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Annual themes on Intermodal Transport

2014 Theme: Role of freight forwarders and logistics in intermodal transport chains

Note by the secretariat

I. Mandate

1. This document has been prepared in line with the output/activities of cluster 6: Intermodal transport and logistics of the programme of work of the transport subprogramme for 2014–2015 (ECE/TRANS/2014/23) as adopted by the Inland Transport Committee on 27 February 2014 (ECE/TRANS/240, para. 100).
2. As decided by the Working Party at its last session and in line with the road map on future work and operation of the Working Party (ECE/TRANS/WP.24/133, paras. 39–40), a workshop on the 2014 Theme: Role of freight forwarders and logistics in intermodal transport chains was held in Brussels on 12–13 June 2014.
3. A summary report of discussions leading up to this workshop is provided below and the discussion and outcome of the workshop is summarized.

II. Attendance

4. The workshop was hosted by the Federal Public Service (FPS) – Mobility and Transport of Belgium and was held on 12 and 13 June 2014 in Brussels. It was attended by experts from the Governments of Belgium and Turkey as well as representatives of the European Union and the following non-governmental and industry groups: European Association for Forwarding, Transport and Customs Services (CLECAT); European Intermodal Association; International Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations (FIATA); International Road Union (IRU); Swedish International Freight Association

(SIFA); International Union for Road-Rail Combined Transport; and the Association of International Forwarding and Logistics Service Providers (Turkey).

III. Government Action at National and Subregional Levels

5. Governments provide the appropriate regulatory, financial and educational framework for the design and management of freight transport. However, it is important for public authorities to act swiftly with the preparation and implementation of frameworks, not only to provide, from the outset, a level playing field for all actors involved and ensure transparency and guidance for the industry, but also to establish a comprehensive and consistent framework that allows all public authorities, including those at local and municipal levels to act in line with the same principles. The latter is particularly important for rational land-use planning and the localization of freight villages and freight distribution centers.

A. Activities at national level

6. Some UNECE member States have already responded to these challenges. They have or are in the process of identifying, in close cooperation with concerned industry groups and other stakeholders, the role and responsibility of Governments and non-governmental actors in this field. They also determine appropriate regulatory, financial and educational policy measures that could contribute to more efficient and sustainable freight and intermodal transport systems integrated into modern logistics and supply chains.

7. Germany, for example, adopted, in early 2008, a Masterplan for Freight Transport and Logistics to enhance the competitiveness of its logistics industry and to provide for the optimum design, funding and use of freight transport systems. Another example is the logistics plan of Portugal of 2006 that integrated regulatory and planning structures for the development of a network of logistics centres at strategic locations in Portugal. The plan supports logistical activities in the country with a view to making better use of the existing transport network and to promote rail and port hinterland transport.

B. Activities at subregional level

8. At the subregional level, in October 2007 a Freight Logistics Action Plan was adopted by the European Commission as part of a larger freight transport package to enhance the efficiency and sustainability of freight transport, including also freight-oriented rail networks, new port policies, motorways of the sea and a European maritime space without borders.

9. The topics were based on extensive consultations with stakeholders and cover four broad themes: innovation, quality, simplification and green transport. Within this framework, the European Commission developed a road map for the implementation of e-freight that denotes the vision of a paper-free, electronic flow of information accompanying the physical movement of goods. In addition, the freight transport logistics bottleneck exercise continued with a view to finding practical solutions, including regulatory measures.

IV. International Government Action: Activities of the UNECE Working Party

10. The responsibilities and measures to be taken by Governments to influence the design and management of freight transport cover a wide field and go much beyond those usually addressed at the international level by the UNECE Working Party on Intermodal Transport and Logistics (WP.24). While many of the governmental responsibilities and measures in this field are not necessarily apt for intergovernmental norms, standards or regulatory measures, an exchange of experiences and best practices among countries at global United Nations or regional UNECE level (covering 56 countries in the pan-European region as well as North America) may be useful and provide guidance of action at the national level.

11. Also, the above considerations have shown that logistics and the design and management of freight transport have an important international dimension that may need to be addressed by consistent and internationally harmonized government policies. The present programme of work of the Working Party contains a number of intergovernmental activities that relate directly or indirectly to the design and management of freight transport and its interrelation with intermodal transport. These activities may need to be reviewed and refined in line with the propositions below and might need to be carried out in consultation or cooperation with other UNECE bodies and other competent intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

12. The activities briefly below would fall within the mandate and area of competence of WP.24 and could provide value-added at the intergovernmental and pan-European level. For some of these activities, such as on civil liability regimes, specific expert groups may need to be established to address very specific and complex technical and legal issues.

