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

Revision of the Convention:

Preparation of Phase III of the TIR revision process

Report of the Informal Ad hoc Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure on its twenty-seventh session*

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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 twenty-seventh session on 4 and 5 December 2017 in Geneva (Switzerland).
2. The session was attended by experts from Belgium, Croatia, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. Experts from the European Union, the International Road Transport Union (IRU) and the World Customs Organization (WCO) also attended the session.
3. Due to absence of the Chair at the start of the work, the session was chaired by the Vice Chair, Mr. H. Greven (Netherlands).

II. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 10 (2017)

4. The Expert Group adopted its provisional agenda.

III. New information and communication technology developments in the TIR system (agenda item 2)

5. The Expert Group welcomed the presentation by IRU on a project related to the electronic consignment note (eCMR).¹ The Expert Group noted that pilot projects are already practiced and that a standard eCMR data model is currently being developed under the umbrella of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT). The Expert Group noted with interest that, whereas in Western Europe the CMR has limited use for customs and is mainly used for controls en route (e.g. by police), in Eastern Europe it is required by customs and even stamped. The Expert Group took note that, in the eCMR pilot project, smartphones and Quick Response (QR) codes are used as electronic authentication methods. However, this could pose problems for the introduction of pilots in countries of the Eurasian Economic Union, Iran, Islamic Republic of or Turkey. In the European Union, this authentication method could also be an issue in Germany. The Expert Group also noted that there is a strong push by the European Commission to have all its member States accede to the eCMR Protocol.

IV. eTIR pilot projects (agenda item 3)

A. UNECE-IRU eTIR pilot project between Iran, Islamic Republic of and Turkey

6. The Expert Group took note that, further to the successful conduct of the eTIR pilot project between Iran, Islamic Republic of and Turkey and taking into account the Joint Statement on the Computerization of the TIR procedure, adopted in June 2015 by AC.2, on 26 September 2017, EXCOM accepted a five years eTIR project with a total budget of \$1,511,275. Subsequently, on 6 October 2017, UNECE and IRU signed a Memorandum of

¹ CMR stands for “Convention relative au contrat de transport international de Marchandise par Route”.

Understanding (MoU) on cooperation in the field of the computerization of the TIR procedure and a Contribution Agreement (CA), which would ensure the provision of the necessary funds to finance, inter alia, an additional Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) expert to work on the project as well as the hosting of the eTIR international system at the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) data centre. The Expert Group further noted that, in the framework of the MoU, annual work plans will be established on the basis of the specific requests of contracting parties willing to take part in eTIR projects and that the development of the eTIR international system would follow an agile methodology. Furthermore, it noted that IRU agreed that the CA would be amended if the funds would not be sufficient to keep up with the requirements brought forward by contracting parties willing to move toward eTIR.

7. The Expert Group also took note of the information provided by IRU on the continuation of eTIR transports between Iran, Islamic Republic of and Turkey. Further to the 100 eTIR guarantees issued until 20 February 2017, 30 additional ones had since been issued. The Expert Group took note that the apparently small quantity of eTIR guarantees issued is due to the limited number of transport operators authorized to undertake eTIR transports and the small number of customs offices from and to which eTIR operations can take part.

B. eTIR pilot project between Georgia and Turkey

8. The Expert Group took note of progress in the Georgia-Turkey eTIR pilot project, launched in the framework of the United Nations Development Account project “Strengthening the Capacities of Developing Countries and Countries with Economies in Transition to Facilitate Legitimate Border Crossing, Regional Cooperation and Integration”. The Expert Group took note that all technical issues related to the development environment of the Central Exchange Platform had been resolved and that both countries would soon be in a position to move to the production environment.

V. Findings of the Group of Experts on Legal Aspects of the Computerization of the TIR Procedure (agenda item 4)

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.2/10

9. The Expert Group took note of document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.2/10, which contains the report of the Group of Experts on Legal Aspects of the Computerization of the TIR Procedure (GE.2) at its fifth session (30-31 October 2017) and of the oral information provided by the secretariat on the main findings of GE.2 at that session.

10. More specifically, GE.1 noted that GE.2 had reiterated its findings from a survey on electronic authentication mechanisms that data submitted electronically required authentication, along with a variety of methods of authentication in use and differing specificities and legal status of electronic signatures and that it had requested the secretariat to prepare a document that summarized the results of the survey for the consideration of the Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport (WP.30) at its next session.

11. Decisions by GE.2 that GE.1 considered to be of relevance for its work included that:

(a) Conformance testing should be mentioned in the draft legal framework, to enable the computerization of the TIR procedure (“draft Annex 11”) as a mandatory step prior to the operational connection to the eTIR international system and be part of the assistance provided by ECE (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.2/10, para. 13);

(b) Annex 10, paragraph 2 of the TIR Convention would continue to be used for paper-based TIR transports, and ways to adapt the reconciliation procedure for eTIR transports could be considered at a later stage (see ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.2/10, para. 22); and

(c) Draft Annex 11 and the related revisions to the main body of the TIR Convention, subject to the modifications agreed to at the fifth session of GE.2, and its self-evaluation should be submitted to WP.30 for further consideration (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2018/3, ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2018/4, see also ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.2/10, paras. 26 and 30).

