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**Inter-regional Expert Group Meeting  
of the United Nations Development Accounts Project 1213AA -  
Strengthening the capacities of developing countries  
and countries with economies in transition  
to facilitate legitimate border crossing,  
regional cooperation and integration**

**First session**

Geneva, 8 December 2014

**Report of Inter-regional Expert Group of the United  
Nations Development Accounts Project 1213AA on its  
first session**

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## **I. Attendance**

1. The Inter-regional Expert Group of the United Nations Development Accounts (UNDA) project 1213AA - “*Strengthening the capacities of developing countries and countries with economies in transition to facilitate legitimate border crossing, regional cooperation and integration*”, further referred to as the “Expert Group”, held its first session on 8 December 2014 in Geneva (Switzerland).
2. The session was attended by experts (consultants and representatives of customs administrations) from Argentina, Croatia, Costa Rica, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Tunisia and Turkey. Officials from the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the International Road Transport Union (IRU) also attended the session.
3. The ECLAC representative, and experts from Latin America, expressed gratitude for the provision of interpretation into Spanish that was arranged at their request using the project budget for this purpose.

## **II. Welcome address**

4. Ms. Eva Molnar, director of the UNECE Transport Division, welcomed the participants to the first session of the Expert Group. She stressed the importance that UNECE attaches to this project and recalled the importance of the transport sector for economic integration. She pointed at the numerous conventions managed under the auspices of the UNECE Transport Division and recalled that most of these instruments are global in nature and are also relevant for countries outside the UNECE region.
5. After having stressed that crossing borders has always been a challenge in international transport and trade, she mentioned that electronic customs systems facilitate efficient risk assessment prior to the arrival of goods to the extent they incorporate timely and reliable data. Despite the fact that supply chains are largely computerized, customs still largely rely on paper documents, like the TIR Carnet, to obtain the necessary information to assess risks. In short, insufficient customs-to-customs (C2C) data exchange, together with the incomplete adoption of international standards, compromises the efficiency of risk assessment.
6. While recalling that the project has a very tight schedule, she expressed faith in the positive outcome of this project.

## **III. Election of officers**

7. The Expert Group elected Mr. Nanno Mulder (ECLAC) to chair the session.

## **IV. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)**

*Documentation:* Informal document UNDA1213AA/No. 1 (2014)

8. The Expert Group adopted its provisional agenda as contained in Informal document UNDA1213AA/No. 1 (2014).

## **V. Meeting objectives and overall project status (agenda item 2)**

9. The Expert Group took note of the status of the project and recalled that, in order to provide sufficient time for the final evaluation of the project, all remaining activities should be completed by the end of September 2015.

10. The Expert Group also recalled the objective of the meeting, i.e. select/confirm the pilot countries for the project and recommend options for the second phase of the project, e.g. provision of technical assistance customs authorities to interconnect customs IT systems, possibly through an international or regional exchange platform or development of an action plan setting out the steps required to enable or expand the electronic exchange of transit information.

11. The Expert Group also welcomed a presentation by UNECE on the TIR Convention, the eTIR project and an eTIR pilot project, which shed light on the benefits of a centralized approach for interconnecting custom administrations, by comparison to a bilateral or decentralised approach. The presentations also stressed the importance the use of international standards for data exchange, such as the ones used and developed in the framework of the eTIR project.

## **VI. Example of C2C electronic information exchange (agenda item 3)**

12. The Expert Group welcomed a presentation of a pilot project on C2C electronic information exchange at border crossing points between Georgia and Turkey. It showed not only of the benefits of such exchanges, e.g. reduction of delays and improved risk assessment, but also the prerequisites for the success of such projects. These include high level political support in both countries, an implementation strategy as well as the involvement and motivation of staff.

13. The Expert Group took note that the implementation of these projects often requires several years, in particular for the formulation and ratification of Memorandum of Understanding, Terms of Reference (ToR) or Agreements. However, once data exchange agreements are in place, the Expert Group acknowledged that the expansion of the scope of these agreements can be speedy when both parties agree with the objectives and scope of the data exchange.

## **VII. Regional sub-projects (agenda item 4)**

### **A. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia**

*Documentation:* Informal document UNDA1213AA/No. 3 (2014)

14. The Expert Group considered and discussed Informal document UNDA1213AA/No. 3 (2014), containing the gap-analysis for Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia, as well as the presentation made by the consultant hired by ESCWA. It took note that, in view of the information collected through questionnaires and analysed by the consultants, Tunisia seems a suitable pilot country in the region. Indeed, customs' technological readiness, a legal system allowing the treatment of paper and electronic documents on an equal footing and existing data exchanges with France (for safety and security purposes as well as for the highways of the sea project) ensures that, in the medium term, Tunisia can exchange transit data electronically with interested partner countries and use data transmitted by other countries in its risk assessment procedures.

