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COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Centre for the Facilitation of Procedures and
Practices for Administration, Commerce and Transport

Item 3 of the provisional agenda,
Sixth session, 27-30 March 2000

REPORT OF THE CEFACT STEERING GROUP (CSG)

Geneva, 17-18 March 1999
(Second Meeting 1999)

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Submitted by the Chair of the CEFACT Steering Group (CSG) *

This document has been submitted by the CEFACT Steering Group (CSG) for information as required under the CEFACT procedures outlined in document TRADE/R.650. It is for information only. Items to be decided upon by the CEFACT Plenary will be presented in a separate report from the Chairman to the CSG.

Present:

Ray Walker, United Kingdom - Chair
Rocio Cardenas - CEFACT Secretariat
Hans Hansell - CEFACT Secretariat
Jean Kubler - CEFACT Secretariat
Raul Colcher, Brazil
Ernst Deeg, Germany
David Dobbins, Australia
Harry Featherstone, United States
Pierre Georget, France
Borislav Georgiev, Bulgaria
Peter Guldentops, SWIFT
Kenji Itoh, Japan
Rob van Kuik, Netherlands/WCO
Alexander de Lijster, Netherlands
David Marsh, United Kingdom
Santiago Mila, IAPH/ Spain
Klaus-Dieter Naujok, Canada
Emile Peeters, Belgium/ECEA
Adriana Sirzea, Romania
Teresa Sorrenti, United States
Christina Wallén-Rahlén, SWEPRO/Sweden
Peter Wilson, United Kingdom
Christoph Wolf, Germany

Introductory note

1. To encourage the greatest possible openness in the process and input into its decisions and recommendations, the CSG encourages a wide circulation of its reports. Further information about UN/CEFACT and its Steering Group can be obtained at the following Internet address: <http://www.unece.org/cefact>.

Role & responsibilities of CSG, method of operating

2. The CSG Chair defined the Steering Group as the coordinating body between the Plenary, Heads of Delegations (HoD), and the Working Groups. CSG is responsible to the Plenary which sets the targets and objectives. The CSG is responsible for coordinating the work of the working groups and providing them with guidance.

3. The Chairman pointed out that an open exchange of views is necessary for building a team position but as a collective decision-making body, all members are responsible for CSG decision. The CSG Chair's role is to reach consensus for the Group's decisions.

4. The main issues resulting from the Plenary concerned the Ad hoc working group on Simpl-EDI and forms and web based EDI (SIMAC) and eXtensible Mark Language (XML).

SIMAC

5. The SIMAC Chair reported that the majority of SIMAC's work needed to be transferred to the UN/EDIFACT Working Group (EWG). He suggested that the EWG should base its work on the SIMAC vision statement.

6. The EWG Chair informed the CSG that this issue would be addressed at the EWG Atlanta meeting. The EWG Management Team would identify ways for maintaining the momentum. Also, the EWG Management Team would study the SIMAC report and make recommendations to its group. As to XML, it needed coordination with other groups. The EWG Chair expected SIMAC experts to take part in the work. It was suggested that the Business Process Analysis Working Group (BPAWG) should be involved from the beginning to ensure that business processes would drive the work.

7. The EWG Vice Chair noted that, to that end, the EWG first needed to review the SIMAC work as there was a risk of splitting the work between various groups and losing the momentum. It was also noted that as an empowered group, EWG had developed its own work plan and procedures and that there was a risk that the agreed plan would be substantially changed without EWG agreement.

8. The SIMAC Chair stressed the importance of coordination and cooperation between the relevant groups and pointed out that a great deal of the work needed to be carried out at the level of message implementation guidelines.

9. The CSG Chair requested the SIMAC Chair to draft a statement on the transfer of the activity to the EWG. Furthermore, he requested EWG to identify the issues involved and respond by 31 of March via the list server. The CSG Chair will discuss the coordination issue with the EWG and BPAWG Chairs.

XML

10. The CSG Chair thanked the TMWG for its report on XML and stated that there would be a substantive discussion at the next CSG meeting in June on the subject. He also noted the desire of HoDs to move forward on the issue of XML and, especially, to investigate working with the Internet community (W3C) regarding the development of repositories. Furthermore he pointed out the importance of communicating UN/CEFACT's view on XML to the world and tabled a draft statement for review.

11. The group agreed on a two-way approach:

- " Restate the 'three-track' strategy to Heads of Delegations through an aide-mémoire which would confirm that XML was an integral part of the UN/CEFACT's strategy.
- " Issue a press release, stating UN/CEFACT's view on the role of XML. The press release would also address the session results and relate it to all actions, SIMPL-EDI, XML etc.

Relationship with the Internet community

14. Mr. Naujok, in his role as Standards Liaison Rapporteur was mandated to identify potential partners within the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) so that a coordinated approach to the repository issue might be taken. The Rapporteur also suggested that the W3C be requested to join the Memorandum of Understanding between the UN/ECE, ISO and the International Electrotechnical Commission concerning standardization in electronic business. He noted that the Internet environment should be considered as consisting of W3C and the IETF (Internet Engineering Task Force).

