

Technical cooperation Seminar for the SPECA countries “Trade Facilitation in Times of COVID-19”

**Recommendations and report from the
online seminar on 6-7 July 2020, Dushanbe, Tajikistan**

Recommendations from the seminar

The participants in the seminar

1. Supported the reinforcement of cooperation between the SPECA countries to:
 - reduce barriers to trade and transport in the region, with a focus on the implementation of the Ashgabat Initiative and the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy;
 - facilitate trade in essential goods and perishable goods in the times of the pandemic;
 - harmonize border-crossing procedures and strengthen cooperation of regulatory border agencies in times of the pandemic; notably considering the recommendations of a UNECE study on this subject;
 - promote the implementation of a project on digitalization of transport corridors, using UN standards and other tools, to reduce physical person-to-person interaction of participants in cross-border supply chains;
 - implement in practice such innovative electronic tools as eTIR, eCMR or electronic Dozvolny (permits for vehicles);
 - jointly build political support for such projects on harmonized and standardized digitalization of trade and transport; involving development partners;
 - ensuring that legitimate protective measures aimed at limiting the corona virus infection do not become unjustified barriers to trade.
2. Commended the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy adopted on 21 November 2019 by the 14th session of the SPECA Governing Council in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, as an important document requested by the countries. Support for implementing the Strategy and for trade facilitation reforms in general should be reinforced, considering the challenges imposed by the pandemic. The draft Roadmap for its implementation should be further developed in the new circumstances, notably in the following key areas:
 - define priority trade facilitation measures in the new circumstances;
 - develop the border-crossing capacities of the SPECA countries through the harmonization of border-crossing procedures across the region;
 - establish a regional information resource on trade facilitation (web-site), which will be locally-based and locally-maintained in the subregion; discussing the key issues related to such an information resource at the next SPECA meetings.
3. Supported suggestions to reinforce the public-private dialogue and partnership to achieve trade facilitation in the region to:
 - ensure participation of the business community in establishing the administrative procedures of introducing protective trade measures during the pandemic;
 - ensure rapid exchange of up-to-date information on the situation at border crossings, Customs procedures and changes in legislation;
 - assist each other in addressing emerging issues within the territories of the countries;

- strengthen the functioning of NTFCs as purely national bodies, supporting the national interests in trade facilitation:
 - organize meetings of NTFCs in response to challenges caused by the pandemic;
 - define their functions as bodies helping policy coordination among regulatory agencies and the business community and as facilitators of implementing international trade facilitation standards in the times of pandemic;
 - coordinate the regional cooperation between the NTFCs as the most efficient means of consultative cooperation on finding solutions to the pandemic.
 - invite countries where an NTFC has not yet been formally established to participate in the cooperative work by designating a relevant state agency;
 - organize a capacity-building seminar for the NTFCs of the SPECA countries on the use of international (UN/CEFACT) recommendations and standards.
4. Noted that in the times of the pandemic a high priority should be given to streamlining documentary formalities, in particular:
- diminishing physical interventions and checks of paper documents;
 - simplifying the procedures to make them both safer and more efficient;
 - to that effect, continue efforts to carry out (a) Business Process Analyses and recommendations for business process re-engineering and simplification; and (b) data harmonization to reduce instances of repeated, redundant or simply incorrect requirements for data and documents, reducing the number of submissions of the same documents and data, using UN/CEFACT recommendations and standards;
 - intensify the implementation of signed multilateral agreements and conventions with a view to harmonize trade and transport procedures.
5. Invited the countries to plan further activities to reinforce trade facilitation in the region:
- explore possibilities to organize a subregional information resource (web site), which would be owned and operated by the countries and the business community in the subregion. International organizations, such as UNECE, ITC, and development partners may only help in the beginning;
 - organize a seminar (webinar) ideally in Baku on data sharing, port community systems and digital corridors in the ports of the Caspian Sea and the GUAM corridor, in the autumn of 2020;
 - continue organizing the biannual UNECE-OSCE Border Management College seminars once the restrictions are lifted.

Report

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Partnership on Transport and Logistics in Central Asia co-organized this seminar working with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the OSCE Border Management Staff College and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). This seminar was organized with support from UNECE's E293 project on trade facilitation in the SPECA region as well as from the project of the 11th tranche of the UN Development Account on trade facilitation in the countries with economies in transition.

