



Conclusions and Recommendations

from the Third Technical Cooperation Workshop for the Western Balkans *Single Window and Data Sharing in the Western Balkans* online, 27-28 October 2020, 14:00 –17:00 CET

Participants from the region and international organizations assisting them in the implementation of trade facilitation met on 27-28 October 2020 for a third regional workshop on the Single Window and data sharing. The Customs Administration of North Macedonia and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) collaborated to fulfil the recommendation of the second workshop (Skopje, 4-5 September 2019) to “organize a follow-up meeting (physical or virtual) in 2020 to review progress” in building Single Window systems and data sharing, using international standards. They collaborated with the World Bank, CEFTA Secretariat, DG TAXUD, UNCTAD, USAID, and other partners to achieve this.

The workshop took place online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It reiterated the will of stakeholders in the region to implement national Single Window systems and data sharing and to deepen cooperation to achieve these goals. The participants reviewed progress in implementing the recommendations of the two previous workshops in 2018 and 2019 to strengthen the efforts to: prepare for national Single Window projects; implement international standards and data modelling; integrate data flows with the European Union; reinforce the international network of experts in support of these projects (involving country experts, UNECE, UN/CEFACT, DG TAXUD, the World Bank, CEFTA, UNCTAD/ASYCUDA, USAID and others); enable the use of UN/CEFACT Reference Data Models and semantic standards, the EU Customs Data Model, the EU CSW-CERTEX¹ and TRACES NT platforms; roll out a fully automated electronic Customs declaration process; involve all relevant regulatory agencies in Single Window projects; carry out business process analyses; updating existing systems (e.g. EXIM in North Macedonia) to align them to the EU CDM and relevant UN/CEFACT standards²; organize practical training events to raise the capacity of technical experts in the Western Balkans and Moldova (notably on the EU CDM, TRACES NT, the EU CSW-CERTEX, and UN/CEFACT standards and Reference Data Models). The participants outlined the necessary next steps to foster the use of international standards for trade facilitation and the digitalization of information flows.

The workshop supported the drive of the CEFTA Parties to European integration and the idea of convergence of standards for digital exchange of information to deal with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on trade, transport and connectivity. It provided input to the World Bank’s project on Customs modernization and Single Window implementation in the Western Balkans; and created a link to the ongoing work of the European Commission, the CEFTA Secretariat and UN/CEFACT to create an enabling environment for interagency and cross-sectoral exchange of information. It created a bridge between ongoing projects and the work on standards and brought together experts from the two domains. It also drew a link to the ongoing work on establishing standards for multimodal and intersectoral data and document exchange for Single Window and digital multimodal corridor projects. The participants discussed and supported the further development and implementation of the CEFTA SEED+ and similar instruments with the objective of stronger implementation of international standards for data exchange.

¹EC DG TAXUD(EU CSW-CERTEX) Guide for the integration of electronic certificates and licenses in national Single Windows.

²These UN/CEFACT standards can be found at www.unece.org/unecefact/mainstandards.html

On this basis, the participants in the seminar made the following recommendations for stakeholders in the region to:

1. Redouble their effort to create an enabling legal and data exchange environment for their national Single Window and related projects. In this sense they should:
 - a. establish strong political leadership and governance models for both national Single Window development and implementation phases that recognize the “whole of government” nature of the national Single Window;
 - b. follow the developments and use in their Single Window legislation and blueprints the approach defined in the EU Single Window Environment for Customs legislation³, which would become part of the *acquis communautaire* once the EU co-legislation procedure is completed; this means that it will be required for implementation by the EU candidate countries, and it will become a guiding direction for the other parties. Existing national legislation should be assessed and adapted;
 - c. use UN/CEFACT Recommendations 33-37 on the Single Window concept, implementation planning, data harmonization, legal aspects, interoperability with other systems, and the single submission portal concept, as guidance as well;
 - d. enhance the ability to use the EU Customs Data Model as the basis for Customs-focused data exchange and the UN/CEFACT semantic standards (e.g. the Core Components Library UN/CCL) and Reference Data Models for the development of certificates and permits of other agencies and for the collection of information from business transactions.
2. Aim at the convergence of the use of different standards and data models in the implementation of national Single Window projects, in order to obtain the best possible quality of collected data.
3. Reinforce the collaboration between Western Balkan experts, UN/CEFACT, UNECE, World Bank, EC DG TAXUD, CEFTA, UNCTAD/ASYCUDA, USAID, KGH, and other experts.
4. Maintain coordination among related national and regional projects and avoid duplication of efforts.
5. Build synergies with the Berlin Process for the Western Balkans and its new Action Plan (2021 – 2023), notably in the area of standardization and mutual recognition of electronic certificates, licenses, and other documents.
6. Explore the possibility to use existing standards and research, such as:
 - a. the package of standards for multimodal transport and cross-sectoral digital corridors: explore possibilities for pilot projects, for example on the implementation of the cross-industry invoice for government procurement;
 - b. the results of UNECE’s data mapping exercise from 2008 project on Single Window and data harmonization.
7. Invite the four ASYCUDA user countries in the region to implement the UN/CEFACT standards for electronic document equivalents, notably for agricultural certificates and transport and logistics documents accompanying goods as pilot implementation projects.
8. Develop standard model for document equivalents as a precursor to a common data set/data model.
9. Call on all CEFTA Parties to work on a common understanding and adoption of joint decision/declaration to establish common data set(s) to be used in the future Mutual Recognition Programs (such as, AEO, certificates, documents) that shall be part of the new MAP for the Common Regional Market.
10. Strengthen the work on developing and implementing SEED+ and other relevant tools, taking into account the UN/CEFACT and other international standards in the framework of further cooperation and integration with the rest of Europe.
11. Maintain the momentum of interagency and regional cooperation, organize follow-up activities and, notably, the next meeting (physical or virtual) of this initiative in 2021 to review progress.

³For more information on the legal proposal and its annex see: https://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/general-information-customs/electronic-customs/eu-single-window-environment-for-customs_en