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Draft CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS from the
***15th International Capacity-Building Seminar "Trade Facilitation and Digital Transformation
of Multimodal Data and Document Exchange along the Trans-Caspian Corridor"***
11-12 June 2024, Aktau, Kazakhstan

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This seminar was organized in collaboration between the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Ministry of Trade and Integration and other governmental agencies in Kazakhstan, the International Association «Trans-Caspian International Transport Route» (TMTM), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, the Permanent Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Commission of the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Central Asia (PS IGC TRACECA) and other partners. It was part of the implementation of the package of standards for digitalization of multimodal data and document exchange under the UN Development Account project 2225N. It responded to the request of the SPECA Governing Council for capacity-building on the UN/CEFACT standards[1] to help implement the "Roadmap for the digitalization of multimodal data and document exchange along the Trans-Caspian transport corridor, using United Nations legal instruments and standards". [2]

The agenda of the seminar built on the following logic:
1. Explain to the audience the UN/CEFACT standards and supporting tools for multimodal data and document exchange, clarify business requirements, and what needs to be done for the implementation of standards in digitalization projects along the Trans-Caspian corridor,
2. Review progress in the pilot project and testing of an electronic prototype for the CIM/SMGS railway consignment note and use this as best practice for new projects,
3. Review further possibilities for pilot implementation: deepen and expand the CIM/SMGS pilot, integrate the results into national IT systems, and expand the implementation to multimodal data and document exchange; explore other areas for pilots,
4. Launch a discussion on standardized exchange of information between the ports and port community systems of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and, eventually, Turkmenistan, to develop another pilot project on data exchange between the ports using UN/CEFACT standards,
5. Launch discussion among the countries and with development partners on (a) further pilot projects and (b) capacity-building for local experts and policy makers on the implementation of UN/CEFACT standards for harmonized and more efficient digital data and document exchange along the Trans-Caspian trade and transport corridor.

The participants outlined a key issue that needs addressing: the fragmentation of digitalization projects; national, regional or modal legal regimes; different syntaxes, etc. The use of global, UN/CEFACT standards as a common reference to ensure interoperability was recognized as a

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[1] The report of the 18th session of the SPECA Governing Council held on 23 November 2023 in Baku noted that "H.E. Mr. Jasurbek Choriyev, *Deputy Minister of Transport of Uzbekistan,* asked for capacity-building on the UN/CEFACT standards to streamline existing standards in the digitalization of the trade and transport corridors", online https://unece.org/speca/events/eighteenth-session-speca-governing-council, visited 14 June 2024.
[2] On 24 November 2023, the Presidents of the States participating in the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) adopted this Roadmap: https://unece.org/speca/speca-digitalization-roadmap

viable solution. The participants unanimously agreed on the need to position the UN (UN/CEFACT) standards as a core reference ensuring interoperability within the Trans-Caspian corridor and with the rest of the world. They reiterated the commitment to deepen, expand and multiply pilot implementation projects to confirm their feasibility and involve stakeholders in practical testing and implementation. They welcomed initiatives to train implementers and local trainers for further uptake of the standards.

In this context, from presentations and discussions at the seminar were derived the following:

RECOMMENDATIONS:

I. *Policy recommendations*

The Governments of the SPECA and Trans-Caspian corridor countries are encouraged to:

1. Present the concept of using the UN standards for harmonized digitalization of multimodal data and document exchange to relevant development partners to build synergies and solicit support. These partners include, among others, the European Union, World Bank, Islamic Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, European Investment Bank, bilateral donors, individual States, and others. Support collaboration with UNECE, ESCAP and other UN agencies, such as UNCTAD, UNCITRAL, IMO, ICAO, UNDP, and others, as well as relevant business associations.

2. Continue developing and implementing pilot projects in the region: notably, deepening, expansion, and finalization of the CIM/SMGS railway consignment note pilot testing; making the initiative multimodal; including data and document exchange between the ports of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and, eventually, Turkmenistan, aligned with the UN/CEFACT standards. Based on the results of the pilot project, carry out consultations on the need to develop it further. The pilot projects should create a link to all relevant modal exchanges of data and documents accompanying goods: maritime, rail, road, and air; linking data in documents accompanying goods to regulatory IT systems, including Customs.