13. In the field of international transport policy and regulatory measures:

(a) Monitoring and analysis of national measures to influence the design and management of freight transport with a view to enhancing the use of intermodal transport and preparation of a tool-box of policy measures and mechanisms that, depending on national circumstances, could be utilized to this end. Relevant European Conference of Ministers of Transport resolutions on combined transport should be taken into account.

(b) Review and possible amendment of the 2005 “Model” Action Plans and Partnership Agreements, including performance parameters for the development of intermodal transport, with logistical requirements, benchmarks and responsibility parameters.

(c) Analysis of the Rotterdam Rules and review civil liability regimes and provisions for intermodal land transport in a pan-European context.

14. In the field of international transport infrastructure and performance measures:

(a) Review of the existing infrastructure and performance standards in the AGTC Agreement, including its Protocol on inland water transport with a view to raising interoperability standards and establishing benchmarks for an efficient design and management of freight transport and international intermodal transport services. The difficulties and costs in modifying such standards should be taken into account.

(b) Review of AGTC minimum standards for terminals with a view to optimizing transshipment and logistical procedures and inclusion of mechanisms for the optimum location, construction and operation of terminals, freight villages and distribution centres, border-crossing and gauge interchange stations as well as ferry links/ports.

(c) Inclusion of logistical requirements into the AGTC (also possibly AGR and AGC) to increase capacity and efficiency of port hinterland transport services.

15. In the fields of exchange of information on research, education and awareness:

(a) Exchange of best practices on new concepts, design, weights and dimensions of intermodal loading (transport) units taking account of existing weight and dimensional limits enshrined in national, international and subregional (European Union) regulations.

(b) Exchange of best practices in the preparation and implementation of national logistics action or master plans.

V. Outcome and discussion

16. The UNECE workshop on the “Role of freight forwarders and logistics in intermodal transport chains” was moderated by Mr. Henri Mallard, former Chair of the Working Party. On the basis of presentations from private industry and governments information was gathered at the workshop on the current national situations for freight-forwarders, the direct or indirect involvement of freight forwarders in the development of intermodal transport and logistics and the utility or lack thereof of an international statute.

17. The programme consisted of 4 sessions: (a) Terms and Statutes, (b) Actors of multimodality, (c) Actors in the supply chain, and (d) Relevance of an international statute.

1. Terms and statutes

18. Workshop participants discussed the terminology for functional titles of professions as well as the status and existence (in form and content) of legal devices by country. The cases of Belgium and Turkey were presented and the importance of common terminology in understanding where responsibilities lie for liability purposes was highlighted through a presentation by SIFA. Further analysis of country practices was identified as an important tool to better assess the issues in this area. Participants recommended that WP.24 ask countries to provide information on the relevant terms and statutes used in their respective countries.

2. Actors of multimodality

19. The focus was on the importance of multimodality in providing the best logistics solutions. The difficulty and complexity involved in choosing the "right" mode was highlighted, but noted as a problem that can be limited by using industry best practices. A presentation from CLECAT noted that there is room for governments to help create environments where the mode of transportation can be chosen based on efficiency by aligning legislative measures at the international level, by better assessing the necessity of some rules and regulations and by identifying and eliminating institutional hindrances to interoperability.

3. Actors in the supply chain

20. FIATA gave an overview on the services supplied by freight forwarders. The "importance of ensuring logistics connectivity" was emphasized and obstacles to such connectivity such as regulatory bottlenecks were identified. A discussion followed in which participants from industry clarified that it is in the best interest of freight forwarders to lessen the difficulty in navigating through different rules and regulations between countries.

Participants expressed guarded optimism that the recent WTO Bali agreement on trade facilitation could be a major step toward creating a simpler and more efficient environment for trade.

4. Relevance of an international statute

21. Different views on the need for an international status for freight forwarders were exchanged at the workshop. IRU presented its view that without aligned European Union-wide rules on the access to the profession of freight forwarder, competition is and would continue to be distorted. The requirements for hauliers were compared to the current lack of requirements for forwarders and it was concluded that guarantees for professional competence would add legal certainty where it is currently needed.

22. Participants from industry had a different opinion than the one expressed by IRU. A presentation by SIFA identified some of the potential unwanted side effects of creating such a status for forwarders. SIFA concluded that the logical conclusion of such requirements would be a less competitive market dominated by a few large forwarders as only large enterprises would have enough in-house knowledge to gain status and access for all modes of transport.