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

A. Contributions by the network of eTIR focal points

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 12 (2017)

12. The Expert Group took note of Informal document GE.1 No. 12 (2017) and, in particular, that thirty-five countries have nominated one or more eTIR focal points. The Expert Group also took note that version 4.2a of the eTIR conceptual, functional and technical documentation had been sent to eTIR focal points and copied to TIR focal points, for comments.

B. Version 4.2a of the 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)

13. The Expert Group welcomed the eTIR specifications contained in Informal documents GE.1 No. 5, No. 6, No. 7 and No. 8 (2017). The Expert Group took note and endorsed the changes that had been introduced since its last session, in particular:

- the introduction of two new messages to notify the refusal to start a TIR operation and its response (I17 and I18)
- a new attribute in the termination class to indicate the termination type
- linking the CertificateOfApproval class to the TransportEquipment class (instead of the TransportMeans class)
- the inclusion of a code for the termination type in case of accidents or incidents
- the removal of holder and guarantee details in TIR operation messages
- the inclusion of the core data types in the technical specifications
- the addition of the usage clause and disclaimer to the specifications and XSDs
- the publication of version 0.4 of the XSDs and of the code lists
- the publication of a new set of XSDs that include notes (documentation) to help developers

14. The delegation of the European Union reiterated its proposal to organize an informal meeting to compare the eTIR and the New Computerized Transit System (NCTS) requirements resulting from the new Union Customs Code (UCC).

C. Amendments

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 9 (2017)

15. The Expert Group carefully considered the various amendment proposals contained in Informal document GE.1 No. 13 (2017).

1. Accompanying document

16. The Expert Group welcomed the revised draft accompanying document contained in Annex I of Informal document GE.1 No. 13 (2017). It first considered whether it would be preferable to use a barcode or a QR code on the attached document. Taking into account that most customs offices are already equipped with barcode readers, the Expert Group decided that a barcode would be sufficient to enable a quick read of the guarantee reference. Furthermore, the Expert Group extensively discussed who should be allowed to print the accompanying document, whether it should be stamped by the customs office of departure and whether it should be mandatory for all modes of transport.

17. While considering whether the accompanying document could also be printed by the holder, the Expert Group recalled that, at this stage, it is not foreseen to include any security elements in the accompanying document that would ensure the authenticity of a document printed by customs. However, considering that national references of the TIR operations and the reference to the seals are only known after the acceptance of the declaration, the holder would not be a position to print them on the accompanying document. With that in mind, the Expert Group was of the view that it is the responsibility of customs administrations to provide the holder with an accompanying document.

18. With regard to the question of whether customs should stamp the accompanying document at departure, the Expert Group decided that it would be preferable not to stamp it to avoid giving the accompanying document an official nature. The Expert Group was of the view that despite the fact that the accompanying document is essential for controls outside of customs offices (for example, but not limited to, road controls by the police), including in case of accidents or incidents, as well as in case of fallback, the eTIR procedure should be based on the electronic exchange of data and not on the paper accompanying document.

19. The Expert Group also extensively discussed whether the accompanying document should be mandatory. It was of the view that, for en route control purposes as well as in case of accidents or incidents (the certified report being printed on the verso of the accompanying document), it is essential that the holder would carry this document at all times. However, the Expert Group also noted that in the case of intermodal use of the eTIR procedure, the requirement to carry an accompanying document could lead to complications that could jeopardize the use of the eTIR procedure for containerized transports.

20. In conclusion, the Expert Group mandated the secretariat to prepare a revised version of the accompanying document, together with a summary description of its usage and to circulate it among TIR focal points (with copy to eTIR focal points) to gather their expert view on any potential procedural issue.

2. Sequence of messages

21. The Expert Group considered the sequence diagrams contained in Annex II of Informal document GE.1 No. 13 (2017) and requested their inclusion in the next version of the eTIR specifications.

3. Status of guarantees

22. The Expert Group took note that the status of the guarantee could not remain “in use” in case of accidents or incidents as well as in the case of a refusal to start a TIR operation. Consequently, it requested the secretariat to introduce two new codes for the guarantee status and the required rules for the eTIR international system in the next version of the eTIR specifications.

23. The Expert Group also asked IRU about the potential reasons that could lead to a request for cancellation of the guarantee. IRU agreed to produce a document for the next session of the Expert Group to clarify this issue.

4. Core data types

24. The Expert Group agreed with the secretariat that only the core data types used in eTIR messages should be listed in the eTIR specifications and that additional core data types could be added in the future, if necessary.

