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COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

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

Sixth session, 27-30 March 2000

Item 9 of the provisional agenda

**REPORT OF THE FIFTH MEETING
OF THE SOUTHEAST EUROPEAN NATIONAL COMMITTEES FOR THE FACILITATION OF
PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES IN ADMINISTRATION, COMMERCE AND TRANSPORT
(SECIPRO)**

13 December 1999
Budapest

Submitted by the UN/ECE Regional Advisor on Trade Facilitation

This document has been submitted to the Centre for discussion and
noting.

Report of the Fifth Meeting

13 December 1999, 9:30 – 15:00

Budapest

Principal Conclusions

1. The SECI PRO Committees agreed that country reports on the status of the International Road Transport MoU will become a standing item on the agenda of future SECIPRO meetings. SECIPRO will submit a report on its observations and any recommendations to future meetings of the Regional Road Transport Committee, which is charged with implementing the MoU.
2. Special consideration needs to be given to simplifying visa procedures, as the situation in the region will become more restrictive with the extension of the Schengen Agreement to some but not all SECI countries. The summary matrix agreed to at the Fourth Meeting needs to be completed.
3. During 2000 the Chair of SECIPRO will rotate, with the President of the PRO Committee of the country hosting the meeting acting as Chair and the President of the PRO Committee from the country hosting the subsequent meeting acting as Vice Chair. The UN/ECE Regional Advisor on Trade Facilitation will support the Chair and Vice Chair as Coordinator of the association and Ms. Vera Budway will act as Secretary of SECIPRO.
4. Each PRO Committee will begin to take responsibility for the preparation of information about its national activities for inclusion on the SECIPRO website. The names of the responsible individual for each Committee should be sent to Ms. Budway by the end of January 2000.
5. The next SECIPRO meeting will be held in Venice, Italy, on 23 March 2000.

Summary of the discussion

6. Dr. Szabolcs Fazakas, President of HUNPRO, chaired the meeting and welcomed the participants to Budapest. As this was the first SECIPRO meeting for several of the participants, Dr. Fazakas invited the participants to introduce themselves. In addition to representatives of the several SECI PRO Committees, this meeting included several observers from the EastWest Institute's Economic Task Force, the World Bank and AUSTRIAPRO. A list of the participants is included as annex I. As the Austrian Government was awarding a special honour

to Mr. Gianfranco Zoppas of the Business Advisory Council to SECI, Dr. Erhard Busek was unable to attend this meeting. The meeting noted that apologies had been sent by CROATIAPRO, who were unable to attend due to the extraordinary circumstances. The proposed agenda was reviewed and approved (Annex II).

7. Addressing agenda items 2 and 3, Mr. Will Keenan, UN/ECE Regional Advisor on Trade Facilitation, reviewed the report of the Fourth Meeting, held in Vienna on 27 May 1999. As a general comment, he noted that several of the actions agreed at the May meeting had not been implemented or only partially completed. There were several explanations, including a number of changes within the national PRO Committees and competing demands upon many involved with SECI resulting from the Stability Pact. This was one of the reasons it was decided not to hold a regular SECIPRO meeting last October in Slovenia. Instead an "informal" discussion was held at Bled among representatives of CROATIAPRO, SloveniaPRO, TURKPRO and Mr. François Vuillemier of EUROPRO.
8. Among the ideas discussed was the development of a more formal work programme for SECIPRO to encourage stricter adherence to targets and timetables. The positive experience of the "trilateral" meeting held in Thessaloniki in September suggested that there were advantages to bringing together a smaller group to focus on specific issues. The question was also raised as to whether SECIPRO was trying too soon to address issues that were too complicated. Perhaps the association also needed to review its organization and distribution of responsibilities based on its first year's experience. Most of these questions are reflected in the agenda of this meeting.
9. Agenda item 4 was introduced by Ms. Tatiana Hadjiemmanuel, HELLASPRO, who explained how HELLASPRO, MAKPRO and BULPRO met in Thessaloniki on 21 September to discuss the synchronization of services on both sides of a common border point. The report of this meeting is included as annex III. Ms. Hadjiemmanuel added that a follow-up meeting among representatives of HELLASPRO and BULPRO would be held at the Promohonas-Kulata border-crossing point on 17 December, in line with the agreement in Thessaloniki to make joint inspections of selection border crossings and report the findings and conclusions back to the respective PRO Committees for review and further action. HELLASPRO believes that this example of trilateral and bilateral meetings among PRO Committees provides a specific results-oriented focus that is difficult to achieve in the larger SECIPRO meetings.
10. Ambassador H. Kenneth Hill, who coordinates support from SECI Washington for transport infrastructure and trade facilitation activities, participated in the trilateral meeting in Thessaloniki and suggested that it should be a model for future cooperation among the PRO Committees. He congratulated HELLASPRO for the good organization of the meeting and BULPRO for conceiving the idea. Ambassador Hill also noted the positive contribution made by the Customs officers from the specific border crossing who could draw upon their first hand experience of operational issues.

