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**Working Party on Customs Questions affecting
Transport**
**Group of Experts on Conceptual and
Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure**
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Item 3 of the provisional agenda

**Report of the informal preparatory meeting for the Group of Experts on
Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure**
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I. Attendance

1. The informal preparatory meeting for the Group of Experts on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure (further referred to as “the Group of Experts”) was held online on 3 and 4 November 2020.

2. The session was attended by experts from Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, China, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Latvia, Netherlands, Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Slovakia, Turkey, Ukraine and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the European Commission (EC) and the International Road Transport Union (IRU).

II. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)

Documentation: Informal document WP.30/GE.1 No. 1 (2020)

3. The participants of the informal preparatory meeting (further referred to as “the Experts”) adopted the provisional agenda as contained in Informal document WP.30/GE.1 No. 1 (2020).

4. The Experts noted that, in view of the informal nature of the preparatory meeting, no decisions would be taken and, instead, the advice provided by the Experts would be used by the Group of Experts to facilitate its work and by the secretariat to further improve the documentation to be submitted to the Group of Experts.

III. Election of officers (agenda item 2)

5. The Experts elected Mr. P. Arsic (Serbia) as Chair to steer the informal preparatory meeting.

IV. Mandate – Terms of Reference (agenda item 3)

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2019/9 and ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2019/9/Corr.1

6. The Experts took note that the conversion of the Informal Ad hoc Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure (GE.1) into a formal Group of Experts was requested by the Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport (WP.30) at its 153rd session (February 2020) on the basis of the Terms of Reference contained in ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2019/9 and ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2019/9/Corr.1.

7. They also noted that the conversion was then endorsed by the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) in February 2020 and approved by the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Executive Committee (EXCOM) on 20 May 2020.

V. Work plan (agenda item 4)

Documentation: Informal document WP.30/GE.1 No. 2 (2020) and ECE/EX/2/Rev.1

8. The Expert noted that the Group of Experts was established and will function in accordance with the ECE Guidelines for teams of specialists approved by EXCOM on 31 March 2010 (ECE/EX/2/Rev.1) and that, at its first meeting, the Group of Experts shall adopt a work plan, clearly defining its objectives and activities, including a time schedule for their implementation.

9. The Experts considered the work plan proposed in Informal document WP.30/GE.1 No. 2 (2020) and, while stressing its challenging and optimistic nature, expressed their support.

10. The secretariat stressed that the eTIR international system constitutes the future of the TIR Convention; it is a prerequisite for the revitalization of the TIR system and its implementation – meaning its development and interconnection with national customs systems –, it is an objective of high importance and it has to be delivered with high quality and urgently.

11. In that sense the secretariat pointed out that it has already developed the eTIR international system, based on version 4.3 of the specifications and that it has already started interconnecting the system with several national customs systems, following requests coming from contracting parties. Furthermore, the secretariat, while interconnecting eTIR with national customs systems started preparing the relevant technical documentation which will constitute a part of the technical specifications of version 4.3.

12. The Experts agreed, subject to further possible discussions by the Groups of Experts at its January session, that the eTIR international system and its specifications are subject to changes and continuous improvements and that, in that sense, the Experts understand that the Group of Experts has to deliver a version of the specifications that will be fully operational and aligned with the provisions of Annex 11; and they will constitute the concrete basis on which eTIR operations will start after Annex 11 comes into force. Then, the next version of the specifications (4.4), that will further improve the system, will be initiated and discussed in the framework of the Technical Implementation Body (TIB).

13. Therefore, the Experts preliminary agreed, subject to further possible discussions by the Groups of Experts at its January session, with the proposed workplan and that, during its term of office, the group should focus on preparing an integrated document of the eTIR specifications version 4.3 in the three official ECE languages, that will be divided in four segments: (a) introduction, (b) concepts, (c) functional specifications, (d) technical specifications, for adoption by WP.30 at its June and/or October 2021 sessions.