The seminar took place simultaneously in two languages using the Cisco WebEx Meetings software. During the two days a total of 116 participants (of whom 36 women) joined the seminar in either language and followed its discussions. The SPECA countries (Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) were the target of the seminar. Most participants from both the public and the private sectors were from this region. International organizations and development partners, such as the World Bank Group, the International Trade Centre (ITC), the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), World Food Programme, OSCE, GIZ and DAI Global LLC took part in the seminar.

The concept of this seminar built on years of promotion and support for trade facilitation in the SPECA region, the results of UNECE supported studies on the readiness of the SPECA countries to implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and recent work on reducing the impact of COVID-19 on supply chains in the region. It aimed to enhance the capacities of national stakeholders, especially for streamlining border-crossing procedures and further digitization of trade and transport related data flows. Discussions took place on streamlining documentary procedures, using international trade facilitation standards, developing further the enabling environment for Single Window mechanisms and other advanced trade facilitation tools. Speakers and participants recognized that electronic data exchange in trade and transport, which is harmonized and aligned to international (UN/CEFACT) standards has become even more important under the COVID-19 emergency, because of the need to decrease physical person-to-person interaction in supply chains.

The participants had an opportunity to exchange best practice experiences in addressing the challenges for business and supply chains due to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 crisis. They expressed interest in joining the UNECE project (as part of a UN Development Account project on the immediate reaction to the effects of COVID-19 on international trade and transport) on the digitalization of transport, logistics, agricultural and other documents and accompanying procedures, following UN/CEFACT standards, as a means to reduce person-to-person contacts in cross-border operations thus ensuring higher level of protection of society and supply chains against the adverse economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the opening session, Ms. Elizabeth Tuerk, Director of the UNECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, noted that the COVID-19 crisis hit hard the world economy, especially the developing countries and SMEs. Yet it also created a window of opportunity to harmonize standards, facilitate electronic exchange of information and support contactless data exchange in international trade. Mr. Abdurakhmon Abdurakhmonzoda, Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Trade of Tajikistan and Chair of the SPECA Working Group on Trade, presented the priorities of the SPECA countries. He stressed the need to implement the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy. In particular, he noted that the Roadmap for the implementation of the TF Strategy should be updated in the new situation and then rolled-out. He expressed interest in participating in a UNECE-led project on digitalization of documents and electronic data exchange using the UN/CEFACT standards. He noted the need to foster regional dialogue of the NTFCs and regional cooperation on trade facilitation in general by organizing trade facilitation capacity building events.

Response to the economic consequences of COVID-19 (notably, NTFCs in the response). Several participants stressed that the NTFCs are not sufficiently active in coordinating their countries' response to the challenges of COVID-19 to trade facilitation. Ms. Asel Uzagalieva, Component Manager of the GIZ Programme "Trade Facilitation in Central Asia", outlined the importance of public-private consultations to solve issues resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, notably with regard to ensuring food safety. She

suggested that GIZ and UNECE co-sponsor a joint event of the NTFCs in the region. noted the key role of ensuring food safety during the crisis. Mr. Aidar Samykbayev, Chief of Secretariat of the Trade Facilitation Council of Kyrgyzstan, spoke about the protective measures undertaken by the Government of Kyrgyzstan. The Trade Facilitation Council of Kyrgyzstan is active in developing a national response policy to the COVID-19 crisis. He outlined the importance of public-private dialogue in this process to ensure mitigation of the adverse economic effects of those protective measures.

Streamlining formalities and use of international standards

Ms. Larisa Kislyakova, Chairperson of the Partnership on Transport and Logistics in Central Asia, reported on disruptions to border-crossing procedures caused by the protective measures imposed by the SPECA countries against spreading the COVID-19 virus. Insufficient information on those measures and lack of infrastructure complicated the border crossing procedures and doubled the length of waiting times, in some cases increasing it even tripled. She recommended that the countries implement the recommendation of the SPECA Economic Forum and Governing Council session from November 2019 to review, simplify and harmonize border-crossing procedures in the region.

