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International Convention on the Harmonization of**Frontier Controls of Goods, 1982 (“Harmonization Convention”):****round table on the role of best practices at border crossings in
the implementation of the Harmonization Convention****Round Table on the role of best practices at border crossings
in the implementation of the Harmonization Convention****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) organized a round table on the role of best practices at border crossings in implementing the International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods, 1982 (Harmonization Convention). The Round table took place on 14 June 2012, and was held in the framework of the 131st session of the UNECE Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport (WP.30) (12-15 June 2012).

The Round table provided extensive information on the ‘Handbook on Best Practices at Border Crossings – A Trade and Transport Facilitation Perspective’ published in early 2012 under the joint auspices of UNECE and OSCE, and addressed various examples of best practices from the ECE region and beyond. The round table focused on capacity-building with a view to ensuring more effective and efficient border crossing facilitation measures for the optimal implementation of the Harmonization Convention.

I. Introduction

1. At the seventy-fourth session of the Inland Transport Committee, held from 28 February to 1 March 2012, UNECE and the OSCE officially launched the Joint OSCE–UNECE Publication: “Handbook of Best Practices at Border Crossings – A Trade and Transport Facilitation Perspective”, in relation to the implementation of the International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods, 1982 (Harmonization Convention). This Handbook, financed by OSCE, contains numerous case studies from UNECE member States as well as a chapter on border crossing performance measurement techniques and may become a useful tool to promote facilitation at border crossings.

2. The Harmonization Convention is a framework convention that lays down a number of key principles, which are sine-qua-non for border crossing facilitation, and provides for a high degree of flexibility in their implementation at the national level, considering that there may be no ‘one fits all’ solution for the 55 Contracting Parties. Under this situation, examples of best practices have been found to be indispensable for the proper implementation of the Harmonization Convention. With a view to discussing these best practices as reflected in the publication and in order to facilitate the sharing of experiences among Contracting Parties, the Working Party welcomed the organization of a joint UNECE–OSCE Round Table.

3. The round table was held during the 131st session of WP.30 on 14 June 2012 in Geneva. The round table addressed various examples of best practices within and beyond the ECE region as well as provided an overview of the newly published handbook. The round table focused on capacity-building with a view to ensuring a higher degree of effectiveness and efficiency in border crossing facilitation measures. The discussions and programme are designed for government officials responsible for Customs, transport and trade policies. It was also open to representatives of transport industry. It included detailed presentations by experts from various governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as by representatives of countries and the UNECE secretariat. The present document has been prepared by the UNECE secretariat and contains a summary of the presentations and discussions during the round table.

II. Attendance

4. The seminar was attended by representatives of the following countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine. Representatives of the following observer States and non-ECE member States were also present: Australia and Pakistan. The European Commission (EC) was represented. The following intergovernmental organizations were also represented: the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The following non-governmental organization was represented: the International Road Transport Union (IRU). The full list of participants can be consulted at the UNECE Transport Division website.

III. Welcoming statements

5. In her opening statement, Ms. Eva Molnar, Director, UNECE, Transport Division highlighted the importance of the OSCE–UNECE Handbook on best practices at border crossings, particularly the Chapter on the methodology of border performance measurements and benchmarking. She stressed the importance of this methodology for monitoring purposes and invited WP.30 to find a way of using it in the framework of the Harmonization Convention, being a unique tool for border crossing facilitation.

6. Welcoming the participants on behalf of his organization, Mr. Roel Janssens of the OSCE underscored the importance of the OSCE cooperation with UNECE on the development of the Handbook and noted the importance of promoting the publication throughout the ECE region and beyond.

IV. Presentations and discussions

7. The round table was held in four sessions and included presentations by experts from various governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as by representatives of countries and the UNECE secretariat. Presentations submitted to the round table can be downloaded at the UNECE Transport Division website www.unece.org/trans/events/140612.html.

A. Harmonization Convention and the Handbook of Best Practices (Session 1)

8. The presentation by the representative of the OSCE secretariat “General introduction of the Handbook and overview of its selected chapters” highlighted the content, objectives, benefits and scope of the Handbook, which covers major aspects of border crossing facilitation, including some 120 examples of best practices and case studies. In conclusion he stated that the OSCE and UNECE intend to further promote the Handbook starting with a training seminar planned for July 2012 in Dushanbe.

9. The presentation by the secretary to the Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport (WP.30) “Harmonization Convention as a unique global tool for border crossing facilitation” provided an overview of the Harmonization Convention, its objectives and benefits. The presentation focused mainly on the evolution of the Convention over the years, the present challenges and the opportunities for further future development.

B. Selected examples of national and regional best practices (Session 2)

10. The representative of the State Customs Service of Ukraine gave a presentation on “EURO 2012: joint border controls between Poland and Ukraine”, providing an overview of the measures implemented to facilitate border crossing. The main focus of the presentation was the cooperation of the customs services of Ukraine and Poland in, for example, exchange of information at check-points, joint control and simplified procedures.

11. The presentation by the representative of the State Customs Committee of Belarus was devoted to best practices that have proven effective for border-crossing facilitation both in road and rail transport. He presented the main elements of the Simplified Customs Clearance procedure for transit within the Customs Union between Belarus, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation. With regard to rail transport, the presentation highlighted the positive results from the use of the joint International Convention concerning the Carriage

of Goods by Rail/Agreement on International Railway Freight Communications (CIM/SMGS) consignment note. The presentation also outlined the benefits of the effected pre-arrival notification system in Belarus, the one stop system at checkpoints as well as addressed issues on infrastructure.