VI. eTIR international system (agenda item 5)

A. Progress report on the development of the eTIR international system

14. The Experts welcomed a presentation by the secretariat on the recent developments of the eTIR international system, in particular that the secretariat was working on upgrading the eTIR international system to include the changes brought by versions 4.2 and 4.3 of the eTIR specifications. The Experts were informed that important changes had been brought to the eTIR database and notable improvements had been applied to the eTIR Data Model, which was now fully developed and maintained by the secretariat. The Experts were further informed about the important enhancements in terms of quality of the source code of the eTIR international system by using static code analysis software, a mature continuous integration pipeline and by tripling the number of automated tests in one year. The secretariat also reported progress on preparing the guides aimed at helping customs authorities to connect their national customs systems to the eTIR international system. The secretariat finished the presentation by introducing its next priorities, namely completing the upgrade of the eTIR international system to the latest version of the specifications, continue preparing the technical guides and supporting customs administrations with their eTIR connection projects, and start preparing the conformance tests.

B. Progress report on the connection of national customs systems to the eTIR international system

15. The Experts noted that further to the adoption of Annex 11 and the related amendments to the text of the body of the TIR Convention by the Administrative Committee of the TIR Convention in February 2020, Ms. Olga Algayerova (Executive Secretary of ECE), on 7 April 2020, addressed a letter to the heads of customs administrations expressing the readiness of ECE to start projects with contracting parties, with the aim to set up the required connections between customs Information and Communication Technology (ICT) systems and the eTIR international system, in preparation of the entry into force of Annex 11.

C. NCTS-eTIR Proof of Concept

16. The Experts took note that the European Commission and ECE have been preparing an eTIR-NCTS¹ Proof of Concept (PoC), which analyses the compatibility of eTIR with NCTS processes and data requirements, with a view to identifying the most effective method to connect customs systems of the European Union with the eTIR international system. They noted that currently the investigated approach is to connect the eTIR international system to a central “converter” in NCTS. This approach is aimed at minimizing the costs for the member States of the European Union and to ensure a uniform application of eTIR in the European Union.

17. The Experts also noted that, according to the Multi-Annual Strategic Plan for electronic Customs (MASP-C), eTIR might be part of NCTS Phase 6 or a later phase/release.

¹ New Computerized Transit System

VII. eTIR conceptual, functional and technical documentation version 4.3 (agenda item 6)

A. Introduction

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 5 (2017)

18. The Experts took note that version 4.2 of the Introduction document was published in Informal document GE.1 No. 5 (2017) and that version 4.3 will be presented at the first session of the Group of Experts.

B. eTIR Concepts

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 6 (2017)

19. The Experts noted that version 4.2 of the eTIR Concepts document was published in Informal document GE.1 No. 6 (2017) and that a first draft of version 4.3 will be presented at the first session of the Group of Experts.

C. eTIR functional specifications

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 7 (2017)

20. The Experts took note that version 4.2 of the eTIR functional specifications was published in Informal document GE.1 No. 7 (2017) and that a first draft of version 4.3 will be presented at the first and second sessions of the Group of Experts.

D. eTIR technical specifications

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 8 (2017)

21. The Experts noted that version 4.2 of the eTIR technical specifications was published in Informal document GE.1 No. 7 (2017) and that a first draft of version 4.3 will be presented at the second session of the Group of Experts.

E. Amendments

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/7, Informal document WP.30/GE.1 No. 3 (2020), Informal document WP.30/GE.1 No. 4 (2020) and Informal document WP.30/GE.1 No. 5 (2020) Informal document WP.30/GE.1 No. 6 (2020) and Informal document WP.30/GE.1 No. 7 (2020)

22. The Experts considered Informal document WP.30/GE.1 No. 3 (2020), which contains a list of proposed amendments to version 4.2 of the eTIR specifications, and provided the following advice:

1. Accompanying document and fallback procedure

23. The Experts took note that the secretariat did not yet have the time to prepare the activity diagrams for the fallback procedures but that they will be submitted to the second session of the Group of Experts.

2. Reconciliation procedure

24. IRU presented how they implement an electronic reconciliation procedure within Realtime SafeTIR (RTS) for cases in which the termination information does not reach them on time. The Experts, welcoming the presentation, were informed that, even if technical issues might impede the transmission of eTIR messages, the eTIR system is designed in such a way that each and every message will be sent when the issue is resolved, which makes any

reconciliation procedure less relevant. The Experts also pointed out that such procedure was outside scope of the eTIR project, and that, in case of need, the paper procedure in Annex 10 could still be used for missing termination messages.