11. Mr. Çelik Arsel, TURKPRO, reminded the meeting that the Border Crossing Facilitation project has been considered the “flagship” of SECI. In addition to generating the World Bank’s first regional loan programme and the establishment of the several national trade facilitation committees, the project also developed the “Memorandum of Understanding on the Facilitation of International Road Transport of Goods in the SECI Region.” The MoU has been signed by all SECI Participating States but has yet to be ratified. One of the objectives of the national PRO Committees should be to follow-up in their countries that the MoU is ratified and then to ensure that its provisions are implemented.
12. The SECI PRO Committees agreed that country reports on the status of the International Road Transport MoU will become a standing item on the agenda of future SECIPRO meetings. SECIPRO will submit a report on its observations and any recommendations to future meetings of the Regional Road Transport Committee, which is charged with implementing the MoU.
13. The Chairman invited Ms. Ljubica Nuri, MAKPRO, to comment on the Resolution of the Presidents and Representatives of the Chambers / Unions of Chambers of the Balkan Countries at the General Assembly of the Association of Balkan Chambers (A.B.C.), held in Bucharest, 25-26 November 1999. The relevant paragraph of the Resolution is the following:
14. *“Having in mind the attributions of the Chambers / Unions of Chambers as business, non-governmental and non-political organizations, A.B.C. consider that it is to the benefit of the private sector to have a more powerful involvement into the implementation of the Stability Pact for the South-East Europe. In the same time A.B.C. consider that it is highly necessary to have cooperation within the **Business Advisory Council to the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI)**, and especially express the interest of the Chambers / Unions of Chambers to be coordinators of the pro-committees activities.”*
15. Ms. Nuri, who is also part of the A.B.C. secretariat, noted that in many countries the PRO Committees are tightly linked to the Chambers. The A.B.C. wants to be in closer cooperation with SECIPRO in order to help make the region more transparent to business. In this connection, A.B.C. would appreciate receiving information from Dr. Busek on how things will proceed with the Business Advisory Councils to SECI and to the Stability Pact.
16. Ms. Budway, SECI/EWI, informed the meeting that the setting up of the Business Advisory Council to the Stability Pact (SP-BAC) was decided at the first meeting of Working Table II, held in Bari, Italy, on 9 September. The proposal, based on a favourable assessment of the Business Advisory Council to SECI, was driven by a consortium of German business and government, as well as the EBRD. Dr. Fazarkas referred to a recent dinner with Mr. Bodo Hombach at which there was some discussion whether the chief executives of major multinationals were prepared to devote the time required to participate effectively in a Business Advisory Council. Originally the Stability Pact was confident that the SP-BAC would be operational by late November, early December.

Now it has been postponed to January or later. This is beginning to cause some concern among people who expected that something should be happening.