3. Involve the business community, who can and need to advance standardization of multimodal and intersectoral data and document exchange using UN standards.

II. *Organizational recommendations*

4. Maintain the momentum and continue organizing broader capacity-building and more technical working meetings on the implementation of UN/CEFACT standards for the practical digitalization of data and document exchange on cargo moved along the Trans-Caspian trade and transport corridor.

5. Given the growing interest in and scope of implementation projects, further involve development partners and stakeholders in these activities.

6. Use the network of National Trade Facilitation Bodies (NTFCs), the targeted regional working groups created by TRACECA and GIZ, or national working groups (e.g., in Uzbekistan) to carry out the detailed implementation work. Involve the relevant ministries of digitalization, trade, transport, economy, integration, national digitalization centres, (e.g., in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), business associations, etc. Organize a set of formal (e.g., through MoUs) and informal networks of experts for better training of experts and trainers locally.

7. Explore and implement further the concept of e-platforms for the rollout of standardized digitalization of data and document exchange. Build national and other electronic exchange platforms of stakeholders, using the UN/CEFACT standards as reference for interoperability.

8. Governments, public and private stakeholders, who work on establishing electronic platforms to support export, import and transit, are encouraged to use standardized data and document exchange to allow for interoperability. Electronic platforms should support multimodal interoperability and create a market for multimodal digital data and document exchange services. Such e-platforms should facilitate access of SMEs and foreign companies to digital services and organize a controlled competent authority on access to data.

III. Technical recommendations and support for pilot projects

9. Through coordination with relevant government agencies, the business community, and the development partners, using the capacity-building under item 4 above, prepare the background for implementing the UN/CEFACT standards, as reference for multimodal interoperability in various projects for digitalization and development of the Trans-Caspian corridor.

10. Ensure that from the outset projects supported by various organizations refer to multimodal data sharing and the UN/CEFACT semantic standards and Multimodal Transport Reference Data Model (MMT RDM).

11. Base projects on: collection of real-world business requirements; analysis of cross-border efficiency and business case for digitalization using global standards; best-practice experience and lessons learnt (e.g., from the EU Electronic Freight Transport Information (eFTI) Regulation and other tools); mapping data to the MMT RDM; ensuring technical neutrality of suggested standard solutions; developing and testing prototypes of the implementation of the MMT RDM, etc.

12. Continue supporting the e-CIM/SMGS consignment note pilot project along selected TRACECA routes (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Türkiye and Ukraine) supported by UNECE, PS IGC TRACECA, OSJD, CIT and UIC for practical implementation of UN/CEFACT standards. Provide further technical support for the following stages of the pilot project (e.g., parallel testing, encouraging development of Application Programing Interfaces (API) convertor between UN/EDIFACT and other solutions based on the MMT RDM, authentication issues, etc.

13. Expand the e-CIM/SMGS pilot to include connectivity with other modes of transport (e.g., railway, ports and maritime), and include other interested countries in the region.

14. Note the adoption of the new Convention on the Contract of International Carriage of Goods by Rail (URL 1), which will provide one international legal regime for railways and use the experience gathered on the pilot testing of the electronic CIM/SMGS consignment note to inform the implementation of the URL 1 convention in the future.

15. Prepare a study on existing trade and transport digital platforms in the SPECA and Trans-Caspian corridor countries (national single window systems, B2B and B2G trade and logistics platforms, port community systems) to evaluate existing level and plans for development. Suggest options for cross-border interaction between different platforms (legal and technical). Initiate specific pilot projects for interaction between various digital platforms. Work in synergies with other partners that are involved in similar activities, e.g., the European Union, World Bank, OECD, USAID, PS IGC TRACECA.