Mr. Mario Apostolov noted that countries may follow two approaches for streamlining documentary formalities: business process analysis and re-engineering; and data harmonization. He presented tools and recommendations supported by UNECE to assist countries in streamlining documentary formalities: a Business Process Analysis guide and Recommendation 34 on data harmonization. Mr. Aziz Ibrokhim, head of WTO Department in the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of Tajikistan and Ms. Nozigul Khushvakhtova, trade and transport expert from Tajikistan, spoke about the measures to simplify documentary formalities in Tajikistan and in the SPECA countries. Ms. Khushvakhtova noted a concern that trade facilitation projects are often considered as activities imposed from outside, notably as such projects and activities focus on implementing the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). Countries should move away from such an approach and focus on their national development needs.

Ms. Dinara Dairabayeva, National Coordinator of the GIZ Regional Programme “Trade Facilitation in Central Asia” for Kazakhstan, reported on the findings of a study on the use of international trade facilitation standards in Kazakhstan conducted within the GIZ project, on the implementation of art. 10.3 of the WTO TFA. UN/CEFACT standards were the main scope of that research and the study contains a set of practical recommendations for Kazakhstan. The participants requested UNECE to consider organizing a capacity-building seminar for the NTFCs of the SPECA countries dedicated to the use of UN/CEFACT recommendations and standards.

Ms. Yelena Vasilevskaya noted the need to establish a web-based online resource providing up-to-date official information on the situation at border crossing points in the SPECA region. Ms. Larisa Kislyakova expressed readiness to provide comprehensive assistance in this project, while Mr. Mario Apostolov outlined the need to ensure sustainability of such a locally owned platform by involving key national stakeholders and their active participation in the development and maintenance of the platform.

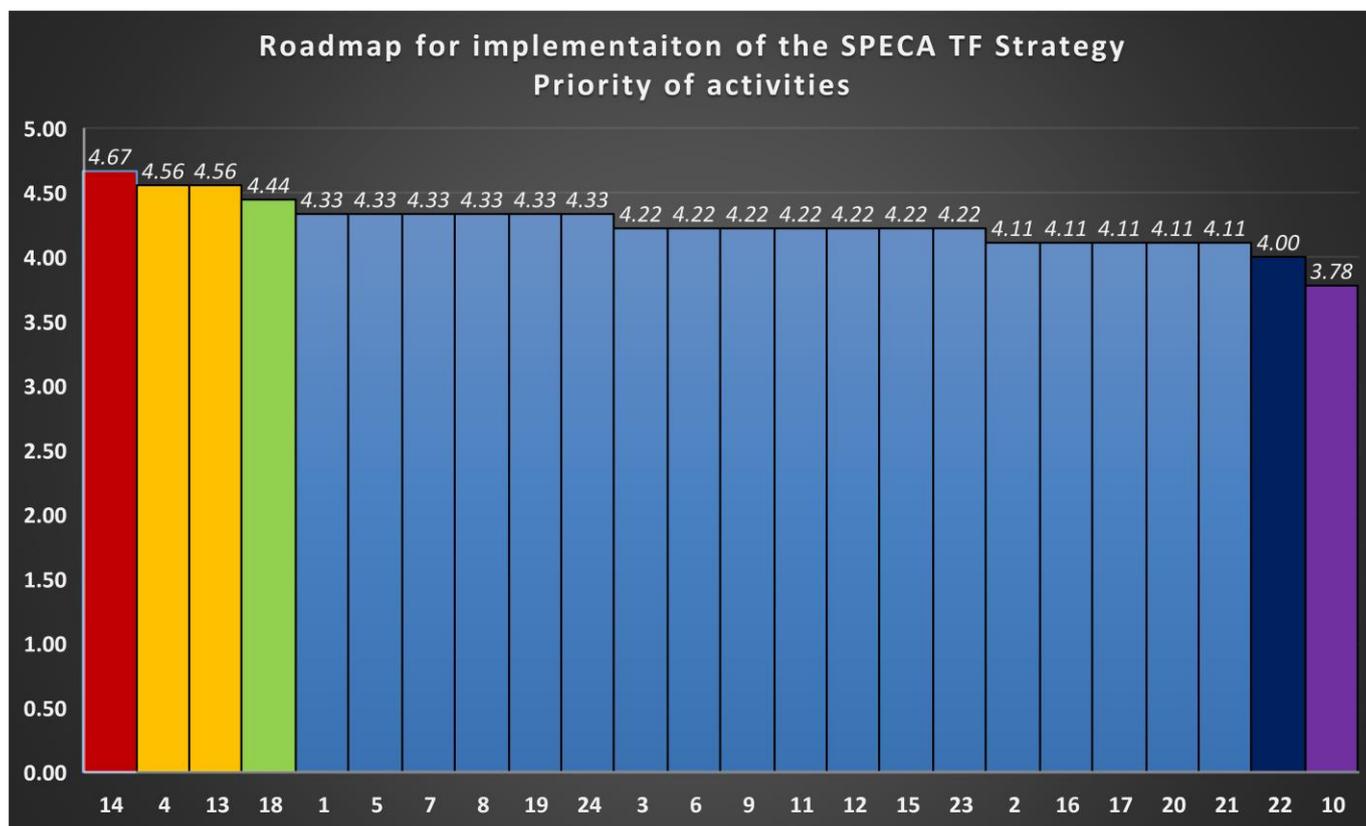
Implementation of Single Window and digitalization of trade and transport information flows in the age of COVID19.