17. Under agenda item 5, Mr. Arsel observed that the people in many of the PRO Committees have been changing during this start-up period of national trade facilitation activities. Instead of having a standing chair, he proposed a rotating chair whereby the head of the PRO Committee where the SECIPRO meeting was being held should act as the chair, with the PRO Committee of the location for the subsequent meeting acting as vice chair. Thus ITALYPRO (Mr. Federico Pacorini) would chair the March 2000 meeting in Venice, with HELLASPRO (Mr. Nicos Efthymiadis) acting as vice chair. This proposal was adopted.
18. Ms. Hadjiemmanuel suggested that it would be useful to have a continuous support to the rotating chairmanship and proposed that the UN/ECE Regional Advisor take on this responsibility, which in fact would be a continuation of the role he has played during the first year of the association. The meeting supported this proposal. Mr. Keenan thanked the association for their endorsement and accepted to act as SECIPRO Coordinator. As part of the agreement between SECI and the EastWest Institute, Ms. Budway will act as secretary to SECIPRO and to the Business Advisory Council.
19. Ms. Budway introduced agenda item 6, "SECI Business Resource Centres and their relation to SECIPRO," explaining that the idea originated at the March 1999 BAC meeting in Rome. These Centers will be located in Thessaloniki, Istanbul and Trieste. Their purpose is to follow-up on BAC decisions, follow-up on investment opportunities, and assist the BAC with private sector concerns. The Centres should be able to provide support for the PRO Committees in the region. Originally it was suggested to develop geographic competencies within each office, but this was dropped in favour of establishing functional orientations: Istanbul for banking and finance; Thessaloniki for trade and transport; Venice for small and medium-sized enterprises. [NB: at the SECI Business Advisory Council meeting on 14 December, the BAC decided to rename these centers, "Business Support Offices."]
20. Mr. Arsel pointed out that the three countries where the Centres will be located are all on the southern rim of the Balkans. The Centres are supposed to support the region and should be operational during the first quarter of 2000. He noted that these three offices aim to direct private investment into the region, whereas the PRO Committees were more project oriented, seeking to simplify and harmonize trade and transport procedures in southeast Europe.
21. Mr. Philip Moeller, World Bank, presented an overview of the Bank's Trade and Transport Facilitation in Southeast Europe (TTFSE) programme under agenda item 7. He said that they were being successful in reducing by one-half the time required for the Bank to act on a loan application. The SECI Border Crossing programme included six projects that had similar objectives, but with considerable variation among them. The Bank was able to speed up its procedures due to the help it was receiving from SECI, the PRO Committees, and the Chambers of Commerce.

The World Bank team has visited each of the six countries and those Governments have received instructions about what additional information is now required to complete the applications.

22. The World Bank team has found an incredible need for improved communication and coordination. In some countries they have found that Customs is not proactively seeking out ways of facilitating trade but rather reacting to problems as they arise. The reality at the borders did not reflect the countries' progress in legal reforms, etc. In the SECI region the team did not find the usual collection of non-governmental organizations representing the interests of the business community or consumers. Financial services were found to be very weak in all the countries.
23. As concerns the role of the PRO Committees, the World Bank found that in every country the situation was different. Sometimes the PRO Committee depended more upon the personality of a couple of individuals rather than reflecting the strength of institutional commitment to trade facilitation objectives. The TTFSE programme expects to be able to provide grants to support website development and training. In some SECI countries the Bank is considering to provide support to chambers of commerce, rather than to the national trade facilitation committees because the PRO Committees do not include the chambers, which have been found in some cases to be more capable than the trade facilitation bodies.
24. The TTFSE also includes a component Commons Advisory Service Consultancy (CASC), which will assist the World Bank Project Implementation Team. This consultancy will be awarded on a tender basis and the UN/ECE was requested to obtain additional information about the prerequisites for bidding.
25. Ms. Pranvera Kastrati, ALBAPRO, expressed the view that the PRO Committees should be involved with the TTFSE programme. In particular she would like to see ALBAPRO involved with the website activities. She noted that the Albanian Chamber of Commerce is a member of ALBAPRO.
26. Ambassador Hill stressed the importance of having practical information on the website. Trade statistics may be useful for macroeconomists or commercial attachés, but traders and transporters require practical information.
27. Mr. Keenan said that he had little to report under agenda item 8, as the recent WTO Ministerial meeting in Seattle was so preoccupied with other issues—both inside and outside the conference hall, no decision was taken concerning trade facilitation. Agencies of the United Nations, such as the Regional Commissions and UNCTAD, as well as bodies such as the World Customs Organization and the European Free Trade Association, are classified “observers” at the WTO meeting. Thus the UN/ECE could not attend the working group meetings, only the plenary sessions, and was obliged to rely on conversations with national delegates to monitor the debates. Mr. Keenan concluded that it is reasonable to expect that

