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First session

Geneva, 20–22 January 2021

Report of the Group of Experts on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure on its first session

Contents

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. Attendance.....	1–2	3
II. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)	3–4	3
III. Election of officers (agenda item 2)	5	3
IV. Report of the informal preparatory meeting for the Group of Experts on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure (agenda item 3)	6	3
V. Mandate – Terms of Reference (agenda item 4)	7–8	3
VI. Work plan (agenda item 5).....	9–13	4
VII. eTIR international system: (agenda item 6)	14–19	4
A. Progress report on the development of the eTIR international system	14	4
B. Progress report on the connection of national customs systems to the eTIR international system	15–17	5
C. NCTS-eTIR Proof of Concept	18–19	5
VIII. eTIR conceptual, functional and technical specifications version 4.3 (agenda item 7)	20–58	6
A. Introduction	20–21	6
B. eTIR Concepts	20–25	6
C. eTIR functional specifications	26	7
D. eTIR technical specifications	27–28	7
E. Amendments.....	29–58	7



1.	Accompanying document and fallback procedure	31	8
2.	Reconciliation procedure.....	32	8
3.	Validations performed by the eTIR international system	33	8
4.	Minor corrections	34	8
5.	Message Identifier	35	8
6.	Functional Reference.....	36	8
7.	Cancel advance data and Advance amendment data	37	8
8.	Add a new rule to the Version attribute.....	38	8
9.	Review of the conditions and rules	39	8
10.	Review of the code lists.....	40	8
11.	Change in the metadata information.....	41	9
12.	Change in the date formats	42	9
13.	Introduction of warnings	43	9
14.	Cardinality on subcontractors.....	44	9
15.	Description of the messages E1, E3, E5, E7 and I5	45	9
16.	Status of the guarantee after a Refusal to start a TIR operation	46	9
17.	Notifications to customs related to TIR operations	47–48	9
18.	New messages I19/I20 to validate customs offices with ITDB.....	49	9
19.	Updated list of error codes	50	9
20.	Guarantee types	51	10
21.	Advance TIR data for multiple loading places.....	52–53	10
22.	Suspension of an eTIR intermodal transport	54	10
23.	Procedure for drawing samples	55–56	10
24.	Messages exchanged in the framework of the TIR specifications.....	57	10
25.	Replication of ITDB TIR Carnet holder and customs office data	58	10
IX.	Other business (agenda item 8)	59–62	11
A.	Annex 11 of the TIR Convention.....	59–60	11
B.	National and regional developments.....	61	11
C.	Date and place of the Group of Experts sessions	62	11

I. Attendance

1. The Group of Experts on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure (further referred to as “the Group of Experts”) held its first session in hybrid format on 20 and 21 January 2020. Considering that no interpretation could be made available on 22 January 2021, the Group of Experts agreed to dedicate that day to an informal preparatory meeting for the second session.

2. The session was attended by experts from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Slovakia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Experts from the European Commission (EC) and the International Road Transport Union (IRU) also attended.

II. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/1

3. The Group of Experts adopted the provisional agenda as contained in ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/1.

4. The Group of Experts regretted that the all documents were not available in the three ECE working languages and decided, while it could discuss them, it would not be in a position to take decisions with regard to the documents available in English only.

III. Election of officers (agenda item 2)

5. The Group of Experts elected Mr. P. Arsic (Serbia) as Chair to steer its sessions and the informal preparatory meetings in 2021.

IV. Report of the informal preparatory meeting for the Group of Experts on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure (agenda item 3)

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/1

6. The Group of Experts endorsed the report of the informal preparatory meeting for the Group of Experts on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure, which took place on 3 and 4 November 2020, as contained in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/1 and decided to consider it as recommendation for its work, in particular with regard to the discussion on the amendments to version 4.2 (agenda item 7 (e)).

V. Mandate – Terms of Reference (agenda item 4)

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2019/9 and ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2019/9/Corr.1

7. The Experts took note that the conversion of the Informal Ad hoc Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure (GE.1) into a formal Group of Experts was requested by the Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport (WP.30) at its 153rd session (February 2020) on the basis of the Terms of Reference contained in ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2019/9 and ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2019/9/Corr.1.