16. Support the development of port community information systems (PCS), using UN/CEFACT standards for multimodal information exchange. These should play the role of hubs supporting multimodal electronic data exchange.

17. Upon suggestion from the Port of Baku, explore the possibility to organize a pilot project in support of digital data and document exchange between ports in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan using the UN/CEFACT standards. Explore the possibility to include information exchange among railway agencies across the Caspian Sea (e.g., using CIM/SMGS).

18. Analyze and further promote standardized digital submission of data from documents accompanying goods to regulatory services.

IV. *Create an enabling environment for legal interoperability:*

19. For an effective digitalization of multimodal data and document exchange using UN/CEFACT semantic standards and MMT RDM, countries to analyze and, if necessary, amend domestic regulations to eliminate possible impediments and enable legal and functional equality of paper and digital documents and electronic transferable records in information exchange in the supply chain with the use of global UN standards.

20. If necessary, public and private stakeholders to foster a cross-border agreement on the use of aligned multimodal electronic data and document exchange, e.g., along a digital corridor, underlying the use of electronic document equivalents based on the multimodal UN/CEFACT standards and MMT RDM.

21. Advocate for a broader adoption of the Model Law on Electronic Transferable Records (MLETR) of UNCITRAL, emphasizing its role in ensuring legal interoperability in business-to-business transactions; supporting the rollout of the package of UN/CEFACT standards for multimodal data and document exchange and MLETR as the basis for a transition from information exchange about cargo based on documents to exchange based on digital datasets (electronic transferable records). Support the admissibility in courts of datasets (electronic transferable records).

22. Train experts in developing legal standards for digital trade, emphasizing the importance of legal interoperability; share outcomes and lessons learnt from pilot projects, providing insights for overcoming legal challenges and ensuring successful implementation of the standards,

23. The legal framework should cover cross-border use of electronic transport and trade documents in fully paperless environment with mutual recognition of methods of authentication and electronic signatures. Build synergies with such initiatives as ESCAP's Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific; the UN/CEFACT and TRACECA digital corridor concepts.

V. *Knowledge sharing and capacity-building recommendations:*

24. Promote knowledge-sharing, capacity-building plans, sharing of outcomes and lessons learnt from pilot projects to help build better standards, better systems, and better sharing of data on legitimate trade involving development partners and national authorities, by:
    a. learning from economies that have successfully implemented similar regulations at domestic and regional levels, e.g., the European Union (notably, in the rollout of the EU eFTI Regulation), the United Kingdom, Singapore, etc.,
    b. establishing training for implementers and train-the-trainers networks on national or regional basis (the Trans-Caspian Corridor, SPECA, etc.), sharing best practices, capacity-building, learning by doing (involving experts in real pilot implementation projects),
    c. creating an advanced e-learning tool.

VI. *Concluding recommendations:*

25. Make public-private collaboration an indispensable part of the digitalization of multimodal data and document exchange along the Trans-Caspian corridor. Support the lead of the business community in some of the pilot projects.

26. Always keep the longer-term focus on multimodal interoperability, even when carrying out step-by-step projects in support of digitalization in separate modes of transport.

27. The partners from the Association "Trans-Caspian Transport Route", supported by all participants, requested to transform these recommendations further into practical guidelines on what must be done to implement the UN/CEFACT standards as the common IT language and foundation for interoperable digitalization of multimodal data and document exchange in the Trans-Caspian corridor.

28. Explore the possibility to organize the next, sixteenth regional seminar in Turkmenbashi, in the first quarter of 2025 in the framework of Turkmenistan's Chairmanship in SPECA, given that the SPECA Roadmap on the digitalization of the Trans-Caspian corridor envisages a focus on the exchange of information between ports, using UN/CEFACT standards, for 2025.

29. The participants expressed their gratitude to the hosts from the Ministry of Trade and Integration of Kazakhstan, the International Association "Trans-Caspian International Transport Route" (TITR), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE),

the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, the Permanent Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Commission on the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Central Asia (PS IGC TRACECA) for the excellent organization of the seminar.