trade facilitation will be part of the WTO next round of trade negotiations. He encouraged each PRO Committee to maintain contact with those responsible for WTO in their capitals, as well as their countries' missions to WTO in Geneva. The PRO Committees should become the national reference point for trade facilitation questions.

28. Reviewing the SECIPRO Work Programme under agenda item 9, Mr. Keenan asked whether the project to harmonise the use of the EU Single Administrative Document (SAD) was proving to be too ambitious for the national PRO Committees. The consensus of the meeting was that the ROMPRO initiative was important, that most of the national committees had submitted the requested information, and that they wanted to continue with the project. A couple of PRO Committees said that while they had submitted the completed questionnaires to ROMPRO, they did not yet see their countries information in the summary analysis.
29. Mr. Gueorgui Tchernev, BULPRO, reported that progress continued to be made in the development of a Trader's Handbook. In Bulgaria they planned to complete this work by January 2000. A new concept being incorporated into the Handbook is to have the responsible authorities for different border crossing operations sign-off on the publication, which will be distributed to lorry drivers. If border crossing personnel should require additional documentation or fees, the drivers should be able to refer to Handbook. The initial results will be reported to the next meeting.
30. Mr. Christian Boser, AUSTRIAPRO, expressed the interest of his PRO Committee and other EUROPRO members in establishing more formal cooperation with SECIPRO, with particular reference to joint research projects that might be sponsored by the European Commissions Fifth Framework Programme. No specific proposals were tabled, but the meeting recalled an earlier initiative by HELLASPRO and BULPRO to cooperate with AUSTRIAPRO in a research project to monitor border-crossing delays via a geographic information system. The proposal for this project missed the submission deadline, but the basic concept might be reconsidered.
31. Mr. Ekrem Gacic, BiHPRO, requested assistance from other PRO Committees in obtaining examples of statutes developed for their own organizations. Examples of national work programmes or objectives would also be appreciated.
32. Ms. Nuri referred to the proposal made by MAKPRO at the SECIPRO meeting held in Skopje last year that action should be taken to facilitate visa procedures for small and medium-sized businesses. The situation in the region can be expected to become more difficult, as countries that previous did not require visas from their neighbours will be obliged to do so as a consequence of EU expansion and the Schengen Agreement. The participants recalled that the MoU on Facilitating International Road Transport includes a specific article calling upon countries to simplify visa requirements. Thus it should be possible to address the visa issue as part of the overall monitoring of the MoU's implementation, as noted in paragraph 10 above. In order to ensure that the visa question is given priority, a special effort will be made to complete the matrix that was agreed at the Fourth SECIPRO Meeting, held in Vienna last May.

33. Item 10 of the agenda concerned the SECIPRO website. Today information on SECIPRO and its activities is available at www.unece.org/secipro/. The shortcoming is that this information is only maintained by the UN/ECE Regional Advisor. As there is unanimous agreement on the usefulness of the Internet and World Wide Web for communication and promotion, each PRO Committee should identify someone locally who can take responsibility for developing pages concerning their national activities. The name of this person should be communicated to Ms. Budway by the end of January 2000. If a local server is not available, alternative arrangements can be made in another country.
34. As a first step towards increasing awareness of SECIPRO and its activities, the meeting agreed to submit the report from this Fifth Meeting to the annual plenary of UN/CEFACT, the UN's trade facilitation body, as an information document.

Next meeting

35. The next SECIPRO meeting is scheduled for the morning of 23 March 2000 in Venice, Italy.
36. There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 15:00.