8. They also noted that the conversion was then endorsed by the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) in February 2020 and approved by the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Executive Committee (EXCOM) on 20 May 2020.

VI. Work plan (agenda item 5)

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/2 and ECE/EX/2/Rev.1

9. The Group of Experts noted that it was established and will function in accordance with the ECE Guidelines for teams of specialists approved by EXCOM on 31 March 2010 (ECE/EX/2/Rev.1) and adopted its workplan contained in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/2, as amended. The amendments were referring to the dates of the meetings that had to be revised and to the fact that the group can only prepare and agree on version 4.3 of the eTIR specifications, while its parent body, the Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport (WP.30), will be requested to adopt them.

10. The secretariat pointed out that it has already developed the eTIR international system on based on version 4.3 of the specifications and that it has already started interconnecting the system with several national customs systems, following requests coming from contracting parties. Furthermore, the secretariat, while interconnecting the eTIR international system with national customs systems, started preparing the relevant technical documentation which will constitute a part of the technical specifications of version 4.3.

11. The Experts agreed that the eTIR international system and its specifications are subject to changes and continuous improvements and that, in that sense, the Experts understand that the Group of Experts has to deliver a version of the specifications (4.3) that will be fully operational and aligned with the provisions of Annex 11; and they will constitute the concrete basis on which eTIR operations could eventually start after Annex 11 comes into force. Then, the next version of the specifications (4.4), that will further improve the system, will be initiated and discussed in the framework of the Technical Implementation Body (TIB).

12. In response to an intervention by an expert from the Russian Federation, the secretariat clarified that, (1) in line with the schedule contained in the workplan, governments, as well as the private sector, have the possibility to submit proposals for discussion for the second session of the Group of Experts in May (proposals have to be sent to the secretariat before 2 March 2021), and (2) the dates in the workplan had to be changed because of the restriction imposed by UNOG on ECE on the daily availability of interpretation for official meetings.

13. In response to a question regarding links between the Group of Experts and the TIB, the secretariat clarified that the TIB will take over the task to prepare the subsequent versions of the eTIR specifications once it will be convened after the entry into force of Annex 11 of the TIR Convention. In view of the administrative and organizational aspects as well as challenges related to the creation of a new body, especially during periods of liquidity crisis, the secretariat informed the Group of Experts that the first session of the TIB could be eventually organized, at the earliest, in 2022.

VII. eTIR international system (agenda item 6)

A. Progress report on the development of the eTIR international system

14. The Group of Experts welcomed a presentation by the secretariat on the developments of the eTIR international system since the adoption of Annex 11, in particular that the secretariat was working on upgrading the eTIR international system to include the changes brought by versions 4.2 and 4.3 of the eTIR specifications. The Experts were informed that important changes had been brought to the eTIR database and notable improvements had been applied to the eTIR Data Model, which was now fully developed and maintained by the secretariat. The Experts were further informed about the important enhancements in terms of quality of the source code of the eTIR international system by using static code analysis

software, a mature continuous integration pipeline and by drastically increasing the number of automated tests in one year. The secretariat also reported that it had prepared eight guides aimed at helping customs authorities to connect their national customs systems to the eTIR international system. The secretariat finished the presentation by introducing its next priorities, namely completing the upgrade of the eTIR international system to the 4.3 version of the specifications, continue preparing the remaining technical guides and supporting customs administrations with their eTIR connection projects, and start preparing the conformance tests.

B. Progress report on the connection of national customs systems to the eTIR international system

15. The Group of Expert noted that further to the adoption of Annex 11 and the related amendments to the text of the body of the TIR Convention by the Administrative Committee of the TIR Convention in February 2020, Ms. Olga Algayerova (Executive Secretary of ECE), on 7 April 2020, addressed a letter to the heads of customs administrations expressing the readiness of ECE to start projects with contracting parties, with the aim to set up the required connections between customs Information and Communication Technology (ICT) systems and the eTIR international system, in preparation of the entry into force of Annex 11.