12. An excellent example of the advantages of a single window system that enables international (cross-border) traders to submit regulatory documents at a single location and/or single entity was presented by the representative of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Ukraine (Odessa region) in his presentation “Local solution for single window: implementation features in Ukraine”. It was noted that the single window project is the optimal tool for an increase in efficiency and safety and decrease in costs for moving cargoes across borders. The presentation also outlined the benefits of the combined train “Viking”; a joint project of Lithuanian, Belarusian and Ukrainian railways, seaport cargo companies, and Klaipėda, Ilyitchovsk and Odessa seaports. Finally, the main elements of the implementation of the Electronic Customs Declarations were presented.

13. The presentation by the representative of the ECO “Best practices at border crossing in the ECO region” provided an in-depth analysis of the advantages and limitations of various approaches/indicators for measuring corridor performance and the correlation with supply chain logistics. He also presented examples of practices and challenges in the ECO region, as well as highlighted the findings and achievements of the successful cooperation of ECO with the IRU on bottleneck monitoring and corridor-wide monitoring.

C. Role of the private sector in setting up best practices at borders (Session 3)

14. From the presentation by the representative of the Ministry of Customs and Trade of Turkey, the participants were informed about the efforts undertaken in Turkey for the modernization of border crossing points through public-private partnerships. The presentation provided an overview of the positive results of the first completed projects, as well as outlined the planned upcoming projects with special emphasis on the pilot project with Georgia for the joint use of border gates. The presentation emphasized the importance of human resources management and training of staff for further development and successful implementation of the modernization process.

15. The International Road Transport Union representative gave a presentation on “IRU’s projects and tools for border crossing facilitation”, focusing on the operation and benefits of the Border Waiting Times Observatory (BWTO), a web based application for reporting on border waiting times in order to provide real time and accurate information for operators and other stakeholders. He also presented the function, benefits and geographic coverage of the TIR Electronic Pre-Declaration (TIR-EPD), a computerized and free of charge service for trade operators.

D. Border performance measurement and benchmarking (Session 4)

16. The representative of the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service presented an “Overview of various methodologies to evaluate border performance”, as determined by relevant case studies and practices in Australia. The presentation included detailed analysis of the benefits of benchmarking, the methodologies and performance indicators that have proven most effective and of the relevant legal framework. He also outlined the findings of the Australian Time Release Study and of case studies on an Integrated Cargo System and on Container Examination Facilities. He concluded that

benchmarking is the way forward and that to this end it is necessary to standardize the methodology and indicators for benchmarking.

17. The presentation by UNCTAD secretariat focused on the Time-Cost-Distance Model and its methodology, which is based on the graphical representation of data collected with respect to the cost and time associated with the transit transport process. The presentation outlined the objectives and benefits of the model as well as provided a description of the methodology and the process of data collection.

18. The last session of the round table concluded with the presentation on “Transport Route Attractiveness index (TRAX) methodology for international freight transport as applied in the Euro-Asian TRACECA corridor”, by the representative of Dornier Consulting in Germany. The presentation went into depths with the description of the methodology and criteria of attractiveness of road and rail routes. The benefits of the exercise for competitiveness and prioritization of improvements to be implemented along particular routes were also highlighted.

V. Conclusions

19. The participants of the round table came to the following conclusions and recommendations:

(a) Cumbersome procedures at borders increase the cost of transport operations and hamper international trade, economic development and foreign investment. Efficient transport and trade can be achieved by removing bottlenecks and implementing facilitation measures;

(b) The International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods, 1982 is a key legal instrument in the area of border crossing facilitation and coordinated border management. Its proper implementation can not only reduce border delays and transport/trade costs, but also minimize governmental expenditures on the infrastructure and operation of border crossing points;

(c) Given the fact that the Harmonization Convention provides for a flexible legislative framework, examples of best practices and/or guidelines are essential for its harmonized application at the national level;

(d) The OSCE–UNECE Handbook offers an extensive overview of best practices, from both the public and private sector perspectives, and draws attention to the need to apply best practices and internationally accepted norms and standards. It can be used as a training tool for regional trainings (i.e. at the OSCE Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe) or for national, tailor-made capacity-building upon specific requests of individual countries;

(e) The Handbook should be promoted as much as possible amongst Contracting Parties to the Harmonization Convention, but also to other countries. It should become a reference document for policymakers for developing and implementing better trade, transport, border and customs policies;

(f) More efforts need to be made to improve cooperation between border services both domestically as well as internationally. Single Windows, one-stop border crossing points and other concepts and methodologies are available and particularly designed to facilitate this;

(g) Governments need to step up efforts to find a better balance between security and trade facilitation;

(h) There is an increasing role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the border management and Customs field which requires more training and investments;

(i) Effective public-private partnership is instrumental for the implementation of border crossing facilitation measures, in particular:

- monitoring the situation at border crossings and sharing this information with all parties concerned;
- meeting the infrastructure requirements for efficient border crossing points;
- use of ICT to speed up border crossing procedures.

(j) Monitoring is a crucial element to ensure the proper implementation of the provisions of the Harmonization Convention. In particular, harmonized border performance indicators and/or benchmarking are required to further improve the efficiency of border crossing points.
