



Economic Commission for Europe
Inland Transport Committee
Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport
155th session

Geneva, 13 and 15 October 2020

**Report of the Working Party on Customs Questions affecting
 Transport on its 155th session**
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I. Attendance

1. The Working Party (WP.30) held its 155th session on 13 and 15 October 2020, virtually and in-person in Geneva. The session was attended by representatives of the following countries: Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia, Netherlands, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Uzbekistan. Representatives of the European Union were also present. The following non-governmental organizations were represented: Alliance Internationale de Tourisme / Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (AIT/FIA), International Road Transport Union (IRU).

II. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)

2. WP.30 adopted the provisional agenda, prepared by the secretariat (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/309/Rev.1 and its Corr.1).

III. Activities of United Nations Economic Commission for Europe bodies and other United Nations organizations of interest to the Working Party (agenda item 2)

Alignment of the work of the Working Party with the Inland Transport Committee strategy

3. The Working Party recalled that, at its 154th session (February 2020), it started considering document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/1, summarizing the main scope of the seventeen legal instruments under the auspices of the Working Party, reviewing the final clauses and proposing, where required or deemed appropriate, amendments. The Working Party continued its considerations on the basis of document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/8, in which various international organizations in the field of customs, railways and container transport provided their views on the relevance of some legal instruments (see (j), (o) and (p) in ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/1).

4. The Working Party took note of document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/2020/8 and comments by the European Commission on behalf of the member States of the European Union and decided to continue discussions at its next session, requesting delegations to pursue their national consultations about the status and relevance of the 17 legal instruments under the auspices of the Working Party.

IV. Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets (TIR Convention, 1975) (agenda item 3)

A. Status of the Convention

5. The Working Party was informed about any changes in the status of the TIR Convention, 1975 and the number of contracting parties. In particular, the Working Party was informed that, further to the accession of Oman and it becoming a TIR operational country, the Convention now has seventy-six contracting parties, whereas, TIR operations can be established with sixty-four countries.

6. In addition, the Working Party was informed that, on 25 February 2020, the Secretary-General of the United Nations in his capacity of depositary, issued depositary notification C.N.71.2020.TREATIES-XI.A.16 (re-issued). In accordance with the provisions of

article 59 (3) of the Convention, the proposed amendments shall come into force with respect to all parties to the Convention three months after the expiry of a period of twelve months following the date of the communication during which no objection to the proposed amendments has been communicated to the Secretary-General by a party. Annex 11 shall come into force, in the absence of any objection to the proposal of amendments within the abovementioned twelve month period, except for those States which notify the depositary of their nonacceptance of Annex 11 between 25 February 2021 and 25 May 2021. The delegation of the European Union stated that the European Union at this point in time has no intention to "opt-out" from Annex 11, because eTIR is in line with the Union Customs Code (UCC), which aims at a paperless and fully automated customs union, by means of upgrading existing electronic systems and introducing new ones for the completion of all customs formalities. More detailed information on this issue as well as on depositary notifications is available on the TIR website.¹

B. Revision of the Convention

Amendment proposals to the Convention

7. The Working Party recalled that, at its previous session, against the background of proposals adopted by the Administrative Committee for the TIR Convention, 1975 (AC.2), at its seventy-first session (October 2019), to increase the number of loading and unloading places in Article 18 of the Convention from four to eight, the Working Party considered Informal document WP.30 (2020) No. 1 and its Add. 1 by IRU, containing a proposal to accommodate up to eight customs offices in the TIR Carnet. Further to discussions, IRU was invited to review the design, taking account of the comments made and, if possible, provide a realistic example of the overlap between the seals and stamps in boxes 16 and 17. The Working Party decided to revert to the issue at the current session (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/308, para. 13).

8. The Working Party considered and adopted document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/9–ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/2020/25 and agreed with the new lay-out for TIR Carnet, Version 1 and Version 2. The Working Party further considered and adopted Informal document WP.30 (2020) No. 7/Rev.1 – AC.2 (2020) No. 6/Rev.1, containing the full set of amendments to the legal text of the Convention required to introduce a maximum of eight places of loading and unloading and the new lay-out of the TIR Carnet in the legal text of the TIR Convention and decided to transmit them to AC.2 for further consideration and, possibly, acceptance pending formal adoption.

