Economic and Social Council

Economic Commission for Europe

Inland Transport Committee

Working Party on Road Transport

Group of Experts on the Operationalization of eCMR

First session
Geneva, 4-5 July 2022

Report of the first session of Group of Experts on the Operationalization of the Additional Protocol

I. Attendance

1.   The Group of Experts on operationalization of eCMR (GE.22) held its first session on 4 to 5 July 2022.

2.   Representatives of the following ECE member States participated: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

3.   The following non ECE member States participated: Algeria, Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jordan and Togo.

4.   The European Union was represented, and the following intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations attended: Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Association of International Road Carriers (ASMAP), Association of Macedonian Enterprises for Road International Transport (AMERIT), Center for Transportation Studies of Westerns Mediterranean (CETMO), International Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations (FIATA), International Road Transport Union (IRU) and Union of Road Transport Associations in the Black Sea Region (BSEC-URTA).

5.   The following representatives attended at the invitation of the secretariat: European Road Transport Telematics Implementation Co-ordination Organisation (ERTICO), Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines & Agriculture, Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB), Slovenian Logistics Association, Turkmen Logistics Association, Union of International Haulers and Hellenic Federation of International Road Transport (OFAE).

II. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)

5.   The Group of Experts adopted the session's agenda (ECE/TRANS/SC.1/GE.22/1).

III. Election of officers (agenda item 2)

6.   The Group of Experts elected its Chair (Ms Annija Novikova, Latvia) and its Vice-Chair (Mr Elyor Khakimov, Uzbekistan).

IV. Programme of work (agenda item 3)

7.   The Group of Experts adopted its programme of work (ECE/TRANS/SC.1/GE.22/2022/1) with the following amendment: priority of discussions should be given to the provisions of article 5 followed by discussions on the draft high-level architecture including the main stakeholders and scope/objectives of a future eCMR environment.

8.   Based on the mandate of the Group of Experts as contained in Annex IV of ECE/TRANS/2022/6, the programme of work contains information on the sessions foreseen, tasks to be accomplished, related outputs and formal document deadlines.

V. Tentative dates of meetings (agenda item 4)

9.   The Group of Experts will meet three times during 2022 (via a hybrid mode) on the following dates: 4-5 July, 4-6 October, and 9-11 November. The Group of Experts will meet three times during 2023 (in person only meetings) on the following dates: 25-27 January, 3-5 April, and 5-7 July.

VI. Other business (agenda item 5)

A. Opening address by the Director of the Sustainable Transport Division

10.   The Director of the Sustainable Transport Division welcomed participants and provided an overview of the work of the Division, its Strategy until 2030, and referred to the Working Party on Road Transport (SC.1), which is the parent body of the Group of Experts. The work of SC.1 includes the task of operationalizing the Additional Protocol to the Convention on the Contract for the International Carriage of Goods by Road (CMR) concerning the electronic consignment note (eCMR Additional Protocol).

B. Rules of procedure of the Group of Experts

11.   The secretary informed the Group of Experts that ECE/EX/2/Rev.1 (Guidelines for the establishment and functioning of teams of specialists within ECE) would form the basis of the rules of procedure of the Group.

C. Presentations on CMR, eCMR Additional Protocol and eCMR pilot projects

12.   The secretary presented the terms of reference of the group and introduced the CMR and the eCMR Additional Protocol. She also provided information on the contracting parties to both pieces of legislation, the benefits and costs of acceding to the eCMR Additional Protocol, and outlined observations from key pilot projects to date and operationalization challenges to be addressed.

13.   The representative of Ertico-ITS Europe presented an overview of the AEOLIX project which included architectural elements, scope, internet of things integration and a number of transport and logistic platforms which were piloted. He shared that the success of the AEOLIX project has led to creation of the FENIX IT framework. The latter was designed on the basis of decentralization, an ecosystem of data and services, standardized interoperability, value adding apps, and trust and data sovereignty.

14. The Vice Chair (in his capacity as an Uzbek Customs official) presented on the role of the CMR and use of paper consignment notes by the Customs authorities of Uzbekistan. He shared that there are three ways in which Customs use paper consignment notes: as a document providing general information on a contract of carriage; as a document identifying the consignment; and as a document showing the Customs clearance of other countries. He also spoke of the importance of digitalization based on the benefits it offers.