ANNEX I

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ANNEX II

SECIPRO

Southeast European National Committees for the Facilitation of
Procedures and Practices in Administration, Commerce and Transport

Fifth Meeting

13 December 1999, 9:30 – 16:00

Venue: Hyatt Regency Hotel
Budapest, Hungary

AGENDA

1. Adoption of the agenda
2. Report of the Fourth Meeting of SECIPRO held on 27 May 1999.
3. Summary of the “informal” SECIPRO meeting held in Bled, 20 October 1999.
4. Follow-up to “trilateral meeting” held in Thessaloniki, 21 September 1999.
5. Election of SECIPRO Chairman and Vice-chair for 2000.
6. SECI Business Resource Centres and their relation to SECIPRO.
Overview of the rationale for these three centres (Istanbul, Thessaloniki and Trieste) by Ms. Budway and plans for the Thessaloniki centre by HELLASPRO.
7. World Bank’s Trade and Transport Facilitation in Southeast Europe (TTFSE) Program
Perspectives from a PRO Committee about this program by MAKPRO.
8. WTO and Trade Facilitation
Report from the WTO Ministerial meeting in Seattle by UN/ECE.
9. SECIPRO Work Programme
Status review of existing activities (SAD harmonisation, Traders Handbook) and consideration of a more formal approach to joint activities.
Should SECIPRO begin to address “electronic commerce”?
Submitting a paper on SECI trade facilitation issues to UN/CEFACT.
10. SECIPRO Website
Discussion of content and decentralization of responsibilities
11. Other business

ANNEX III

SECIPROSoutheast European National Committees for the Facilitation of
Procedures and Practices in Administration, Commerce and Transport**Trilateral Meeting****BULPRO – HELLASPRO - MAKPRO**

21 September 1999, 11:00 – 14:30

Thessaloniki, Greece

Conclusions

1. The most important road transport border crossings among these three countries are the following:
 - Bulgaria: Kulata to Promahon (GR) and Gyushevo to Deve Bair (MK)
 - Greece: Eyzonoi to Bogorodica (MK) and Promahon to Kulata (BG)
 - Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Deve Bair to Gyushevo (BG) and Bogorodica to Eyzonoi (GR)
2. Three major points, among the various issues discussed, have been identified by all participants:
 - The harmonization of the shifts in all three (3) cross-border points, i.e. 8hr shifts changing at 7:00am-15:00pm-10:00pm.
 - The re-design of the controlling process in all three points. It has been observed a major difference in the sequence of the controlling processes between the three countries that creates a long delay and bottlenecks.
 - Specifically for the Promahon(GR)-Kulata(BG) cross-border the construction of adequate infrastructure(bridge) which will minimize delays. According to experts the bridge construction will solve partially the delay problem up to 15-20%. They emphasize that these should be considered into conjunction with further improvement of the controlling processes.
3. HELLASPRO and MAKPRO will organize the same data for their border crossing listed above in paragraph 1 according to the matrix prepared by BULPRO, included as Annex 2 to this report. In addition, the three PRO Committees will prepare a chart illustrating the sequencing of the border crossing services.
4. The most problematic border crossing is Kulata (BG) – Promahon (GR). BULPRO and HELLASPRO will organize a meeting within the next few weeks, bringing together the responsible directors of the several border services to discuss the nature of the difficulties. This meeting will also review the status of the proposed new bridge to be constructed and the implications for other physical infrastructure (e.g. the location of disinfection pits, etc.). A protocol of *proposed* corrective actions will be prepared at this meeting by BULPRO and HELLASPRO.

It is also proposed to have a similar meeting between HELLASPRO and MAKPRO at Eyzonoi-Bogorodica to review and prepare a similar protocol of proposed corrective actions.