16. The Group of Experts also noted that fifteen countries indicated an interest in such interconnection project, either in the form of a request for additional information or the willingness to start a connection project (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Israel, Lebanon, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, Pakistan, Qatar, Tunisia, Turkey and Ukraine) and six countries (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Morocco, Pakistan, Tunisia and Turkey) have already started an interconnection project.

17. The secretariat also expressed gratitude for the effort undertaken by newly acceding Contracting Parties to operationalize the TIR system and recalled that, while some of the steps required to operationalize the TIR system may imply electronic connections with the IRU systems that constitute valuable steps in the overall effort to computerize customs systems, they do not prevent countries from having to implement the messages described in the eTIR specifications to operate the eTIR procedure. The secretariat recalled that it stands ready to organise information meetings about possible eTIR interconnection projects to all contracting parties interested.

C. NCTS-eTIR Proof of Concept

18. The Group of Experts took note that the European Commission and ECE have been preparing an eTIR-NCTS¹ Proof of Concept (PoC), which analyses the compatibility of eTIR with NCTS processes and data requirements, with a view to identifying the most effective method to connect customs systems of the European Union with the eTIR international system. They noted that currently the investigated approach is to connect the eTIR international system to a central “converter” in NCTS. This approach is aimed at minimizing the costs for the member States of the European Union and to ensure a uniform application of eTIR in the European Union.

19. The Group of Experts also noted that a report will be prepared as an outcome of this exercise and that the report could be submitted to the Group of Expert for information.

¹ New Computerized Transit System

VIII. eTIR conceptual, functional and technical documentation version 4.3 (agenda item 7)

A. Introduction

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 5 (2017)

20. The Group of Experts took note that version 4.3 of the Introduction document was contained in documents ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/9, ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/10, ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/11, ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/12 and ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/13. It regretted that they were not translated and could not be presented in the consolidated Informal document GE.1 No. 1 (2021) as foreseen. The group of Expert agreed with the proposal by the secretariat to prepare Informal document GE.1 No. 1 (2021) in the three ECE working languages, as soon as its parts would be translated, and distribute it to the meeting participants as well as to eTIR focal points for feedback. The Group of Expert further noted that, given the technical nature of these documents, the United Nations translation services would be happy to receive comments and suggestions on the French and Russian translations, if any.

21. An expert from the Russian Federation pointed at possible issues with some parts of the introduction documents, e.g. the obligation for customs to print the accompanying document or the security aspect related to the transfer of data between customs administration and the eTIR international system, and their alignment with Annex 11. While indicating that it would be easier to work on a consolidated Russian version of the document, he agreed to send its detailed comments to the secretariat after the session.

B. eTIR concepts

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 6 (2017)

22. The Group of Experts took note that version 4.3 of the eTIR concepts document was contained in documents ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/14, and ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/15. It regretted that document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/14 was not translated and that a consolidated version of the eTIR concepts could not be presented as Informal document GE.1 No. 2 (2021) as foreseen. The group of Expert agreed with the proposal by the secretariat to prepare Informal document GE.1 No. 2 (2021) in the three ECE working languages, as soon as document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/14 would be translated, and distribute it to the meeting participants as well as to eTIR focal points for feedback.

23. An expert from Turkey stressed that, while the eTIR declaration mechanism, as contained in ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/15, have in generally been aligned to the new wording defined in Annex 11, some parts are not yet fully aligned and seem outdated. The Group of Expert requested the secretariat to prepare the necessary corrections.