9. The Working Party recalled, that, at its previous session, it took note of Informal document WP.30 (2020) No. 5 by IRU, providing a map and a list with the different guarantee levels (50,000 United States dollars, 60,000 euros and 100,000 euros) that currently apply. The Working Party mandated the secretariat to prepare, for consideration at the current session, a document providing a succinct overview of its past discussions of the issue of introducing more flexibility in the guarantee system. In this context, the delegation of the Russian Federation requested the secretariat to include in the document its proposals to introduce full guarantee coverage and to also refer to recommendation No. 3 from the audit report of the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/308, para. 14).

10. The Working Party considered document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/4 and decided, due to the current circumstances and in view of the upcoming computerization of the TIR procedure, not to consider this issue until further notice.

¹ www.unece.org/tir/tir-depositary_notification.html.

C. Application of the Convention

1. eTIR

(a) eTIR pilot projects

11. The Working Party, recalling the signature on 6 October 2017 of a five years Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation between ECE and IRU in the field of computerization of the TIR procedure and of the supporting Contribution Agreement (CA) towards enhancing full computerization of the TIR procedure, noted that within the eTIR project between Azerbaijan and Iran (Islamic Republic of), the meeting planned for 26 and 27 February 2020 in Bilasuvar (Azerbaijan), aimed including Georgia in the project, had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It also noted that, regarding the extension of the eTIR project between Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Turkey, Iran (Islamic Republic of) had sent comments to Turkey regarding the Memorandum of Understanding and both countries are discussing to extend the scope of the project to all customs offices and all TIR Carnet holders from both countries.

(b) New developments in the eTIR international system

12. The Working Party welcomed a presentation by the secretariat on recent developments regarding the eTIR international system. The Working Party was informed that the secretariat had finalized the implementation and tests of all messages according to version 4.1 of the eTIR specifications and had started working on the updates needed according to the eTIR specifications v4.2 and v4.3. The Working Party was also informed about the fact that important changes had been applied to the eTIR database and that the number of internal automated tests had more than tripled. The Working Party was further informed about important efforts made by the secretariat in the development and maintenance of the eTIR data model, including the submission of amendment proposals to the next session of GE.1. The Working Party was informed about the publication of three guides at the eTIR documentation portal² and on the current work performed by the secretariat in preparing additional technical guides to help customs authorities of contracting parties to connect their national customs systems to the eTIR international system. Finally, the Working Party was informed about the next priorities for the secretariat, namely: finishing the implementation of the changes according to the eTIR specifications v4.3, supporting customs authorities in the context of the eTIR interconnection projects and preparing the conformance tests.

(c) eTIR interconnection projects

13. The Working Party took note that, on 7 April 2020, the ECE Executive Secretary sent a letter to all contracting parties to the TIR Convention inviting them to contact the TIR secretariat in case they were interested to connect their national customs system to the eTIR international system, in preparation of the entry into force of Annex 11. The following 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, Montenegro, Morocco, Pakistan, Qatar, Republic of Moldova, Tunisia, Turkey and Ukraine. To date, project kick-off meetings have been organized with Azerbaijan, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Tunisia and Turkey. Furthermore, the secretariat has been working with the European Commission and some of the European Union member States on an NCTS³-eTIR Proof of Concept, aimed at identifying the most effective method to connect European Union customs administrations to the eTIR international system. The secretariat also informed interested countries about the availability of assistance funds for interconnection projects to hire Information and Communication Technology (ICT) experts who could assist customs administrations.

² See wiki.unece.org/display/ED/eTIR+documentation+-+Homepage

³ NCTS stands for New Computerized Transit System

(d) Activities of the Informal Ad hoc Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of computerization of the TIR Procedure

14. The Working Party noted that the Informal Ad hoc Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure (GE.1) held its thirty-first session on 10 and 11 March 2020 in Geneva, endorsed its report, contained in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/5, and confirmed that, for the eTIR procedure, one and only one guarantee per transport should be used.