5. All relevant information produced by these meetings will be forwarded to respective national governmental organizations of the participating countries, for further action.
6. The meeting identified major differences in shift change procedures between Greece (8hr shifts changing at 7:00am-15:00pm-3:00am) and Bulgaria (12hr shifts 8:00am-20:00pm). Minor differences exist also between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In the Bulgarian customs' there is a delay of 15-30 minutes at each shift change. BULPRO agreed that it should be possible to adopt the procedure followed in the other two countries, thus eliminating the shift change delay.
7. Greek Customs changes its shift at 7:00am, while Bulgarian Customs changes at 8:00am. BULPRO agreed to work to adjust the schedule of shift changes to be in line with the Greek practice in order to further minimize the risk of disruption. Consideration will also be given in Bulgaria to the possibility of changing from the current two shifts of 12 hours to three shifts of eight, in line with Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.
8. For each of the three border crossing points listed above in paragraph 1, the respective PRO Committees will organize joint visits to these sites to verify whether problems reported by traders and transporters appear to be isolated events or chronic situations. Joint reports from these visits will be prepared for review by the respective national PRO Committees.

Summary

9. The meeting was opened by Mr. Nikos Efthymiadis, co-President of HELLASPRO and past President of the Association of Industries of Northern Greece, who welcomed the participants to Thessaloniki. A list of participants at the trilateral meeting is attached.
10. Mr Efthymiadis explained that the World Bank team working on the SECI loan application had recommended the PRO Committees might be able to contribute to improved border crossing operations by looking into to synchronisation of services offered on both sides of the border between two countries. This "trilateral" meeting was being held in order to permit a more detailed discussion among the participants than would be possible at a regular SECIPRO meeting.
11. Mr. Keenan, UN/ECE, chaired the meeting on behalf of Dr. Erhard Busek, SECI Coordinator and Chairman on SECIPRO. Mr. Keenan proposed that the meeting's agenda should be to 1) agree on the most important mutual border crossings among the three countries; 2) discuss the available data to determine what requires clarification, and 3) to recommend any corrective actions.
12. The most important border crossings are listed above in paragraph 1. of the Conclusions.
13. The group noted that when there was a shift change at the Bulgarian borders, it was necessary to close the border for 45-60 minutes to enable a transfer of responsibilities and paperwork from one shift to the next. On the Greece and Macedonian sides, however, a shift change did not require closing the border. After some discussion of the procedural differences, Mr. Angel Parvulov, Vice Chairman of BULPRO and Deputy Director General of Bulgarian Customs expressed his belief that it should be possible to adapt the Bulgarian procedures to those in effect in Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, thus eliminating this source of border delays.
14. A further agreement towards harmonisation would be to modify the schedules of the Bulgarian border shifts from two 12hr shifts, changing at 8am and 8pm to three shifts changing at the same time as the other two countries.
15. When reviewing problems at border crossings it is often difficult to reach consensus because different participants make contradictory claims concerning what problems exist or where the responsibility lies. In an effort to move beyond discussions that end in a stalemate, the participants agreed that unannounced joint visits to border crossings could be carried out periodically by members of the PRO Committees. The observations made by the joint team would be submitted to their respective PRO Committee members for comment and recommendations.

16. The participants compared the sequencing of controls at the border to determine whether the existing arrangements were the most efficient. Developing a simple diagram to illustrate how different controls are applied at the border can help such an analysis. Subsequent to this meeting HELLASPRO developed a diagram illustrating the control flow at Promahonas.
17. The importance of introducing a common weight certificate was emphasized, as foreseen by the SECI Memorandum of Understanding on the Facilitation of International Road Transport. BULPRO pointed out that if a vehicle crossing into a neighbouring is found to weigh 300kg more than what was measured in Bulgaria, this can result in an additional charge of DEM2'000 – 2'500. This creates too strong an incentive to “adjust” the scales to yield additional revenue.
18. Mr. Bourogiannopoulos, Director of the 2nd Regional Directorate of Customs, observed that the SECIPRO proposal to harmonise the use of the Single Administrative Document (SAD) will not help much if drivers show up at the borders with incomplete or incorrect TIR or ATA carnets.

The meeting closed with a general consensus that the discussions had been constructive and that the PRO Committees would follow-up on the corrective actions to be taken.

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September 21st 1999

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