24. Various experts from countries pertaining to the Eurasian Customs Union (EACU) expressed concerns with the fact that the eTIR messages structures and formats were different from those used by their transit system and with regard to possible inconsistencies between the eTIR specifications and the EACU customs code. Among the possible missing data elements in the eTIR specifications, they mentioned the value of the goods or the requirement to have textual descriptions in Russian. The secretariat clarified that, in the eTIR specification, most data element are coded, and code lists can easily be translated. Furthermore, textual data elements can be filled in Russian and conditions could easily be added to make the Russian language mandatory in case countries pertaining to the EACU are involved in an eTIR transport. However, the addition of a data element containing the value of the goods transported, even if optional, would require the agreement of all contracting parties as it deviates from the original mandate which was to computerize the data contained currently on the TIR Carnet. While other experts understood the possible need for additional information, they also recalled that the timeframe to finalize version 4.3 of the eTIR

specification is very short and that additional data requirements could be integrated in a future version of the specifications.

25. The Group of Experts welcomed the proposal to undertake an exercise similar to the NCTS-eTIR proof of concept with countries of the EACU, in cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) and with the assistance of the secretariat, to identify and possibly resolve any critical obstacles.

C. eTIR functional specifications

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 7 (2017)

26. The Group of Experts took note that version 4.2 of the eTIR functional specifications was published in Informal document GE.1 No. 7 (2017) and that a first draft of version 4.3 will be presented at the second sessions of the Group of Experts. It also noted that that parts of version 4.3 of the functional specification were already contained in documents ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/16, ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/17 and ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/18 but were only available in English.

D. eTIR technical specifications

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 8 (2017)

27. The Group of Experts took note that version 4.2 of the eTIR technical specifications was published in Informal document GE.1 No. 8 (2017) and that, taking into account that most parts of this document have not yet been completed, the secretariat was of the view that the structure of the document could be further improved. Consequently, the secretariat presented a revised table of contents for the eTIR technical specifications document. The Group of Experts agreed with the proposal to circulate the new proposed table of contents (in English, French and Russian) to meeting participants as well as to eTIR focal points for their feedback. The secretariat also indicated that it would welcome contributions from national experts to prepare or revise parts of the technical specifications and that volunteers could contact the secretariat to coordinate their efforts.

28. More generally, experts from the Russian Federation expressed concerns with the fact the eTIR international system will not be able to communicate with all customs offices since not all of them are connected to Internet but only to a secured national network. They further mentioned that specific cryptographic algorithms had to be used in the Russian Federation to sign and encrypt electronic messages. The secretariat clarified that the eTIR international system only communicates with the central information system of each customs administrations. The connection of the national central information system with all the customs offices is to be ensured by the customs administrations. The secretariat also pointed out that it could work with experts from the Russian Federation in order to identify a possible solution, such as the use of a third party, to address the requirement to use specific cryptographic algorithms in the Russian Federation.

E. Amendments

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/7, ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/19 and ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/20

29. The Group of Experts took note of document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/7, containing the already approved amendments to version 4.2 of the eTIR specifications. It noted that the amendments related to the introduction and the concepts had already been introduced in the documents discussed under agenda item 7 (a) and (b) and that the amendments related to the functional and technical specifications will be introduced in version 4.3 in the documents which will be presented at the second session of the Group of Experts.

30. The Group of Experts considered document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/19, which contains a list of proposed amendments to version 4.2 of the eTIR specifications, and

took the following decisions:

1. Accompanying document and fallback procedure

31. The Group of Experts took note that the secretariat did not yet have the time to prepare the activity diagrams for the fallback procedures but that they will be submitted to the second session of the Group of Experts.

2. Reconciliation procedure

32. The Group of Experts were of the view that, in view of the expected time frame leading to the finalization of version 4.3 of the eTIR specifications, further consideration of the reconciliation procedure and a possible change in the scope of the project could only be discussed during the preparation of the next version of the eTIR specifications.

3. Validations performed by the eTIR international system

33. The Group of Experts noted that, to date, the secretariat had not received any requests for transitional exceptions, which would either change the status of data elements (mandatory vs optional vs dependent) or allow rules or conditions contained in the eTIR specification not to apply. However, if concrete situations appear when connecting customs systems to the eTIR international system, they will be brought to the attention of the Group of Expert.

4. Minor corrections

34. The Group of Experts agreed to the corrections of several minor issues of editorial, consistency or logical nature identified by the secretariat during the development and improvement of the eTIR international system.