## **B. Economic Commission for Europe**

*Documentation:* Informal document UNDA1213AA/No. 2 (2014)

15. The Expert Group considered and discussed Informal document UNDA1213AA/No. 2 (2014), containing the gap-analysis for Georgia, as well as the presentation made by the consultant hired by UNECE. It noted that Georgia has started various C2C electronic data exchange projects with neighbouring countries and had developed the technical and legal basis to enable such projects. The gap-analysis highlights minor knowledge gaps that can easily be overcome, inter alia by means of a workshop. The Expert Group also took note of the Turkish readiness to undertake an eTIR pilot project with Georgia.

## **C. Economic Commission for Africa**

*Documentation:* Informal document UNDA1213AA/No. 4 (2014)

16. The Expert Group considered and discussed Informal document UNDA1213AA/No. 4 (2014), containing the gap-analysis for Morocco and Tunisia, as well as the presentation made by the consultant hired by ECA. It took note that, in view of the information collected by means of questionnaires and analysed by the consultants, Morocco seems a suitable pilot country in the region. Indeed, customs' technological readiness, a legal system allowing the treatment of paper and electronic documents on an equal footing and existing exchanges of data with France (for safety and security purposes as well as for the highways of the sea project) ensures that, in the medium term, Morocco will be in a position to exchange transit data electronically with interested partner countries and use data transmitted by other countries in its risk assessment procedures.

## **D. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**

17. The Expert Group considered and discussed the oral presentation made by the consultant hired by ESCAP on some preliminary outcomes of the gap-analysis for Kyrgyzstan. It noted the importance that the TIR procedure plays in the region and potential efficiency improvements that could be achieved at border crossing if electronic information was exchanged about TIR Transport with neighbouring customs administrations, in particular in Kazakhstan. If China would join the TIR Convention, volumes of transit through Kyrgyzstan could increase significantly and make it even more important to improve efficiency of border crossings. The actual level of computerisation and cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and its neighbours does not seem to allow the establishment of an electronic C2C data exchange of TIR data within the timeframe of the project. Nevertheless, a detailed action plan and a dedicated workshop will help Kyrgyz Customs to achieve this in the medium term, possibly by continuing a computerization project aimed at monitoring TIR transports which started in 2007 but was discontinued in 2010.

## **E. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean**

18. The Expert Group considered and discussed the oral presentation made by the consultant hired by ECLAC on some preliminary outcomes of the gap-analysis for Costa-Rica. It noted that Costa Rica, together with other Central American countries, has developed a regional database called TIM. It is hosted under the auspices of the Secretariat of Central American economic integration (SIECA) in Guatemala. However, various legal and technical gaps have been identified, of which some could be filled in the framework of the project. On the legal side, Costa Rica has not ratified the latest version of the Unified Central American Customs Code (CAUCA) which provides a legal basis for a systematic exchange of information. However, a detailed action plan on the necessary improvements required for the Costa Rican customs IT system (TICA) as well as the TIM database

could help Costa Rican customs to electronically exchange C2C data in the field of transit in the medium term.

## **VIII. Recommendations and conclusions (agenda item 5)**

19. The Expert Group concluded that C2C electronic exchange of information is key to improve risk assessment for transit operations. Moreover, it found that internationally standard B2C electronic messages for transit not only facilitate the submission of information by the business community but also the exchange of data among customs administrations.

20. On the basis of available “gap” analyses, which are aimed at assessing the legal and technical needs of candidate countries to enable or extend C2C electronic exchange of transit information, and of the experience of the experts present, the Expert Group selected the following countries as pilot countries for the project: Costa-Rica (ECLAC), Georgia (UNECE), Kyrgyzstan (ESCAP), Morocco (ECA) and Tunisia (ECA).

21. The Expert Group concluded by making recommendation to each RC on how the resources available for technical assistance could be used and what should be the focus of the workshops.

22. In ESCWA, the technical assistance funds could be used to develop an action plan for Tunisia to enable electronic C2C data exchange with neighbouring countries. If Tunisian customs would have the required willingness and an agreement with a partner country before the end of January 2015, funds could be used to assist in the implementation of an actual electronic C2C data exchange for TIR transports. The technical workshop should focus on providing IT and transit experts (in Tunisia and eventually neighbouring countries) with information on, inter alia, the functionalities of the exchange platform, the eTIR project, C2C best practices, the WCO data model and the ASYACUDA-TIR module.

