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Item 7 (k) of the provisional agenda

Strategic questions of a horizontal and cross-sectoral policy or regulatory nature:

**Strengthening border crossing facilitation (TIR Convention, eTIR project,
Harmonization Convention and other customs transit facilitation measures)**

Strengthening border crossing facilitation (TIR Convention, eTIR project, Harmonization Convention 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) and its subsidiary groups of experts, the Administrative Committee for the TIR Convention, 1975 (AC.2), the Administrative Committee for the Harmonization Convention, 1982 (AC.3) and the ECE/TIR secretariat in the area of border crossing. This includes the computerization of the TIR system in the framework of the eTIR project.

The Committee will be informed about the main outcome of the 154th and 155th sessions of WP.30 (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/308 and ECE/TRANS/WP.30/310) and will be invited to take note of the activities of AC.2 in the year 2020, including, but not limited to, amendments adopted (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/147 and ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/149).

In particular, the Committee will be informed about the adoption, by AC.2 at its February 2020 session, of amendment proposals introducing the eTIR procedure in new Annex 11 of the TIR Convention as well as the progress in the development of the eTIR international system, efforts to interconnect the eTIR international system with national customs systems and activities of the Group of Experts on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of computerization of the TIR Procedure (WP.30/GE.1). The Committee will also be informed about the latest developments in the International TIR Data Bank (ITDB) and efforts to make the electronic submission of data to ITDB mandatory.

The Committee will be informed about progress in 2020 in the implementation of recommendations further to an audit of the TIR trust fund by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS).

The Committee will be informed about the latest amendment proposal to the International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls for Goods, 1982, extending the interval



between surveys among contracting parties on progress made to improve border crossing procedures in their countries from two to five years.

The Committee will be informed about the intention of ECE and the International Touring Alliance / International Automobile Federation (AIT/FIA) to conclude a memorandum of understanding on the revitalization and digitalization of relevant United Nations inland transport conventions.

The Committee will be informed about follow-up actions taken by WP.30 in 2020 in alignment of its work with the ITC strategy.

The Committee will be informed of activities in the field of border crossing facilitation in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I. Background and mandate

1. This document has been prepared in accordance with the 2016–2020 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 2020 by the contracting parties, the Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport (WP.30), the Administrative Committee for the TIR Convention, 1975 (AC.2), the Administrative Committee for the Harmonization Convention, 1982 (AC.3) and the ECE/TIR secretariat in the area of border crossing facilitation, including among others:

- Activities and developments of the TIR Convention and the functioning of the TIR system.
- Progress made in the eTIR project, the finalization and adoption of the text of draft Annex 11 to the convention to legally frame the operationalization of the computerized TIR procedure and the ensuing pilot projects.
- Developments in the International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods, 1982 (Harmonization Convention).
- Developments in the Convention on the Facilitation of Border Crossing Procedures for Passengers, Luggage and Load-luggage Carried in International Traffic by Rail.
- Developments in the 1954 Customs Convention on the Temporary Importation of Private Road Vehicles and the 1956 Customs Convention on the Temporary Importation of Commercial Road Vehicles.
- Requests from ITC to align the activities of WP.30 with the ITC strategy until 2030.
- COVID-19 and activities of ECE in the field of border crossing facilitation.

II. The TIR Convention

A. Amendment proposals to the Convention

2. Since 2019, the TIR Convention, 1975 has 76 contracting parties. In 2020, the TIR system became operational in Oman and Saudi-Arabia and now has 64 active TIR countries.

3. In 2020, WP.30 and AC.2 continued their efforts towards considering and finalizing various amendment proposals to the TIR Convention. Over the year 2020, AC.2 formally adopted various packages with amendment proposals, including, but not limited to:

- Amendment proposals to the body of the Convention and for a new Annex 11, introducing eTIR in the legal text of the Convention.

- Amendments to make the electronic submission of data to the International TIR Databank (ITDB) obligatory.
- Amendment to allow contracting parties to grant, under strict conditions, greater facilities in the application of the provisions of the Convention, such as authorized consignor and consignee.
- Amendments to the TIR Carnet lay-out to allow for the use of maximum eight places of loading and unloading (these proposals have been accepted, pending formal adoption at the February 2021 session of AC.2).