25. The Experts were of the view that, in view of the expected time frame leading to the finalization of version 4.3 of the eTIR specifications, further consideration of the reconciliation procedure and a possible change in the scope of the project could only be discussed during the preparation of the next version of the eTIR specifications.

3. Validations performed by the eTIR international system

26. The Experts noted that, to date, the secretariat had not received any requests for transitional exceptions, which would either change the status of data elements (mandatory vs optional vs dependent) or allow rules or conditions contained in the eTIR specification not to apply. However, if concrete situations appear when of connecting customs systems to the eTIR international system, they will be brought to the attentions of the Group of Expert.

27. The secretariat also clarified that any transitional exceptions will be handled in line with best practices on change, version and release management.

4. Minor corrections

28. The Experts supported the corrections of several minor issues of editorial, consistency or logical nature identified by the secretariat during the development and improvement of the eTIR international system.

5. Message Identifier

29. The Experts supported the proposal of only using a GUID (v4) for the value of the “Message Identifier” attribute.

6. Functional Reference

30. The Experts supported the proposal to rename the “Functional Reference” attribute in eTIR messages as “Original Message Identifier”.

7. Cancel advance data and Advance amendment data

31. The Experts supported the proposals regarding the names, definitions and structures of messages E9 to E14. However, the Experts proposed to look into the possibility of introducing a rule for message E11, ensuring that information related to the goods already forming part of the declaration data should, in general, not be changed.

32. The Experts also took note that, as an outcome of the PoC, the European Commission could propose amendments to some messages.

8. Add a new rule to the Version attribute

33. The Experts supported the proposals to include a new rule to the version attribute, stressing it was a direct consequence of the separation of former message E9 into three separate messages.

9. Review of the conditions and rules

34. The Experts welcomed the proposal by the secretariat to add definitions for rules and conditions and suggested some changes, in particular regarding the fact that conditions usually require at least two fields of a message to be interdependent. The Experts suggested to the secretariat to consider the definitions of the rules and conditions in the NCTS documentation. They also recommended to include a section in the specifications to clarify the pseudo-code used for the conditions.

35. The Experts also considered changes proposed by the secretariat to the rules and conditions and recommended several changes to be introduced in the document to be submitted to the Group of Experts.

10. Review of the code lists

36. The Experts supported the proposals to restrict the use of code list 21 for the “Size” attribute in the “BinaryFile” class and to remove code lists 13 and 15.

11. Change in the metadata information

37. The Experts supported the proposed changes to the metadata information.

12. Change in the date formats

38. The Experts supported the proposal to changes the dates and date/time formats and took note that in NCTS, Universal Time Coordinated (UTC), is used for date/time fields.

13. Introduction of warnings

39. The Experts considered the options proposed by the secretariat to introduce “warnings” in the eTIR response messages. The Experts questioned the necessity of warnings and some expressed concerns that they might be misinterpreted and used as a reason to stop a transport. The Experts were also of the view that transitional rules during agreed transitional periods should not lead to warnings. Finally, regarding the use of warnings to notify the use, and possibly the replication date, of the International TIR Data Bank (ITDB) replica (used as fallback when the ITDB is not available) should be discussed while establishing the replication procedure (see para. 49) and might not only be a technical issue which should be dealt with by the Group of Experts.

14. Cardinality on subcontractors

40. The Experts were of the view that the cardinality of the subcontractor should be 0..n and its address 0..1. The Experts also clarified that the necessity to provide the address of the subcontractor depends on the availability of a subcontractor’s code/indicator which allows to clearly identify him/her.

15. Description of the messages E1, E3, E5, E7 and I5

41. The Experts supported the proposal to change the descriptions of the messages E1, E3, E5, E7 and I5.

16. Status of the guarantee after a Refusal to start a TIR operation

42. The Experts considered the issue related to the guarantee status following a “Refusal to Start” message and expressed support towards keeping the “start refused” status, as it is conceptually different from the status “cancelled”. Furthermore, the Experts clarified that a refusal to start message can only be sent once the transport has begun. Finally, the Experts were of the view that the “start refused” status should not only be a terminal status, but instead, if the transport is in a position to return to the departure under the cover of the same guarantee, the status of the guarantee could return to “in use” after the first operation of the return trip had started.