15. The Slovenian official presented on its national pilot which took place in Slovenia and Croatia in March 2019, and which focussed on financial administration and Customs administration. He also presented on the international pilot project of November 2020 between Slovenia and Turkiye, and which involved all competent control bodies within Slovenia together with the Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity. Information was also provided on the private sector entity, Trinet Informatika d.o.o which created the Transbook platform used for the creation of the electronic transport document.

16. The representative of the Hellenic Federation of Road Transport NGO presented on the national pilot project which took place in Greece in 2019 under the auspices of the AEOLIX project. He provided details on the quantitative and qualitative results achieved. The latter included significant time savings throughout the supply chain steps, improved traceability during transport operations, faster invoicing/improved cash flow. Challenges were also shared with the main one being the lack of a legal framework.

17. The representative of the DIGINNO Prototype Project presented an overview of the pilot which involved Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland between 2019 to 2020. The architecture included the creation and use of national index registries. She also shared that new pilots involving more countries including other eCMR Additional Protocol contracting parties would be taking place in 2022.

18. The German official presented on the design elements for an eCMR environment. He spoke about four key challenges including having clarity in relation to specifications, the desirability of maintaining technological neutrality, the desirability of having a freedom of choice and competition of IT service providers, and the desirability of having global acceptance of the use of electronic consignment notes.

19. The representative of the European Commission presented an overview of EU Regulation 2020/1056 on electronic freight transport information (eFTI) which will come into effect in August 2025. This included information on the vision, potential implementation architecture through national authority access points, architecture principles and requirements for authorities, operators, and EFTI platforms and service providers, as well as certification of the latter.

20. The presentations that were given during the meeting are available at https://unece.org/info/Transport/Road-Transport/events/367759.

21. In their discussions, the Group of Experts recalled that the CMR consignment note is a transport document of private nature between the consignor, the carrier and the consignee. The experts acknowledged however that CMR consignment notes are used by several public authorities such as the customs authorities, police etc.

22. The Group of Experts noted that in geographical areas such as in Central Asia (Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, EEU member States etc) checking at the borders by customs or police and filing in archives of paper CMR consignments notes is obligatory by law. In several cases, customs officers must stamp the CMR consignment notes and if required provide notes or comments on the paper documents.

23. It was also noted that in the European Union region the checking of CMR consignment notes by customs officers or police was not obligatory. However, it could take place for several reasons such as for the control of cabotage or for the implementation of regime 42 which allows goods to be imported free of VAT under the condition that they will be subject to an intra-Community transport in a certain time frame. The CMR consignment note is then used to prove that the goods were delivered with due diligence immediately after the clearance process took place in the first country of arrival.

24. The Group of Experts agreed that since the CMR Convention is an international United Nations convention, the design of the future eCMR environment / system should ensure that - as far as appropriate in light of the scope of the CMR Convention and the eCMR Additional Protocol - the interests of all stakeholders from different geographical areas are being taken into account, that the solution is technologically neutral and is easy to be implemented even by companies with lower technological literacy and resources, making it therefore a sustainable solution of global acceptance.

25. The Group of Experts agreed that in principle, the proposed solution should promote freedom of choice and competition of service providers / IT services offered based on different technologies respecting always the business cultures / modus operandi of countries;

26. The Group of Experts also agreed that their final output based on their terms of reference should keep the right balance between (a) if required, possibly more descriptive eCMR provisions; (b) global acceptance; (c) freedom of choice between different providers and (d) technological neutrality.

27. The Group of Experts recognized that if a common understanding is achieved – if not agreed - among themselves regarding the provisions of article 5 of the eCMR protocol, then they could more easily discuss and design the high level architecture of the future system including the main stakeholders and scope/objectives of a future eCMR system. They decided to focus their analysis and discussions at the beginning of their work on the provisions of article 5 of the eCMR Additional Protocol.

28. The Group of Experts requested the secretariat to prepare a document for its next session based on the input of the experts and the secretariat that includes an analysis of the provisions of article 5 of the Additional Protocol including the draft procedures and their implementation in order to comply with the requirements of the CMR Convention and its Additional Protocol.

VII. Adoption of list of decisions (agenda item 6)

29. The Group of Experts adopted a list of decisions for the session (per paragraphs 5, 6, 7 and 28).

VIII. Date of next session (agenda item 7)

30. The next session of the Group of the Experts is scheduled to take place on 4-6 October 2022. The deadline for submission of formal documents is 26 July 2022.

––––––––––––