4. On 25 February 2020, the Secretary-General of the United Nations in his capacity of depositary, issued depositary notification C.N.71.2020.TREATIES-XI.A.16 (re-issued). In accordance with the provisions of article 59 (3) of the Convention, the proposed amendments shall come into force with respect to all parties to the Convention three months after the expiry of a period of twelve months following the date of the communication during which no objection to the proposed amendments has been communicated to the Secretary-General by a party. Annex 11 shall come into force, in the absence of any objection to the proposal of amendments within the abovementioned twelve-month period, except for those States which notify the depositary of their nonacceptance of Annex 11 between 25 February 2021 and 25 May 2021.

5. On 4 November 2020, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, acting in his capacity as depositary, issued the following depositary notifications: (i) [C.N.513.2020.TREATIES-XI.A.16](#), informing of the submission of various proposals to amend the body and annexes of the TIR Convention, 1975, including those that make the electronic submission of data to ITDB obligatory. In accordance with the provisions of Article 59 (3) of the Convention, the amendments shall enter into force on 4 February 2022, unless an objection has been communicated to the Secretary-General not later than by 4 November 2020; (ii) [C.N.514.2020.TREATIES-XI.A.16](#), informing of the submission of a proposal to amend Annex 6 of the TIR Convention, 1975 with a new Explanatory Note 0.49, granting operators greater facilities. In accordance with the provisions of article 60 (1) of the Convention, the Administrative Committee decided, at its seventy-third session (11 October 2020) that the amendment shall enter into force on 1 June 2021. Therefore, the Secretary-General should be notified of objections to the proposed amendment no later than by 1 March 2021. In the absence of a sufficient number of objections by 1 March 2021, the proposed amendments shall enter into force on 1 June 2021.

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

1. Functioning of the International TIR Data Bank

6. At its seventy-second session (February 2020), AC.2 welcomed the status report on the ITDB application by the secretariat. AC.2 was informed about the current status of data recordings in ITDB and, in particular, of the following figures: 1,038 web application users, 33,944 authorized holders recorded, 232 stamps and seals recorded, 2,439 customs offices recorded, as well as about the web service usage for the past two years. The secretariat also informed AC.2 about recent ITDB-related achievements: the completion of security upgrades on the ITDB servers, email communications sent to TIR focal points sharing ITDB status data, improvements to the ITDB service desk processes, progress in liaising with customs authorities about the customs offices module and the completion of improvements to the holder module (management of user notifications using regions). Finally, AC.2 was informed about future releases and other activities planned for 2020, namely rolling out the improvements on the holder module (notifications using regions), addressing the remaining discrepancies in data in the customs offices feature, supporting the launch of the eTIR international system prototype and starting the design of the Certificates of Approval module. AC.2 took note of the data model for the ITDB customs offices module, presented in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/2020/3 (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/147, paras 12–13).

7. At its seventy-third session (October 2020), AC.2 welcomed the status report of ITDB. AC.2 took note of the current status of data recordings in ITDB and, in particular, of the following figures: 1,063 web application users, 32,362 authorized holders recorded, 252 stamps and seals recorded, 2,474 customs offices recorded, and of the web service usage over the past two years. AC.2 was also informed about recent ITDB related achievements: the completion of security upgrades on the ITDB servers, the email communications sent to the TIR focal points inviting them to review the ITDB user accounts related to their countries, the improvements to the ITDB service desk processes, the deployment to the test environment of the customs office code validation web services, the deployment to production of the region-based notifications and other minor improvements, the tasks associated to the support of the eTIR international system development and the creation of nine read-only accounts in the ITDB web application for International Road Transport Union (IRU) staff. Finally, AC.2 was informed about future releases and other activities planned, namely: rolling out the customs office code validation web service, the support tasks to the contracting parties wishing to import customs office data in ITDB and the Certificate of Approval module. The secretariat mentioned that, even though all efforts are focused on the finalization of the eTIR international system and its interconnection with national customs systems, it will do everything possible to accomplish the above-mentioned tasks, especially the long-lasting ones. AC.2 considered the revised data requirements for the customs offices module of ITDB and took note of a video by the secretariat, available in the three official languages¹, demonstrating how customs officers would manage customs offices in the new module. AC.2 approved document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/2020/3/Rev.1, containing the data requirements for the ITDB customs office module, invited contracting parties to submit data to the module and decided that the data should be published on the ITDB website once the module is finalized (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/149, paras. 11–12).