15. The Working Party considered and approved the list of questions and answers (Q&A) 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 and requested the secretariat to post the list of Q&A on the eTIR website. It also reiterated that contracting parties and national associations could further contribute to this list by sending questions to the secretariat.

16. Finally, the Working Party considered document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/7, containing amendment proposals to the eTIR conceptual, functional and technical documentation, already approved by GE.1 during its twenty-seventh, twenty-eighth, twenty-ninth, thirtieth and thirty-first sessions. It noted that those amendments will be integrated into version 4.3 of the eTIR specifications that should be submitted to WP.30/GE.1 in 2021.

(e) Conversion of the Informal Ad hoc Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure into a formal Group of Experts

17. The Working party noted that, further to its request and approval by ITC, EXCOM agreed, on 20 May 2020, to the conversion of GE.1 into the formal “Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure” (WP.30/GE.1). However, due to a financial liquidity crisis at the United Nations and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the secretariat could not obtain slots in 2020 to organize sessions of WP.30/GE.1 with interpretation in the three ECE working languages. Consequently, and in order to make progress on the preparation of the crucially needed version 4.3 of the eTIR specifications, the secretariat, after consultation with TIR and eTIR focal points, decided to organize a preparatory information meeting (in English only) of WP.30/GE.1 on 3 and 4 November 2020. For 2021, sessions of WP.30/GE.1 are planned for 27–29 January 2021, 25–27 May 2021 and 13–15 September 2021.

2. New developments in the application of the Convention

18. No new developments in the application of the TIR Convention were raised under this agenda item.

3. TIR-related electronic data interchange systems

19. The Working Party was informed by IRU about the latest statistical data on the performance of contracting parties in the control system for TIR Carnets — SafeTIR system (Informal document WP.30 (2020). No. 8).

4. Settlement of claims for payments

20. The Working Party was informed IRU about the current situation on the settlement of claims for payments made by customs authorities against national guaranteeing associations (Informal document WP.30 (2020) No. 9).

5. Other matters

(a) Issues in the application of the Convention in the Republic of Belarus

21. The Working Party recalled the requirement, in Belarus, for foreign operators to submit electronic advance information to customs through a unified platform on a paid basis and that, at its previous session, it had requested the secretariat to transmit its finding on the issue to the Belarus authorities, while also inviting the Vice-Chair to bring this matter to the attention of ITC.

22. The Working Party took note that the secretariat had transmitted the excerpt of the WP.30 report to the Belarus authorities and that the Vice-Chair had brought the issue to the attention of ITC. It further took note that there were indications that Belarus customs were intensifying efforts to prepare implementing eTIR in order to render the relevant transit corridors more attractive for international transport operators and, against that background, was also looking at a wider range of solutions to allow operators to send advance information to the customs authorities.

(b) Decline in the sale of TIR Carnets

23. Under this agenda item, the Working Party recalled that, at its previous session (February 2020), it started considering a study on the reasons for the decline in the sale of TIR Carnets, contained in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/3. The Working Party requested the secretariat to distribute the study among TIR focal points of customs and associations, seeking their views (see also ECE/TRANS/WP.30/308, paras. 29–32).

24. In view that, most likely due to the ongoing pandemic, only few focal points had provided any feedback, the Working Party requested the secretariat to send a reminder to TIR focal points from customs and associations, seeking their views on the study on the reasons for the decline in the sale of TIR Carnets, with 31 October 2020 as final deadline.

(c) Other matters

25. No other issues or difficulties in the application of the TIR Convention faced by customs authorities, national associations, the international insurers or IRU were brought to the attention of the Working Party under this agenda item.

V. International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls for Goods, 1982 (Harmonization Convention) (agenda item 4)

A. Status of the Convention

26. The Working Party was informed that, since the accession of Turkmenistan to the Convention in 2016, the Convention has fifty-eight contracting parties.