17. Notifications to customs related to TIR operations

43. The Experts considered the issue related to the notification of TIR operations’ information to customs administration and were of the view that, while being notified of all start, termination and discharge for each TIR operation would not be desirable, a notification should be sent each time seals are affixed or changed.

18. New messages I19/I20 to validate customs offices with ITDB

44. The Experts supported the proposed structures of new messages I19/I20 to validate customs offices with ITDB and their inclusion in the eTIR specifications.

19. Updated list of error codes

45. The Experts supported the updated list of error codes proposed by the secretariat.

20. Guarantee types

46. The Experts supported the proposal to start using code list 12 for the guarantees issued in the framework of the pilot projects. Furthermore, the Experts supported amending the class diagram regarding the guarantee type, in particular moving the maximum guarantee amount from the guarantee type class to a new association class, between the “guarantee type” class and the “country” class, in order to model the current differences of the maximum guarantee amount between contracting parties. The Experts also were of the view that the new model proposed would allow an increased flexibility for the types of guarantees to be issued for the eTIR procedure.

21. Advance TIR data for multiple loading places

47. The Experts considered how holders should provide advance information in case they know before the beginning of the transport the details about the goods to be loaded at the different loading points. The Experts supported the second option described by the secretariat, in which holders will only submit to the country of first departure the advance TIR data (E9) related to the first load and, by means of an advance amendment data message (E11) to the countries where subsequent loading will take place, send the data for each subsequent departure office.

48. The Experts also considered Informal document WP.30/GE.1 No. 4 (2020), which addresses the question of the suspension for certain legs of an eTIR intermodal transport and expressed support for the idea that the most important part is to ensure that a terminate TIR operation message is sent when the eTIR procedure is suspended and that a start TIR operation message is sent when it is resumed. In between, if required, an indication of suspension could be indicated by customs on the accompanying document.

49. The Experts considered Informal document WP.30/GE.1 No. 5 (2020), containing proposals on how to deal with the provision of Explanatory Note 0.21-3 regarding the notification of the drawing of samples of goods by customs authorities in the course of an examination. While they recognized that the drawing of samples should remain an exceptional procedure and would, therefore, be easily accommodated by an inscription on the accompanying document, the Experts questioned the possibility of using the accompanying document for something else than a fallback procedure and incidents or accidents. They also requested the secretariat to check in the WCO data model if specific classes of attributes exist for this situation. Finally, the experts from the IRU pointed out the importance for the transport sector to keep a trace of the drawing of samples, since they are ultimately responsible towards the consignee and consignor for the entirety of the consignments.

50. The Experts considered Informal document WP.30/GE.1 No. 6 (2020), submitted by IRU, presenting an analysis of the messages exchanged in the framework of the eTIR specifications. The Experts were of the view that this issue should be first discussed by AC.2 in the framework of its consideration of providing IRU access to ITDB.

51. The Experts considered Informal document WP.30/GE.1 No. 7 (2020), which explains the replication mechanisms of the ITDB and how the ITDB replica could be used in cases of fallback. The Experts requested the secretariat to consider the possibility of implementing a real-time replication rather than a replication scheduled once a day. Furthermore, they advised that it would help to understand the need for the replication if it was better explained that the eTIR international system and ITDB are managed separately and will be most likely financed from separate budgets.

52. Finally, the Experts took note that IRU consulted informally with transport operators to see if they would find it useful to receive notifications at the end of a TIR transport directly from the eTIR international system rather than via IRU. At this stage, it seems that transport operators are not interested in receiving information directly from the eTIR international system since they have access to the information via TIR-EPD. IRU proposed to drop this issue for the time being.

VIII. Other business (agenda item 7)

A. Annex 11 of the TIR Convention

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/6

53. The Experts noted that WP.30 agreed with the publication, on the eTIR website, of the list of Question and Answers contained in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/6.

B. National and regional developments

54. The Experts did not have any national or regional development to report.

C. Date and place of Group of Experts sessions

55. The Experts took note of the dates reserved for the first, second and third sessions of the Group of Experts, i.e. 27–29 January 2021, 25–27 May 2021 and 13–15 September 2021, respectively, and that as long as the epidemiologic situation limits international travel leading, possibly, to mandatory quarantines, the secretariat will try to organize sessions in hybrid format (allowing both virtual and in-person attendance).
