions.
- The survey participants also considered that, in addition, the most interesting topics for inclusion in a future trade facilitation forum would be themes related to standards for trade facilitation and trade security, the integrated management of information flows in international trade, and the establishment of single window clearance for exports/imports.
- The forum should constantly take advantage of opportunities as they arise and should include relevant topics in its agenda. Participants emphasized, for example, achieving a balance between trade facilitation and enhanced security, and the relations between the trade facilitation and the WTO development agenda.
- The statistical breakdown of participants in both Forums reflects the global nature of the topics and discussions. All continents were represented, while the geographical proximity boosted the European presence at both the 2002 and 2003 Forums. Nevertheless, efforts need to be undertaken to encourage greater gender balance at future forums. One approach might be to involve more women and civil society organizations in the discussions.
- The meeting evaluations and survey responses suggest that more effort should be made to increase the usefulness of the background documents prepared for the forums, and to provide assistance to delegates, helping them to use the information from the Forum for follow-up activities.

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