2. Mandatory submission of data to the International TIR Data Bank

8. At its seventy-third session (October 2020), AC.2 expressed the view that it felt that concerns raised by the Government of Uzbekistan and IRU how to deal with exclusions and withdrawals in ITDB had been sufficiently addressed and that, thus, nothing impeded the formal adoption of proposals by TIRExB to make the electronic submission of data to ITDB mandatory. It requested the secretariat to transmit the adopted proposals to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for circulation among and acceptance by contracting parties (see ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/149, para. 22 and 27).

C. National and regional TIR workshops and seminars

9. Due to the ongoing COVID-crisis, no in-person workshops or seminars have been organized in 2020. However, various virtual capacity building workshops have been conducted with contracting parties and other stakeholders that have expressed an interest to become connected to the eTIR international system (Azerbaijan, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Israel, Tunisia, Turkey, the European Commission on behalf of the member States of the European Union and the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development Automated System for Customs Data (UNCTAD/ASYCUDA)).

¹ Kindly find the links below to the various language versions of the presentation:

English:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Ezyfem7Wmk&list=PL4iZR0KyjSQ83OvLtykCNksScqnsM8eXC&index=22

French:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=rK-wd5LgI_I&list=PL4iZR0KyjSQ83OvLtykCNksScqnsM8eXC&index=21

Russian:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2cHrQwms44&list=PL4iZR0KyjSQ83OvLtykCNksScqnsM8eXC&index=23

III. Developments in the implementation of the TIR Convention

Office of Internal Oversight Services of the TIR Trust Fund

10. In 2019, AC.2 noted that the audit it had requested at its sixty-fourth session (October 2016) from the competent United Nations services of the accounts of TIRExB and the TIR secretariat (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/131, para. 22) had been undertaken by OIOS and completed in March 2019, and that the audit report was presented in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/2019/25. The report contains nine recommendations dealing with the relationship between ECE and AC.2. Various of them (Recommendations No. 4, 8 and 9) were dealt with and closed in 2019. Thus, for 2020, the outstanding recommendations were:

(1) ECE should propose to the Administrative Committee the possible options of mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the documentation submitted by the authorized international organization in order to strengthen governance in the TIR Convention, particularly with regard to accountability.

11. At its seventy-third session (October 2020), AC.2 considered and adopted document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/2020/8 as a basis for such activity. AC.2 decided to accept the list of documents, subject to minor changes, to be submitted by IRU as contained in Annex II of the said document, on the understanding that, as in the past, most documents could be archived at the TIR secretariat on behalf of TIRExB and would be made available to contracting parties following the procedure established in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/2015/12. Furthermore, AC.2 decided to amend some recommendations in Annex I of the document. While fully conscious of the importance of implementing OIOS recommendation No. 1 without delay, AC.2 felt that more time was required to properly review the evaluation mechanism and, therefore, decided to revert to the issue at its next session, requesting the secretariat to revise document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/2020/8 according to the above instructions (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/149, para. 38).

(2) ECE should prepare updated terms of reference for TIR focal points for consideration and approval by the Administrative Committee in order to ensure consistency and enhance the effectiveness of focal points.

12. At its seventy-second session (February 2020), AC.2 considered document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/2020/9 which includes updated Terms of Reference (ToR) for TIR focal points, both from customs and associations. As a general observation, delegations cast doubt if all enumerated tasks could be performed by one single person. In conclusion, the secretariat was requested to review both ToR on the basis of comments from AC.2 and to seek the views of national focal points from both customs and associations. Based on their feedback and the follow-up considerations by AC.2 at its next session, it could then be envisaged to submit the updated ToR to heads of customs for their approval (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/147, para. 43). At its seventy-third session (October 2020), AC.2 considered Informal document WP.30/AC.2 (2020) No. 8 with the outcome of the survey on establishing ToR for TIR focal points from customs and national associations. While fully conscious of the importance of implementing OIOS recommendation No. 2 without delay, AC.2 felt that more time was required to properly review the terms of reference and, therefore, decided to revert to the issue at its next session (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/149, para. 36).

(3) ECE should bring to the attention of the Administrative Committee the need to develop appropriate procedures concerning (a) evaluation of qualified organizations before selection of the authorized international organization for TIR operations; and (b) periodic assessment of the authorized international organization's compliance with the stipulated conditions and requirements.

