**Concept**

**Regional meeting of representatives of the SPECA countries’ Customs services**

**on information availability under the Roadmap for Implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy**

Trade facilitation is becoming a key factor in increasing competitiveness and economic growth of individual countries and whole regions. Trade facilitation can foster economic cooperation between countries with diverging trade policy objectives, different levels of economic development or belonging to different economic blocs, thus further integrating those countries between themselves and with the global economy.

The World Trade Organization’s Trade Facilitation Agreement (WTO TFA), which entered into force on 22 February 2017, encouraged a significant acceleration of implementation of trade facilitation measures worldwide.

An essential precondition of establishing transparent and predicable conditions for international trade operations is the availability of information on existing legal framework and regulations. TFA’s art. 1 is dedicated to this requirement.

A key obligation under the TFA is that the WTO Members must publish in « timely manner » a wide range of specialized information related to Customs clearance requirements and procedures for exported and imported goods. This includes information on procedures, forms and documents, Customs tariffs and fees, rules on classification and Customs valuation of goods, rules on origin, limitations and procedures related to transit, sanctions, appeal procedures, trade agreements and rules of management of tariff quotas. WTO Members must publish specific information online, namely: procedures, forms, documents and data on national enquiry points with their respective denominations, and all these must be notified to the WTO. Information related to requirements and procedures for Customs clearance of export, import and transit must be published in a free, non-discriminatory and easy-to-access form.

The importance of publication of trade information is underlined in other international agreements, namely in the revised Kyoto Convention that was also ratified by some SPECA countries.

In the majority of the SPECA countries information on legislation and laws, related to formalities of import and export, procedures and limitations, as well as on Customs tariffs, duties and payments is published on electronic resources (web pages) of Customs authorities.

In general, as practice has demonstrated and results of studies undertaken in the region have confirmed, information resources in the SPECA countries are often incomplete and their contents do not cover the whole range of information that a foreign trade operator would need to obtain to ensure compliance with import, export and transit formalities. Obtaining up-to-date information on languages used in the SPECA countries is a major problem. Another issue complicating the traders’ search for information is the existence of numerous and often unrelated between themselves information resources. Trade portals, established in some SPECA countries should not limit themselves to step-by-step guides on foreign trade procedures, but should provide in a standard and accessible for traders format the full range of up-to-date information related to foreign trade, with due consideration of requirements of other countries and potential markets (at least within the region itself). However, the issue of sustainability of such trade portals is not yet properly treated within the region.

The issue of availability of information became more acute during the ongoing pandemic. Closure of checkpoints, prohibition of entry and transit, complex procedures, and requirement of additional permits have put transporters in a difficult situation, they were forced to change their traditional routes for new ones, that sometimes also prolonged the duration of deliveries and increased the cost.

The OECD Indicators confirm the difficulty of finding information. In comparison with world best practices (index of 1.571), Azerbaijan has the best results (1.476) from the countries of the region. In other SPECA countries the results are lower: Kazakhstan – 0.75; Kyrgyzstan – 1.095; Uzbekistan – 0.6; Tajikistan – 0.286.

Foreign trade operators raise questions on the lack of up-to-date information at various places through public-private dialogue in the framework of national trade facilitation committees of the SPECA countries.

Several discussions took place with an objective of establishing a uniform approach in solving the aforementioned issues on the availability of information within the framework of implementation of the Roadmap for implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy.

**The purpose of this webinar** is the alignment of proposals on establishing a mechanism of publication of up-to-date operational information on the information resources of the Customs authorities (web sites), including creation of a separate page with information for traders and its further integration with web sites of Customs authorities of other countries.

**Objectives:**

* Discuss parameters of required information: procedures, forms and documents, Customs tariffs and taxes rates, rules of classification and Customs valuation of goods, rules on origin of goods, limitations and procedures related to transit, border procedures and their time frames;
* Discuss key technical issues:
* Establishment of a separate page with information for traders on each respective web site;
* Mechanisms of integrating web sites of Customs authorities between themselves.
* Discuss the necessity of formalizing the proposed regional cooperation (within the framework of existing agreements, including the Agreement on Customs Cooperation and Mutual Assistance of 1994 or a memorandum of intent and cooperation); and
* Exchange of experience and best practices related to the availability of information.

**Expected results**:

* Establishment of a common approach to the facilitation of availability of information to conduct affairs in the SPECA countries;
* Improved environment for the implementation of the WTO TFA;
* Development of new opportunities to obtain information between the SPECA countries;
* Ensuring synergies between Customs authorities and the private sector through establishment of dialogue and possibility to obtain the necessary information from one integrated source; and
* Raising awareness of participants on the issues discussed and search for solution of common challenges.

**Participants of the webinar**:

* Representatives of Customs authorities who manage content of web sites, publication of information or international cooperation;
* Private sector representatives (from the Partnership on transport and logistics in CA); and
* UNECE (SPECA)

**Agenda**

**of the regional working meeting of representatives
of Customs authorities of the SPECA countries
on the availability of information on trade facilitation**

**Date: 12.02.2021**

**Time: 14:00-15:30 Tashkent, Dushanbe / 15:00-16:30 – Nur-Sultan, Bishkek**

**Organizers: Partnership on transport and logistics in CA with support from the UNECE (SPECA)**

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| **Duration** | **Contents** | **Speakers** |
| 10 minutes | Opening and welcome of participants  | Moderator: Larisa Kislyakova Mario Apostolov, Regional Advisor, ECTD, UNECE  |
| 50 minutes | Session 1: Exchange of experience on functioning of web sites of Customs authorities (structure, contents, frequency of updating, online Q&A, electronic services, etc.) Presentation of the web sites  | ModeratorRepresentatives of countries:AzerbaijanKazakhstanKyrgyzstanTajikistanUzbekistanTurkmenistan |
| 10 minutes | Session 2: Presentation of proposals on establishing a mechanism of publication of up-to-date operational information on information resources of the Customs authorities (web sites)  | ModeratorMr. Andrey Kuznetsov, Company “Simurg” |
| 20 minutes | Discussion: * Parameters of required information
* Technical aspects of establishing the “mechanism”
 | ModeratorParticipants of the discussion |
| 10 minutes | Conclusions and plans of further activities  | Moderator: Larisa Kislyakova Mario Apostolov, Regional Advisor, ECTD, UNECE |