Mr. Yves Jobin, an international expert on Single Window mechanisms, briefly outlined current trends in the use of Single Window and digitalization in the age of COVID-19. He noted that some policymakers see digitalization as a temporary solution to fulfil temporary objectives, possibly with a view to return to using paper documents when the crisis is over. He noted that the crisis opens a window of opportunity for harmonizing the digitalization of trade information flows and that this opportunity should be seized to harmonize international electronic data exchange standards. He also reported on a project done with OSCE on “green ports” and data exchange in the Caspian region. The following discussion revealed a need for another meeting on international standards and data exchange in the Caspian region and in the development of digital transport corridors.

Mr. Ihar Kuzminich, Chief of Training & Education of OSCE Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe, noted the excellent record of cooperation between UNECE and the OSCE Border Management

Staff College in Dushanbe and noted that further joint events will be organized once the restrictions to travel are lifted.

As part of the preparation for the seminar, UNECE carried out an online survey on what measures and activities in the draft Roadmap would be a priority in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were invited to define the level of priority of the twenty-four planned activities in the Roadmap.¹ The results indicated that in the age of COVID-19, trade facilitation stakeholders put highest priority to such measures that affect cooperation of border agencies, border crossing procedures and implementation of international standards. This information will be used when revising the Roadmap for the implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy for the next session of the SPECA Working Group on Trade scheduled for 17 November 2020. See the results of the survey in the chart below.



As we will continue with this survey, experts and policymakers in the subregion and in international organizations and development partners working on the issue are invited **to participate in the Survey on the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy (available in English and Russian both) by either following the hyperlink below or by scanning the QR code below.**



¹ [Draft Roadmap for implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy](#)

Agenda

6 July 2020

Beginning: **Baku 12:00 / Kabul 12:30 / Ashgabat, Dushanbe, Tashkent 13:00 / Bishkek, Nur-Sultan 14:00**