13. At its seventy-third session (October 2020), AC.2 considered and adopted document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/2020/11, on the understanding that it only will apply in case a new organization (and not IRU) requests AC.2 to become authorized. As long as IRU

continues as authorized international organization it will have to comply with the submission of documents as decided by AC.2 (see recommendation No. 1). With this additional information, AC.2 considered OIOS recommendation No. 3 as approved and implemented (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/149, para. 40).

(6) ECE should seek the advice of the Ethics Office on the apparent conflict of interest arising from its arrangements with the external partner on the eTIR project, including the receipt of funds from the external partner to whom ECE has become accountable under the contribution agreement, despite having the responsibility to assist the Executive Board in overseeing the external partner's operations and assessing its compliance with the TIR Convention.

14. At its seventy-second session (February 2020), AC.2 took note of the letter sent by the TIR Secretary to the United Nations Ethics Office, as contained in Informal document WP.30/AC.2 (2020) No. 3 and requested the secretariat to keep it informed of any follow-up on the issue (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/147, para. 45). At its seventy-third session (October 2020), the secretariat informed the AC.2 that it had held two meetings with the United Nations Ethics Office and that its advice was expected shortly (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/149, para. 41).

(7) ECE should bring to the attention of AC.2 the need to: (a) study the reasons for the decline in sale of Carnets over the years and develop an action plan to address the underlying causes; and (b) develop an appropriate alternative financing arrangement to ensure the sustainability of TIR trust fund operations.

15. At its 154th session (February 2020), WP.30 was informed that the secretariat had prepared a study on the reasons for the decline in sale of TIR Carnets. IRU had requested the secretariat to bring the results of the study to WP.30, where the transport industry was also represented. WP.30 requested the secretariat to distribute the study among TIR focal points of customs and associations, seeking their views (see also ECE/TRANS/WP.30/308, paras. 29 and 32). At its 155th session (October 2020), in view that, most likely due to the ongoing pandemic, only few focal points had provided any feedback, WP.30 requested the secretariat to send a reminder to TIR focal points from customs and associations, seeking their views on the study on the reasons for the decline in the sale of TIR Carnets, with 31 October 2020 as final deadline (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/310, para. 24). As for recommendation 7 (b), AC.2, at its seventy-third session (October 2020) considered document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/2020/10 and decided to pursue, for now, the current financing mechanism of TIRExB and the TIR secretariat, due to the absence of any realistic alternative arrangement. With this decision, AC.2 considered OIOS recommendation No. 7 (b) as approved and implemented (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/149, para. 39).

(10) ECE should develop an action plan for providing the required training and support to countries that have acceded to the TIR Convention to operationalize the TIR procedures in those countries.

16. At its seventy-second session (February 2020), AC.2 considered document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/2020/2 which contained an action plan for training and support of recently acceded countries. AC.2 welcomed, in principle, the action plan, as reference for activities to be undertaken by the TIR secretariat. However, AC.2 questioned the ambitious time-plan of the various activities as well as the amount of human and financial resources required for its implementation and requested the secretariat to prepare, for consideration at the next session, an assessment of the effectiveness of the action plan for the year 2020, for review by AC.2, with the possibility to adjust the plan for the years 2021 and 2022, if so required (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/147, para. 44). At its seventy-third session (October 2020), AC.2 took note of the updated status of the action plan in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/2020/23 and, in particular, of the fact that most activities are organized at no cost. With this additional information, AC.2 considered OIOS recommendation No. 10 as approved and implemented (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/149, para. 37)

IV. eTIR

A. eTIR pilot projects and new steps towards the full computerization of the TIR procedure

17. At its 154th session (February 2020), WP.30 noted that, in the framework of the five-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation between ECE and IRU in the field of computerization of the TIR procedure and of the supporting Contribution Agreement (CA) towards enhancing full computerization of the TIR procedure, signed on 6 October 2017, so far, within the eTIR project between Azerbaijan and Iran (Islamic Republic of) only one transport had taken place, mainly because, in the case of bilateral transport between both countries, more facilitated transit procedures are available in Azerbaijan. WP.30 further noted that the State Customs Committee of Uzbekistan is working on its Information and Communication Technology (ICT) systems to include functionalities required to launch eTIR projects. Uzbekistan expressed an interest in launching pilot projects with China and Kazakhstan, as well as with other neighbouring countries and that it planned to launch a pilot eTIR project before the end of 2020 (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/308, paras. 15–16).

