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Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT)

Eighth session, 27-30 May 2002

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

**THE POSITION OF THE BELGIAN DELEGATION
AT THE UN/CEFACT PLENARY SESSION**

Submitted by the Delegation of Belgium

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The present report is submitted to the Centre for discussion and noting.

Subject: Reorganization of work

The Delegation of Belgium wishes the item on the reorganization of UN/CEFACT to be taken first, immediately after the adoption of the agenda, as it is a crucial question which has been under discussion since the March 2001 plenary session.

We are all aware from our advisers' input that it is a subject which has mobilized our experts for many months.

We will express our views in detail at the meeting, but the thrust of our argument is clear and simple: let us avoid changing structures if there is no fundamental reason to do so. In other words, those who wish the structure to be changed should state so at the plenary session.

Why does UN/CEFACT's structure need to be changed again so substantially? We, in the Delegation of Belgium, think that all the mechanisms for consultation of public sector administrations and private sector businesses, in other words, the users, are in place in the existing structure. We knew exactly what we were doing at the time of the empowerment of the EWG, and I would point out, if I may, that it was one of the conditions of the 1997 re-engineering. Barely five years later, we are going back to square one and proposing a new structure. In addition, numerous changes to the organization of the work have been made in the meantime.

Having scrutinized very thoroughly the plan for the reorganization of UN/CEFACT produced by the UN/CEFACT Steering Group (CSG), the Delegation of Belgium remains convinced that there is no need for any fundamental changes to be made to the present UN/CEFACT's structure and that what is required to meet the concerns of the business world is to be found in the existing structure as it stands.

We are convinced that if a change is necessary, it should not be along the lines set out in R 12, which in our opinion increases the complexity of the debate. It would be advisable to tell us at the plenary session what distinction can be drawn between a forum and the EWG, in so far as the latter received its own organisational powers in 1997.

We fully realize that in the new structure the forum would be the overarching body responsible for all the activities developed under UN/CEFACT. In those circumstances, what role remains for the CSG? Who decides when, what and how?

What is the FMT doing in the structure? What are its responsibilities vis-à-vis the UN/CEFACT CSG and the Plenary? What are therefore the UN/CEFACT CSG's responsibilities in relation to the FMT's decisions vis-à-vis the Plenary?

We need to continue to follow the logic which dictates that it is the plenary session which decides on structure and policy. Certain comments lead me to believe that this is not the case. And in the process, we have so far only talked about EDI or electronic business.

It is self-evident that absolutely no account has been taken of trade facilitation as conceived in the WTO's future work. That is the reason why the Belgian delegation endorses the comments made by SWIFT, which opts predominantly for 'TBG' over 'ICG and ATG'. The organizational chart as presented therefore needs to be amended.

We are convinced that there are still many para-tariff barriers to both public and private trade and that UN/CEFACT should be the place where these obstacles are studied. It is absolutely essential that we one day become THE partner in the work on trade facilitation which the WTO is to undertake in a few months' time.

In conclusion, we, in Belgium, think that it is time to go beyond the stage of organizing and reorganizing and finally get down to talking about precise issues and the specific concerns of business circles.

We believe that all the work done as part of the re-engineering started in 1995 has resulted in a stable and flexible structure. If flexibility means that the structure is changed every six months in the light of new concepts, we ought to be able to admit that our reorganization principles have failed. We would therefore argue in favour of retaining the existing structures, delegating to the EWG the task of making its own organizational arrangements – although reporting to the plenary session – to take account of technological developments, as was, moreover, decided at the UN/CEFACT March 2001 plenary session.

This is in short the position of the Delegation of Belgium.