5. Refusal to start TIR operation

25. The Expert Group took note that version 4.2a of the eTIR concepts document, which had already been published in April 2017, did not contain the description of the “refusal to start a TIR operation” message and its response message. It instructed the secretariat to include them in the next version of the document.

6. Definition of the declaration

26. The Expert Group decided to amend the definition of the term “declaration” in the next version of the TIR glossary contained in Annex II to the introduction of the eTIR conceptual, functional and technical documentation as follows: “Act whereby the holder, or their representative, indicates in the prescribed form and manner the intent to place goods under the TIR or eTIR procedure”.

7. Conformance testing

27. The Expert Group agreed to the need to devise extended conformance testing scenarios as well as a validation test environment to allow countries to verify the syntax of their messages. It also stressed the importance of the help desk to assist countries in undertaking the required tests and in solving issues identified during the tests. The Expert Group was of the view that the conformance test procedure, test cases and scenarios should be devised as a separate document (i.e. not included in the eTIR specifications) and only after the technical specifications would be finalized.

8. WCO data model version 3.8

28. The Expert Group took note that the current eTIR messages are based on the WCO data model version 3.7 but that extensions were included in them to accommodate the new messages I17 and I18 as well as a new attribute in the termination class to indicate the termination type. It further noted that the secretariat would submit a Data Maintenance Request (DMR) to the WCO Data Model Projects Team, requesting those amendments to be included in version 3.8 of the WCO data model.

29. The Expert Group also took note of the scope of the WCO data model version 3.8, in particular the inclusion of a unique trader reference as well as information packages for eCMR, hazardous wastes and ePhyto certificates.

9. Storage of information

30. The Expert Group agreed with the proposal to include the minimum duration for the storage of information in the eTIR international system in chapter “1.2.5.1 Central platform”.

10. Mutual recognition of the authentication

31. The Expert Group took note that extensive discussions on the mutual recognition of the authentication of the holder performed by the country of departure had taken place during meetings of GE.2 and WP.30 but that, at this stage, no practical alternative had been identified. From a technological perspective, the Expert Group was of the view that the blockchain technology could potentially provide an alternative and welcomed the proposal by the European Union to invite an expert to present, at the next session, how this technology could be used in a customs environment.

11. Hash code

32. The Expert Group recalled the idea to use a hash code to ensure the integrity of the declaration data from the time the holder sent the declaration to the country of departure until the moment it is received by the customs office of destination. The Expert Group was of the view that, in practice, it did not seem feasible to use the hash code in the course of the eTIR procedure but that, in case of legal procedures, the hash code could ensure the integrity of the data as originally submitted by the holder. Consequently, the Expert Group considered the inclusion of the hash code in the envelope of the E9 message and requested the secretariat to prepare, for its next session, a document exploring this possibility.

12. Reconciliation procedure

33. The Expert Group took note that GE.2 had discussed the possible need to devise a special reconciliation procedure (Annex 10, paragraph 2) for eTIR. IRU stressed that, in its view, an automatic reconciliation procedure for eTIR (by means of a new message) was necessary, in particular in case of missing messages. The European Union stressed that, while NCTS had a built-in procedure in case of discrepancies, in view of the possibly large number of customs offices involved in an eTIR transport, it would be preferable to leave the reconciliation procedure on paper and limit any automatic procedure to missing messages.

34. The Expert Group requested the secretariat, possibly with the assistance of IRU, to prepare a document for its next meeting, presenting various options for a reconciliation procedure in eTIR.

VII. Other business (agenda item 6)

A. World Customs Organization activities

35. The Expert Group welcomed the presentation by WCO and took note of the launch of the WCO Transit Guidelines at the WCO Transit Conference, which took place in Brussels on 10 and 11 July 2017. The Expert Group further noted that WCO would organize regional workshops to promote the implementation of the Transit Guidelines,

prepare a publication on transit best practices and organize a second global conference on transit in 2020. The Expert Group also welcomed the information about progress made in the eATA project and welcomed the efforts of the UNECE and WCO secretariats to keep each other mutually informed about development in the eATA and eTIR projects.

B. Other activities of interest

36. The Expert Group welcomed the demonstration of the International TIR Data Bank (ITDB) by the TIR secretariat and took note of the progress in developing a customs office database to be included in the ITDB. The Expert Group recalled the importance for all contracting parties to use the ITDB Web Service to automatically and systematically check the status of TIR Carnet holders at the start of each TIR operation, as this would ultimately push associations and customs administrations to keep the ITDB up-to-date.

37. Furthermore, the Expert Group took note that contracting parties can contact the secretariat if they want to translate the ITDB interface in their own language as well as if they need some support and/or documentation.

C. Date and place of next session

38. The Expert Group was not yet in a position to agree on a date for its next session. It requested the secretariat, in coordination with the Chair, to propose dates, possibly in May or June 2018.