18. At its 155th session (October 2020), WP.30 noted that within the eTIR project between Azerbaijan and Iran (Islamic Republic of), the meeting planned for 26 and 27 February 2020 in Bilasuvar (Azerbaijan), aimed at including Georgia in the project, had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It also noted that, regarding the extension of the eTIR project between Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Turkey, Iran (Islamic Republic of) had sent comments to Turkey regarding the Memorandum of Understanding both countries are preparing to extend the scope of the project to all customs offices and all TIR Carnet holders from both countries (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/310, para.11).

B. New developments in the eTIR international system

19. At its 154th session (February 2020), WP.30 welcomed a presentation on recent developments in the eTIR international system by the secretariat. WP.30 took note that the secretariat had completed the implementation of all messages of version 4.1 of the eTIR specifications and had developed a non-regression system to ensure good reliability of this software. WP.30 was also informed about further progress made: namely the clarification of several details in the eTIR specifications, the review of the eTIR database and actions taken towards finding a new hosting location for the eTIR internal system and ITDB. Finally, WP.30 was also informed about the next priorities for the secretariat: namely the implementation of changes to follow the latest version of the eTIR specifications and the production of documentation for customs authorities to connect their information systems to the eTIR international system (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/308, para. 17).

20. At its 155th session (October 2020), WP.30 was informed that the secretariat had finalized the implementation and tests of all messages according to version 4.1 of the eTIR specifications and had started working on the updates needed according to the eTIR specifications v4.2 and v4.3. WP.30 was also informed about the fact that important changes had been applied to the eTIR database and that the number of internal automated tests had more than tripled. WP.30 was further informed about important efforts made by the secretariat in the development and maintenance of the eTIR data model, including the submission of amendment proposals to the next session of GE.1. WP.30 was informed about the publication of three guides at the eTIR documentation portal² and on the current work performed by the secretariat in preparing additional technical guides to help customs authorities of contracting parties to connect their national customs systems to the eTIR international system. Finally, WP.30 was informed about the next priorities for the secretariat, namely: finishing the implementation of the changes according to the eTIR specifications v4.3, supporting customs authorities in the context of the eTIR interconnection projects and preparing the conformance tests (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/310, para. 12).

² See wiki.unece.org/display/ED/eTIR+documentation+-+Homepage

C. eTIR interconnection projects

21. At its 155th session (October 2020), WP.30 took note that, on 7 April 2020, the ECE Executive Secretary had sent a letter to all contracting parties to the TIR Convention inviting them to contact the TIR secretariat in case they were interested to connect their national customs system to the eTIR international system, in preparation of the entry into force of Annex 11. The following countries indicated an interest in such interconnection project, either in the form of a request for additional information or the willingness to start a connection project: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Israel, Lebanon, Montenegro, Morocco, Pakistan, Qatar, Republic of Moldova, Tunisia, Turkey and Ukraine. To date, project kick-off meetings have been organized with Azerbaijan, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Tunisia and Turkey. Furthermore, the secretariat has been working with the European Commission and some of the European Union member States on an NCTS³-eTIR Proof of Concept, aimed at identifying the most effective method to connect European Union customs administrations to the eTIR international system. The secretariat also informed interested countries about the availability of assistance funds for interconnection projects to hire Information and Communication Technology (ICT) experts who could assist customs administrations (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/310, para 13).

D. Activities of the Informal Ad hoc Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of computerization of the TIR Procedure

