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Strategic directions

Title: The way forward for UN/CEFACT

Submitted by the delegation of The Netherlands

Summary

The Netherlands delegation to UN/CEFACT wishes to actively contribute to the ongoing debate on the way forward for UN/CEFACT. Taking into account the potential of UN/CEFACT's remit and recognizing the value of its deliverables for its constituencies and stakeholders, this Position Paper sets the stage for future UN/CEFACT activities.

I. Core values UN/CEFACT

1. The Netherlands delegation is of the opinion that all UN/CEFACT activities should on the one hand exploit UN/CEFACT's unique values, position and competences and on the other hand aim at achieving in that context deliverables with clear added value. The Netherlands delegation believes that the core values of UN/CEFACT are:

- UN/CEFACT is a unique intergovernmental organization where experts from the private sector and (semi) governmental organizations meet on neutral ground. It has a worldwide scope and is not organized sector by sector. It is a unique forum to discover and discuss cross-sectoral aspects of trade facilitation.
- UN/CEFACT is an organization of the United Nations. This means that it is able to have an influence on debates in other international public and private organizations like WCO, WTO and other standards developing/setting and trade facilitation organizations. The United Nations flag on products developed by UN/CEFACT brings an important added value and important responsibility.
- The deliverables of UN/CEFACT can be adopted and implemented relatively easily because of their neutrality and because the deliverables can be used free of charge. This requires however that UN/CEFACT - within its remit - cooperate intensively with other trade facilitation organizations in the public and private sector as well as standardization organizations.

II. Focus

2. UN/CEFACT intends to facilitate national and international trade through the simplification, harmonization and standardization of processes, procedures and information flows. For that purpose, the organization publishes trade facilitation recommendations, electronic business standards and technical specifications. These work areas have over the past years been the three pillars of the CEFACT work program. The Netherlands delegation has taken the opportunity of earlier broad EXCOM discussions to reflect whether, or to what extent, UN/CEFACT should for the future continue to focus on the three pillars.

3. The Netherlands delegation is of the opinion that the real strength of UN/CEFACT lies in drafting 'Recommendations' and a specific type of standards in respect of core procedural aspects of trade facilitation, the latter often referred to as semantics. The past has shown that via these recommendations and standards UN/CEFACT has helped to realize major developments in respect of trade facilitation. Unambiguous semantics are 'a conditio sine qua non' for effective and efficient international trade and transport and should therefore be the core focus of UN/CEFACT. These deliverables should be as technology neutral as possible, to simplify their adoption and (re)use.

4. Cooperation between UN/CEFACT and other standards development organizations and consortia is a vital requirement. 21st century trade contains numerous activities, processes and information elements that are not all (and cannot all be) in the remit of a single trade facilitation organization or standardization organization. Cooperation usually leads to better products and avoids duplication of efforts.

5. In that respect the delegation of the Netherlands would like to see UN/CEFACT:

- work more closely together with other organizations;
- integrate as much as possible the technical solutions developed elsewhere into UN/CEFACT's work and recommendations rather than having UN/CEFACT carry out proprietary activities;

- actively prevent duplication of work or competition between development activities, aimed at optimizing the use of scarce competences and value adding remits.
 - provide more and transparent information on the development of its deliverables in a form (format plus channels) that is suitable for its constituencies.
6. Note that it is important to maintain and keep up to date semantic tools like code lists and UN/TDED, mirroring the requirement that UN/CEFACT needs to deliver practical solutions.
7. While recognizing the pioneer work on UN/EDIFACT and the deliverables that have been realized obtained in the past, in the 21st century UN/CEFACT should reconsider progressing this and in fact scale down its ambitions regarding the development of new technical work, i.e. creating new syntax solutions. Other well established organizations are able to fulfill the market needs better, and often can count already on a large adoption and implementation of their deliverables. Duplication of work, either 'parallel' or 're-doing' should be avoided. Only under specific circumstances, e.g. if no other organization is able or willing to deliver a suitable solution for the market needs within the required timeframe, UN/CEFACT may consider stepping in by providing resources or - as a last resort - tailor made technical solutions, suitable to be re-integrated in the proper environment.
8. Therefore, in summary, the Netherlands delegation would like to see the following considered in evaluating current and future work items.
9. UN/CEFACT work program and projects should:
- i) mainly be aimed at developing recommendations or agreements on semantics in the field of trade facilitation and e-business;
 - ii) lead towards measurable elimination or reduction of trade constraints and barriers in the sectors of trade, transport, health, agriculture and utilities;
 - iii) achieve participation and obtain commitment from the relevant stakeholders from private as well as public sector in a partnership;
 - iv) not start nor claim activities in areas where other international standardization activities already have a recognized and established position. Cooperation should be sought via bodies such as the MoUMG (Memorandum of Understanding Management Group - MOU on E-business between ISO, ITU, IEC and UN/CEFACT)
 - v) be neutral in terms of technology choice;
 - vi) serve collective interest of all UN/CEFACT member states and therefore justify the added value of using the UN flag on its deliverables;
 - vii) contribute towards harmonization of regulatory processes and standards in member states;
 - viii) not compete with, but enrich or add to, existing and comparable standards developed by the private sector;
 - ix) fit in and be compatible with the latest (and state of the art) technological developments in the various sectors;
 - x) be actively supported by Member States from multiple regions; failure to obtain the minimum support required in this respect should have negative consequences for the project and/or work.
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