10:00 – 10:45 CET	<p><u>Welcome, opening, and presentation of the agenda of the seminar</u></p> <p>Welcome: Representative of the Government of Tajikistan</p> <p>Ms. Elisabeth Tuerk, Director, UNECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division</p> <p>Ms. Larisa Kislyakova, Chairperson, Partnership on Transport and Logistics in Central Asia</p> <p>Mr. Abdurakhmon Abdurakhmonzoda, Deputy Minister, Economic Development and Trade, Tajikistan</p> <p>Ms. Asel Uzagalieva, “Trade Facilitation in Central Asia” Programme Component Manager, GIZ</p> <p>Mr. Ihar Kuzminich, Chief of Training & Education of OSCE Border Management Staff College</p> <p>Mr. Mario Apostolov, Regional Adviser, UNECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division</p>
10:45 – 11:55 CET	<p><u>Session I: Influence of COVID-19 on facilitation of border crossing procedures</u></p> <p><i>Moderator: Ms. Larisa Kislyakova, Chair, Partnership on Transport and Logistics in Central Asia</i></p> <p>How COVID-19 influences the border crossing procedures in Central Asia: analytical overview</p> <p>Ms. Larisa Kislyakova, Chairperson, Partnership on Transport and Logistics in Central Asia</p> <p>Trade facilitation in times of pandemic: implementing a regional SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy. NTFCs, streamlining formalities, international standards and the Single Window</p> <p>Mr. Mario Apostolov, Regional Adviser, UNECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division</p> <p>Implementing eCMR to support the flow of goods in the times of COVID-19</p> <p>Ms. Rebecca Huang, Economic Affairs Officer, UNECE Sustainable Transport Division</p> <p><i>Discussion</i></p>
11:55 – 12:00 CET	<p><i>brief coffee break</i></p>
12:00 – 13:00 CET	<p><u>Session II: The role of National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs) in mitigating adverse economic effects of COVID-19</u></p> <p><i>Moderator: Mr. Mario Apostolov, Regional Adviser, UNECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division</i></p> <p>The role of NTFCs in the national responses to the COVID-19</p> <p>Mr. Aidar Samykbayev, Ministry of Economy of Kyrgyzstan, Chief of Secretariat of the Trade Facilitation Council of Kyrgyzstan (NTFC)</p> <p>Public-Private Partnerships and NTFCs in mitigating the adverse economic effects of COVID-19 in the region</p> <p>Ms. Larisa Kislyakova, Chairperson, Partnership on Transport and Logistics in Central Asia</p> <p>The function of NTFCs as multi-agency forums to discussion and search for solutions in the COVID-19 situation from a regional perspective</p> <p>Mr. Mario Apostolov, Regional Adviser, UNECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division</p> <p>The impact of COVID-19 on the need for cooperation of NTFCs for food security in the region</p> <p>Effects of COVID-19 on trade and transport formalities in the region</p> <p>Ms. Asel Uzagalieva, “Trade Facilitation in Central Asia” Programme Component Manager, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH</p> <p><i>Discussion</i></p>

7 July 2020

Beginning: Baku 12:00 / Kabul 12:30 / Ashgabat, Dushanbe, Tashkent 13:00 / Bishkek, Nur-Sultan 14:00

10:00 – 11:15 CET	<p><u>Session III: Streamlining documentary formalities and the use of trade facilitation standards</u> <i>Moderator: Ms. Larisa Kislyakova, Chairperson, Partnership on Transport and Logistics in Central Asia</i></p> <p>Streamlining documentary requirements and international TF standards Mr. Mario Apostolov, Regional Adviser, UNECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division</p> <p>Results of a study on the use of international trade facilitation standards in Kazakhstan Ms. Dinara Dairabayeva, GIZ, Kazakhstan</p> <p>Simplification of document exchange in Tajikistan; regional cooperation in trade facilitation Mr. Aziz Ibrokhim, Head of WTO Department, Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, Tajikistan</p> <p>Simplification of document exchange in the SPECA region; regional cooperation in trade facilitation Ms. Nozigul Khushvakhtova, expert, Tajikistan Representatives from the region / the NTFCs</p> <p><i>Discussion</i></p>
11:15 – 11:20 CET	<p><i>brief coffee break</i></p>
11:20 – 12:30 CET	<p><u>Session IV: Digitization of data sharing in the SPECA countries – Single Window, Digital Corridors, Single Submission Portals, etc.</u></p> <p>Digitization of trade and transport data flows using UNECE instruments – impact on Single Window, digital corridors and related projects Mr. Mario Apostolov, Regional Adviser, UNECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division</p> <p>Practical approach to Single Window and data sharing Mr. Yves Jobin, UNECE Consultant</p> <p>Developing electronic transport permits in the region Mr. Talgat Mombayev, Director of Development, and Mr. Andrey Ershov, President, Regional Development and Management Research Center</p> <p><i>Discussion</i></p>
12:30 – 13:00 CET	<p><u>Conclusions and recommendations; drafting the roadmap for implement the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy</u></p>

For more information, please contact:

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**The Seminar is conducted under the aegis of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.
We provide interpretation into the UNECE working languages: Russian and English**

Для получения более подробной информации обращайтесь к:

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