22. At its 154th session (February 2020), WP.30 endorsed the report of the thirtieth session of the Informal Ad hoc Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure (GE.1), convened in Budapest on 18–19 September 2019, at the kind invitation of the Hungarian customs administration, as contained in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/2. In particular, WP.30 took note of the final results of the GE.1 survey on the connection to the eTIR international system and the “opting out” of Annex 11, as contained in Annex III of document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/2. WP.30 took note that the thirty-first session of GE.1 would take place on 10–11 March 2020 in Geneva. It further noted that the meeting will focus on (1) several amendment proposals to be possibly included in version 4.3 of the eTIR specifications, (2) considerations on the introduction of the concept of trusted third parties (TTP) as proposed by the Russian Federation and (3) considerations of a list of questions, prepared by the European Commission, on the application of various provisions of the TIR Convention for TIR transports carried out under the eTIR procedure, together with tentative answers. WP.30 decided to open the list of questions mentioned, so that other customs administrations and national associations could add their questions with regard to the application of various provisions of the TIR Convention (including Annex 11) for TIR transports carried out under the eTIR procedure. It requested the secretariat to invite, by email, customs and associations TIR focal points as well as eTIR focal points, to send questions to the secretariat and to publish these as documents for consideration of GE.1 or WP.30 (depending on the nature of the questions), together with tentative answers. Furthermore, in order to ensure the involvement of all TIR contracting parties, WP.30 requested that, as long as GE.1 remains an informal group working in English only, all questions and answers should be published as official documents for WP.30, thus ensuring their translation in all ECE working languages. Finally, WP.30 proposed to publish the list of questions, together with the answers, on a new question and answer (Q&A) page of the eTIR website (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/308, paras. 18–20).

23. At its 155th session (October 2020), WP.30 noted that the Informal Ad hoc Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure (GE.1) held its thirty-first session on 10 and 11 March 2020 in Geneva, endorsed its report, contained in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/5, and confirmed that, for the eTIR procedure, one and only one guarantee per transport should be used.

24. WP.30 considered and approved a list of questions and answers (Q&A) on the application of various provisions of the TIR Convention for TIR transports carried out under

³ NCTS stands for New Computerized Transit System

the eTIR procedure, contained in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/6 and requested the secretariat to post the list of Q&A on the eTIR website. It also reiterated that contracting parties and national associations could further contribute to this list by sending questions to the secretariat.

25. Finally, WP.30 considered document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/7, containing amendment proposals to the eTIR conceptual, functional and technical documentation, already approved by GE.1 during its twenty-seventh, twenty-eighth, twenty-ninth, thirtieth and thirty-first sessions. It noted that those amendments will be integrated into version 4.3 of the eTIR specifications that should be submitted to WP.30/GE.1 in 2021 (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/310, paras 14–16).

E. Conversion of the Informal Ad hoc Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure into a formal Group of Experts

26. At its 154th session (February 2020), the secretariat informed WP.30 that the request to prolong the mandate of GE.1 to the year 2020 together with the request to endorse the establishment of GE.1 as a formal ECE/TRANS/WP.30/308 10 Expert Group had been included in the agenda of ITC at its eighty-first session (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/308, para. 21).

27. At its 155th session (October 2020), WP.30 noted that, further to its request and approval by ITC, EXCOM agreed, on 20 May 2020, to the conversion of GE.1 into the formal “Group of Experts on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure” (WP.30/GE.1). However, due to a financial liquidity crisis at the United Nations and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the secretariat could not obtain slots in 2020 to organize sessions of WP.30/GE.1 with interpretation in the three ECE working languages. Consequently, and in order to make progress on the preparation of the crucially needed version 4.3 of the eTIR specifications, the secretariat, after consultation with TIR and eTIR focal points, organized a preparatory information meeting (in English only) of WP.30/GE.1 on 3 and 4 November 2020. For 2021, sessions of WP.30/GE.1 are planned for 27–29 January 2021, 25–27 May 2021 and 13–15 September 2021 (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/310, para. 17).

V. Harmonization Convention

A. Status of the Convention

28. The Committee may wish to note that in 2020 no new accessions to the International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods, 1982 (“Harmonization Convention”) took place. Thus, since the entry into force of the convention for Turkmenistan, on 27 February 2017, the number of contracting parties to the Harmonization Convention stands at 58.

B. Amendment proposals to the Convention

29. On 27 February 2020, the Secretary-General of the United Nations in his capacity of depositary, issued depositary notification C.N.77.2020.TREATIES-XI.A.17, informing of the submission of a proposal to amend Annex 8, article 7 of the International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods, 1982, extending the interval between surveys among contracting parties on progress made to improve border crossing procedures in their countries from two to five years. In accordance with the provisions of article 22 of the Convention, the proposed amendments shall come into force with respect to all contracting parties to the Convention three months after the expiry of a period of twelve months following the date of the communication during which no objection to the proposed amendments has been communicated to the Secretary-General by a contracting party. This means that, if no objection is raised by 27 February 2021, the proposal shall come into force on 27 May 2021.