5. Message Identifier

35. The Group of Experts agreed with the proposal of only using a GUID (v4) for the value of the “Message Identifier” attribute.

6. Functional Reference

36. The Group of Experts agreed with the proposal to rename the “Functional Reference” attribute in eTIR messages to “Original Message Identifier”.

7. Cancel advance data and Advance amendment data

37. The Group of Experts agreed with the proposals regarding the names, definitions and structures of messages E9 to E14. The Group of Experts also noted that Experts from the European Commission could propose at the second session the introduction of a rule for message E11, ensuring that information related to the goods already forming part of the declaration data should, in general, not be changed.

8. Add a new rule to the Version attribute

38. The Group of Experts agreed with the proposals to remove the version attribute from message E9 and to include a new rule to the version attribute, stressing it was a direct consequence of the separation of former message E9 into three separate messages.

9. Review of the conditions and rules

39. The Group of Experts decided to discuss the rules and conditions during the informal preparatory meeting for the second session on 22 January 2021.

10. Review of the code lists

40. The Group of Experts agreed with the proposals to restrict the use of code list 21 for the “Size” attribute in the “BinaryFile” class to the following values: byte (AD), kilobytes (2P) and megabytes (4L). The Group of Experts further supported to remove code lists 13 and 15.

11. Change in the metadata information

41. The Group of Experts agreed with the proposed changes to the metadata information.

12. Change in the date formats

42. The Group of Experts agreed with the proposal to change the dates and date/time formats.

13. Introduction of warnings

43. The Group of Experts took note that, further to the discussions on this point at the informal preparatory meeting and taking into account the various concerns raised by the experts, the secretariat withdrew the proposal to introduce warning at this stage.

14. Cardinality on subcontractors

44. The Group of Experts agreed to change cardinality of the subcontractor to 0..n and the cardinality of its address to 0..1. The Group of Experts also recalled that condition C001 makes the address of the subcontractor mandatory on in the absence of a subcontractor's code, which is sufficient to clearly identify him/her.

15. Description of the messages E1, E3, E5, E7 and I5

45. The Group of Experts agreed with the proposal to change the descriptions of the messages E1, E3, E5, E7 and I5.

16. Status of the guarantee after a Refusal to start a TIR operation

46. The Group of Experts considered the issue related to the guarantee status following a "Refusal to Start" message and agreed to keep the "start refused" status, as it is conceptually different from the status "cancelled". Furthermore, the Group of Experts clarified that a refusal to start message can only be sent once the transport has begun. Finally, the Group of Experts agreed that the "start refused" status should not only be a terminal status, but instead, if the transport is in a position to continue its journey via a different route of return to the departure under the cover of the same guarantee, the status of the guarantee could return to "in use" after customs register the amended declaration data indicating the new itinerary.

17. Notifications to customs related to TIR operations

47. The Group of Experts considered the issue related to the notification of TIR operations' information to customs administration and agreed with the proposal to send a notification each time seals are affixed or changed while starting or terminating a TIR operation.

48. Further to a question asked by an expert from the Russian Federation, the secretariat clarified that this notification mechanism comes in addition to the query mechanism that is available at any time through the messages I5/I6 to all customs administrations along the itinerary of a TIR transport to be able to query and receive all information stored in the eTIR international system about this TIR transport, its guarantee and the holder. Furthermore, the notifications related to TIR operations will be sent in addition to the notifications that are already send every time customs administration record declaration data (original and amendments).

18. New messages I19/I20 to validate customs offices with ITDB

49. The Group of Experts agreed with the proposed structures of new messages I19/I20 to validate customs offices with ITDB and their inclusion in the eTIR specifications.

19. Updated list of error codes

50. The Group of Experts agreed with the updated list of error codes proposed by the secretariat.

20. Guarantee types

51. The Group of Experts agreed with the proposal to start using code list 12 for the guarantees issued in the framework of the pilot projects. Furthermore, the Group of Experts agreed to amend the class diagram regarding the guarantee type, in particular moving the maximum guarantee amount from the guarantee type class to a new association class, between the “guarantee type” class and the “country” class, in order to model the current differences of the maximum guarantee amount between contracting parties.