15. CSG mandated the Standards Liaison Rapporteur to coordinate this approach with the ISO Central Secretariat, and make an initial report to the CSG by end April 1999.

Review of the UN/CEFACT conference

16. The conference held on Monday 15 April had been found very valuable. The conference had two purposes, the dissemination of information and the involvement in UN/CEFACT's work. The CSG suggested a two-day conference and a two-day Plenary meeting. It was concluded that UN/CEFACT should hold a conference on an annual basis. The subject of the presentations should be focussed and application oriented and more time should be allocated for questions & answers.

17. The Conference was a unique opportunity for promoting UN/CEFACT's work. The CSG envisages this type of events in other parts of the world. The CSG also agreed that within the conference there should be information sessions to demonstrate the progress of each Working Group.

Copyright issue

18. The Legal Rapporteur reported that in his opinion the UN was the exclusive licensee of the UN/EDIFACT standard. Furthermore, the UN had appointed WP.4 and UN/CEFACT as exclusive licensees.

19. The CSG Chair noted that the use of the UN logo had legal implications and that rules for its use needed to be developed.

Trade facilitation

20. The CSG discussed the relationship between the UN Layout Key (UNLK) for trade documents and Web based forms. The TMWG Chair suggested the development of standardized Web pages based on UNLK linked with SIMPL-EDI. However, it still had to be decided whether the work should be driven by the SIMPL-EDI based on message implementation guidelines or by business processes and therefore using a modelling approach.

21. The CSG Chair noted that the trade facilitation work of the Centre required vision, a work programme, coordination and delivery. The vision had been defined and detailed. The work programme and deliverables were available but not yet fully coherent. There was a risk of divergence between vision and delivery. The issue was, therefore, to improve the cohesion and move from a bottom-up to a top-down approach. The CSG Chair also noted that whilst trade facilitation was an ongoing activity, the Centre had never described trade facilitation in terms of a business process. Trade facilitation ought to be described in terms of integrated business processes and the Centre offered a unique platform for doing so.

22. The Regional Advisor to the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI) explained the role of trade facilitation for countries in transition. He noted that the problem was not a lack of expertise, but a lack of institutional funding arrangements. The lack of funding of countries in transition to participate in UN/CEFACT's work was also identified as an issue.

23. The Regional Advisor noted that UN/CEFACT was seen as the integrator between all parties involved in the trade transaction chain. Also, by establishing the Centre, an opportunity exists for the trade facilitation work of the relevant divisions within UN/ECE to be integrated into a coherent framework.

24. From the Legal Rapporteurs' point of view, the legal context ranged from conventions to procedural processes between contracting parties. Within the UN this work was spread over various organizations. Therefore, in his view, the unique contribution by UN/CEFACT should be combining e-commerce with trade facilitation.

25. The Regional Advisor noted that UN/CEFACT should work to secure the agreement of organizations such as IATA, FIATA, to the goals of its trade facilitation programme. Concerning the issue of technology versus facilitation he noted that even without advanced technology certain basic trade facilitation activities could be undertaken by countries in transition.

26. The CSG Chair noted that the concept of business process might be a new opportunity to explain trade facilitation to the outside world. Previous trade facilitation work had not fully taken into account the global picture or stressed the areas where the Centre's work was particularly relevant. Taking action in

these areas and clearly describing its activities in a way understandable to outsiders would be very helpful.

27. It was agreed to continue the discussion at the next CSG meeting.

Other business

28. The CSG Chair requested a list of priorities from all the working groups. The Secretariat should receive feedback from the Chairs of the working groups by the 30th of April.

29. The press release of the UN/CEFACT meeting was discussed. It was agreed that the approval of the recommendations, SIMPL-EDI, XML/EDI and coordination with international organizations should be mentioned. The group agreed that a press release should be issued after each meeting of the plenary.

30. The Chair of BPAWG reported on the WTO trade facilitation meeting. He informed the group that the EUROPRO Procedures Working Group was the counterpart of the ITPWG and that EUROPRO intends to invite the new chair of ITPWG, when nominated, to one of its meetings to discuss ways to avoid duplication of work and to make better use of resources. He also briefed the group on the confusing perception arising between UN/ECE Recommendations and UN Recommendations, which he felt should be addressed by UN/CEFACT.

31. CSG decided that, in addition to its elected members, all the UN/CEFACT Vice Chairs, the Chairs of the permanent groups not already members of the Steering Group, the Rapporteurs, and key members of the UN/CEFACT Secretariat should be members of the list server for CSG.

Meeting dates

21 June at 14:00 - 25 June at 13:00, Geneva

22 November at 14:00 - 26 November at 13:00, Brussels

31 July - 4 August 2000

20 November - 24 November 2000
