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**TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE CZECH REPUBLIC  
IN THE AREA OF TRADE FACILITATION**

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Submitted by FITPRO, the Czech National Trade Facilitation Committee \*

This document is submitted to the Centre for information and noting.

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## **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE CZECH REPUBLIC IN THE AREA OF TRADE FACILITATION**

The Czech Republic has been providing technical assistance for trade facilitation through the project, **“Support to Trade Facilitation Measures and UN/EDIFACT Implementation in Selected Eastern European Countries.”** Funding for this project was approved by Government decree No. 342/1996 on the Plan of Bilateral Development Assistance for the years 1997-1999. The project was implemented in cooperation among Czech experts (in the framework of the Czech national trade facilitation body, FITPRO), the UN/ECE Regional Advisor on Trade Facilitation and specialists from beneficiary countries.

### **Project beneficiaries**

During the first three years of project implementation, assistance focused on Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia and Lithuania. Seminars, consultations, and exchange of experience and information were organized both in the Czech Republic and in beneficiaries' countries and targeted at government officials and representatives of the private sector in these countries.

### **Project objectives**

The project aimed at attaining the following objectives:

- Bring together representatives of relevant government authorities and institutions, and the business sector in beneficiary countries in order to create an understanding among them of the need for cooperation that is required for the implementation of trade facilitation measures;
- Set up national trade facilitation bodies that will be able to provide relevant services both to the national trading community and in relation to foreign partners;
- Prepare promotional and educational materials;
- Establish new contacts for the development of cooperation with beneficiary countries in trade facilitation and trade in general.

### **Expected end-results**

Upon completion of the project, the following results should have been achieved:

- National trade facilitation bodies (PRO Committees) established in beneficiary countries and able to provide relevant services;
- Higher level of public awareness attained about trade facilitation, and support provided from the Government administration to this process;
- Promotional and educational materials prepared and published;

- New contacts established for the development of cooperation in this area and in trade in general;

### **Progress achieved**

To date, the initial objectives of the project have mostly been achieved in **Ukraine** where a national trade facilitation council was established. At the end of 1998, an agreement providing a framework for the implementation of the project in this country was signed between the Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic and the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations and Foreign Trade of Ukraine. The following activities have been conducted within the scope of this agreement:

- Five workshops in Prague and Kiev for the representatives of the Ukrainian government and the business sector, with the participation of Czech experts from FITPRO and the UN/ECE regional advisor on trade facilitation;
- Two on-the-job training courses in Prague for Ukrainian specialists;
- A seminar in Kiev on “Trade Facilitation, EDI and UN/EDIFACT” for the representatives of the Ukrainian government;
- Two seminars in Prague on “Trade Facilitation and Legal Issues Related to International Trade” for businessmen from Lvov and the Kirovograd region;
- The First International Conference on Electronic Business in Odessa, Ukraine.
- First editions of reference publications on the “Establishment of National Trade Facilitation Bodies” and “EDI and the Internet,” in English and Russian;
- Joint promotion of trade facilitation and EDI in the Ukrainian professional press.

A similar agreement was signed with **Latvia**. To date, two workshops were held in Riga and Prague in the framework of the agreement, and three Latvian experts came to Prague to exchange experience with their Czech colleagues. Since the discussions about the legal status and financing of the future trade facilitation body appeared to take more time than originally expected, the Latvian counterpart asked for an extension of the project till 2001. In the meantime, preparations have been continuing for the establishment of the Latvian national trade facilitation body, with support from the Latvian Ministry of Economy, the Latvian Standardization Organization and several companies.

It is expected that by 1 July 2000, the Latvian government will have decided on the legal framework required for the development of electronic commerce (legislation on electronic signatures and electronic documents). The Ministry of Transport has been working towards the implementation of EDI for transit purposes and Customs authorities have started to use EDI to transmit information for pre-clearance purposes between companies and customs offices. As the Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry reports, the volume of EDI/E-commerce in the country has been increasing every year.

In September 1999, cooperation also started with **Belarus** and a first seminar for Belarussian representatives took place in Prague on 14-15 October 1999. Most project activities are scheduled for the years 2000 and 2001.

## **Conclusions**

Following an evaluation of results achieved by the project, the Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic decided to submit a proposal to the Czech Government to extend the project through 2000-2001. This proposal was also supported by the Executive Secretary of the UN/ECE. In addition to the existing beneficiaries, the extended project aims to involve selected interested countries in South-Eastern Europe. To facilitate interaction with this region, FITPRO intends to become an active observer in SECIPRO.

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