23. In UNECE, the technical assistance funds could be used to provide assistance to Georgian customs to undertake an eTIR pilot project with Turkey. The technical workshop should focus on providing IT and transit experts (in Georgia and eventually neighbouring countries) with information on, inter alia, specific ASYACUDA functionalities, the functionalities of the exchange platform, the eTIR project and the WCO data model.

24. In ECA, the technical assistance funds could be used to develop an action plan for Morocco to enable electronic C2C data exchange with neighbouring countries. If Moroccan customs would have the required willingness and an agreement with a partner country before the end of January 2015, funds could be used to assist in the implementation of an actual electronic C2C data exchange for TIR transports. The technical workshop should focus on providing IT and transit experts (in Morocco and eventually neighbouring countries) with information on, inter alia, the functionalities of the exchange platform, the eTIR project, C2C data exchange best practices and allow to share within the region the results achieved in Morocco.

25. In ESCAP, the technical assistance funds could be used to develop an action plan for Kyrgyzstan to enable electronic C2C data exchange with neighbouring countries (in particular Kazakhstan). The technical workshop should focus on all aspect related to the computerization of the TIR procedure in Kyrgyzstan and neighbouring countries, including the benefits of an exchange platform.

26. In ECLAC, the technical assistance funds could be used to evaluate a possible expansion of the regional database TIM with information on risks related to land transport and to assess human capital availability to step up C2C data exchange and risk assessment. The technical workshop for customs officials from Costa Rica and other Central American countries could focus on (a) best practices to expand and use the regional database TIM with information on risks related to

transit land transport, (b) the WCO data model and its use for national and regional C2C systems, (c) the functionalities of the exchange platform and (d) guarantee management best practices (e.g. TIR).

27. Finally, the Expert Group welcomed the idea that every participant would complete an evaluation form. It also agreed that the same form could be used, pending the relevant adjustments, for future events organised in the framework of the project. The results of the evaluation are presented in the Annex.

## **IX. Next steps (agenda item 6)**

*Documentation:* Informal document UNDA1213AA/No. 7 (2014)

28. The Expert Group reviewed the remaining project activities and their schedule, as proposed in Informal document UNDA1213AA/No. 7 (2014). It underlined that the project is under a very tight schedule and that all RCs should complete activities A1.2, A1.3 and A1.4 by end August to allow for activities A2.1 and A2.2 to take place in September 2015. With this timeframe there will be sufficient time for the final evaluation of the project. The Expert Group confirmed that, due to budget constraints, the second Expert Group meeting (A2.1) and the final seminar (A2.2) will be organized back to back.

29. The Expert Group recalled that, for activity A1.2, UNECE will prepare ToR for the development and deployment of a secure C2C versatile electronic exchange platform and agreed that, when necessary, these ToR should be coordinated with those to be prepared by each RC for activity A1.3. The platform will allow the exchange of standard transit data between customs administrations taking part in the project. It should be designed to function beyond the end of the project and also allow for possible extensions, increases in data flow capacity and the introduction of redundancy to avoid service disruption.

## **X. Informal segment - consultations among Regional Commissions**

30. Representatives of UN Regional Commissions (RCs), as well as most experts, welcomed and took part in the informal segments (without simultaneous interpretation) and made use of these segments to coordinate activities of the various RCs and prepare draft recommendations for the meeting.

## Annex

### Evaluation of the first session of Inter-regional Expert Group on the United Nations Development Accounts Project 1213AA

Participants replied to the following questions indicating if they were very satisfied (5), satisfied (4), neutral (3), unsatisfied (2) or very unsatisfied (1).

Questions	Average score
How satisfied are you... with the organization of the event?	4.8
with the topic of the event?	4.9
with the usefulness/scope of the information presented?	4.4
with the quality of the presentations/speaker?	4.3
with the overall meeting format?	4.5
that you had sufficient time to network and share ideas with your peers?	4.5
with the meetings' overall value in helping you improve your professional capacity?	4.5
with the conclusions and recommendations	4.5
that you and your peers received appropriate recognition and appreciation at the meeting for your contributions?	4.7

The overall level of satisfaction averaged 4.6 and none of the participants reported to be unsatisfied or very unsatisfied for any of the questions.

The following general comments were made:

*I missed the presence of Customs officials of the pilot countries, except for Costa Rica and Georgia. Also, UNECE should have asked the teams to define a proposal for 2015 with an implementation plan month by month until July. For the rest, excellent meeting.*

*No specific recommendation. Many thanks for hard work in only one day. A good practice.*