VI. Convention on the Facilitation of Border Crossing Procedures for Passengers, Luggage and Load-luggage Carried in International Traffic by Rail, of 22 February 2019

30. The Committee may wish to note that, at the 154th session of WP.30 (February 2020), the delegation of the Russian Federation informed the meeting that, at the national level, all required procedures in preparation of accession had been finalized and that accession was expected in the course of 2020. No further information was made available in the course of 2020. At present, only Chad has signed the convention, on 26 September 2019.

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

31. The Committee may wish to note that, in 2020, no changes have occurred in the status of the Customs Conventions on the Temporary Importation of Private (1954) and Commercial (1956) Road Vehicles and that the conventions, currently had, 80 and 26 contracting parties, respectively. At its 155th session (October 2020), WP.30 took note of a presentation by FIA on a project to digitalize the Carnet de Passage en Douane (CPD), called: eCPD. It further took note of the intention of ECE and AIT/FIA to conclude a Memorandum of Understanding on the revitalization and digitalization of relevant United Nations inland transport conventions and mandated the secretariat to continue these efforts (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/310, paras 30–31).

VIII. Requests from the Inland Transport Committee

Alignment of the work of the Working Party with the Inland Transport Committee strategy

32. In 2020, WP.30 started addressing tasks that it should undertake in the coming years, in addition to its regular work, to support the implementation of the ITC strategy. At its 154th session (February 2020), WP.30 started considering amending legal instruments with geographical or procedural barriers, on the basis of document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/1, summarizing the main scope of the seventeen legal instruments under the auspices of WP.30, reviewing the final clauses and proposing, where required or deemed appropriate, amendments. WP.30 decided to go through each of the seventeen legal instruments, providing a first assessment (see ECE/TRANS/WP.30/308, paras. 5–9).

33. At its 155th session (October 2020), WP.30 continued its considerations on the basis of document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/8, in which various international organizations in the field of customs, railways and container transport provided their views on the relevance of some legal instruments (see 10, 15 and 16 in ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/1). WP.30 took note of the document and comments by the European Commission on behalf of the member States of the European Union and decided to continue discussions at its next session, requesting delegations to pursue their national consultations about the status and relevance of the 17 legal instruments under the auspices of WP.30 (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/310, paras 3–4).

IX. COVID-19 and border crossing facilitation

34. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the secretariat undertook considerable actions to promote TIR and especially eTIR as a major tool that prevents spreading the virus while keeping the borders open. The results of these efforts were quite impressive. The United Nations Secretary General's report of March 2020 on "shared responsibility, global solidarity, responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19"

clearly mentions eTIR as one of the tools to be used by governments in order to ensure contactless and paperless borders operations.

35. At the outset of the COVID-19 crisis, the secretariat, with the support of the other four other regional commissions and the private sector, established the Observatory on Border Crossings Status due to COVID-19, with information from almost all United Nations Member States. Since its inception, on 18 March 2020, the Observatory has become the only source worldwide, inside and outside the United Nations system, providing daily updates on the status of inland transport border crossing. In the course of time, the Observatory webpage had more than 110,000 page views, with peaks of more than 2,000 unique page views per day in April and May. Updated information was collected and provided for 174 United Nations Member States. The Observatory is officially supported by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), ICAO, World Customs Organization (WCO), International Transport Forum (ITF), International Road Transport Union (IRU), Federation International de l'automobile (FIA), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and International Union of Railways (UIC).

36. On 16 April 2020, the Executive Secretary of ECE and the Secretary General of IRU sent a joint letter to all heads of customs authorities, calling on them to consider the application of specific measures and good practices to minimize the impact of COVID-19 on the international supply chains. The recommended measures were based on internationally agreed policies and conventions and included among other things the prevention of discriminatory measures, the use of the TIR Convention, the implementation of the provisions of the Harmonization convention and the minimization of controls and checks at borders.

37. The secretariat participated in the United Nations Development Account (UNDA) project "Transport and trade connectivity in the age of pandemics: United Nations solutions for contactless, seamless and collaborative transport and trade" with the other four regional commissions and UNCTAD. The secretariat through this project managed to raise funds that support the interconnection of national customs systems with the eTIR international system.

X. Considerations by the Committee

38. The Committee may wish to take note of and support the above activities of contracting parties, WP.30, AC.2, AC.3 and the ECE/TIR secretariat in the year 2020.