21. Advance TIR data for multiple loading places

52. The Group of Experts considered how holders should provide advance information in case they know before the beginning of the transport the details about the goods to be loaded at the different loading points. The Group of Experts agreed with the second option presented, in which holders will only submit to the country of first departure the advance TIR data (E9) related to the first load and, by means of an advance amendment data message (E11) to the countries where subsequent loading will take place, send the data for each subsequent departure office.

53. Despite the document being available in English only, the Group of Experts also considered document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/GE.1/2021/20, proposing additional amendments to version 4.2 of the eTIR specifications, and took the following decisions:

22. Suspension of an eTIR intermodal transport

54. The Group of Experts considered the question of the suspension of the eTIR procedure for legs of an intermodal transport in case of existence of simpler customs transit procedures and when the use of a customs transit regime is not necessary. It agreed that the suspension would start once a terminate TIR operation message (I11) would be sent with a “suspension” termination code (to be added in code list 27). The eTIR procedure can then be restored at the end of the leg during which the eTIR procedure was suspended when customs send a start TIR operation message (I9), and the transport could then continue normally. An expert from Turkey recalled that the accompanying document should not be used in such scenario as it is reserved for the fallback procedure and in case of incident or accident.

23. Procedure for drawing samples

55. The Group of Experts considered the proposals on how to deal with the provision of Explanatory Note 0.21-3 regarding the notification of the drawing of samples of goods by customs authorities in the course of an examination. While they recognized that the drawing of samples should remain an exceptional procedure, they did not consider the usage of the accompanying document as a viable option as its use should be restricted to the fallback procedures and in case of incidents or accidents.

56. The Group of Experts was not in a position to decide if the use of the control class would be preferable over sending an amendment of the declaration and decided to revert to this issue at its next session. However, the Group of Expert was of the view that this issue could be dealt with in the framework of the version 4.4 of the eTIR specifications and, in case of necessity, an interim solution could be found.

24. Messages exchanged in the framework of the TIR specifications

57. The Group of Experts was informed that the proposal submitted by IRU, presenting an analysis of the messages exchanged in the framework of the eTIR specifications, had been submitted as a formal document to be discussed by AC.2 in the framework of its consideration of providing IRU access to ITDB.

25. Replication of ITDB TIR Carnet holder and customs office data

58. The Group of Experts considered the proposal which explains the replication mechanisms of the ITDB and how the ITDB replica could be used in cases of fallback. The Group of Experts agreed with the option that would send an email notification to the TIR or eTIR focal points when the replica is used longer than a period of 24 hours.

IX. Other business (agenda item 8)

A. Annex 11 of the TIR Convention

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/6

59. The Group of Experts noted the list of questions and answers on the application of various provisions of the TIR Convention for TIR transports carried out under the eTIR procedure contained in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/6 had been approved by WP.30 and published on the eTIR website.

60. The Group of Experts also noted that additional questions transmitted by Belarus, along with draft answers by the secretariat, which also take account comments by eTIR focal points, will be presented to WP.30 in June 2021 before being added to the Questions and Answers section of the eTIR website.²

B. National and regional developments

61. The Group of Experts did not have any national or regional development to report. The secretariat proposed to the experts of the contracting parties which are currently interconnecting their national customs systems with the eTIR international system to present their feedback for the next sessions. The chair also proposed to IRU to present their feedback as well.

C. Date and place of Group of Experts sessions

62. The Group of Experts took note of the dates reserved for the second and third sessions of the Group of Experts, i.e. 25–28 May 2021 and 13–15 September 2021, respectively, and that as long as the epidemiologic situation limits international travel leading, possibly, to mandatory quarantines, the secretariat will try to organize sessions in hybrid format (allowing both virtual and in-person attendance).

² <https://unece.org/frequently-asked-questions-1>