27. In addition, the Working Party was informed that, on 27 February 2020, the Secretary-General of the United Nations in his capacity of depositary, issued depositary notification C.N.77.2020.TREATIES-XI.A.17, informing of the submission of a proposal to amend Annex 8, article 7 of the International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls for Goods, 1982, extending the interval between surveys among contracting parties on progress made to improve border crossing procedures in their countries from two to five years. In accordance with the provisions of article 22 of the Convention, the proposed amendments shall come into force with respect to all contracting parties to the Convention three months after the expiry of a period of twelve months following the date of the communication during which no objection to the proposed amendments has been communicated to the Secretary-General by a contracting party. This means that, if no objection is raised by 27 February 2021, the proposal shall come into force on 27 May 2021. More detailed information on the status of the Convention as well as on various depositary notifications is available on the ECE website.¹

B. Issues in the application of the Convention

28. The Working Party took note that a presentation by the Secretary of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) on its semantic work on dematerializing transport and logistics documentation, has been postponed to the next session, pending availability of the UN/CEFACT Secretary.

VI. Convention on the Facilitation of Border Crossing Procedures for Passengers, Luggage and Load-Luggage carried in International Traffic by Rail (agenda item 5)

Status of the Convention

29. The Working Party recalled that, at its 154th session (February 2020), the delegation of the Russian Federation informed the meeting that, at the national level, all required procedures in preparation of accession had been finalized and that accession was expected in the course of 2020 (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/308, para. 34). No further information was available at the session. More detailed information on this issue as well as on depositary notifications is available on the TIR website.⁴

VII. Customs Conventions on the Temporary Importation of Private Road Vehicles (1954) and Commercial Road Vehicles (1956) (agenda item 6)

A. Status of the Conventions

30. The Working Party was informed that the status of and the number of contracting parties to the Customs Conventions on the Temporary Importation of Private (1954) and Commercial (1956) Road Vehicles had not changed and that the Conventions had 80 and 26 contracting parties respectively. More detailed information on this issue as well as on depositary notifications is available on the TIR website.⁵

B. Issues in the application of the Conventions

31. Under this agenda item, the Working Party took note of a presentation by FIA on a project to digitalize the Carnet de Passage en Douane (CPD), called: eCPD. It further took note of the intention of ECE and AIT/FIA to conclude a Memorandum of Understanding on the revitalization and digitalization of relevant United Nations inland transport conventions and mandated the secretariat to continue these efforts.

VIII. Introduction of new technologies in rail, road, road-based mobility, inland waterway, logistics and intermodal transport until 2030 (agenda item 7)

32. No delegation raised an issue under this agenda item.

IX. Taking stock of the resilience of the inland transport sector to pandemics and international emergency situations (agenda item 8)

33. Under this agenda item, the Working Party took note of a presentation by the Secretary of the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics (WP.5) on responses from the transport sector to the COVID-19 crisis, as also reflected in document ECE/TRANS/WP.5/2020/10. In particular, the Working Party welcomed the establishment of the Observatory on Border Crossings Status due to COVID-19.

⁴ www.unece.org/tir/tir-depositary_notification.html.

⁵ www.unece.org/tir/tir-depositary_notification.html.

X. Activities of other organizations and countries of interest to the Working Party (agenda item 9)

34. The Working Party took note of activities by various regional economic commissions or Customs Unions as well as by other organizations, both intergovernmental and non-governmental, and countries as far as they relate to matters of interest to the Working Party.

A. European Union

35. The Working Party was informed about recent developments in the European Union related to the activities of the Working Party. To that end, the European Commission provided a number of weblinks with regard to the following issues: (1) recent accomplishments in the European Union Customs Code;⁶ (2) the new relations between the European Union and the United Kingdom;⁷ (3) recent activities related to COVID-19;⁸ (4) updates in the European Union Information Technology (IT) systems.⁹

B. Economic Cooperation Organization

36. No information was provided under this agenda item.

C. Eurasian Economic Union

37. No information was provided under this agenda item.

D. World Customs Organization

38. No information was provided under this agenda item.

E. Bureau International des Conteneurs

39. No information was provided under this agenda item.

XI. Other business (agenda item 10)

A. List of decisions

40. The Working Party reviewed the list of decisions. The list of decisions is attached as Annex to the final report.

B. Dates of the next sessions

41. The Working Party decided to conduct its 156th session in the week from 9–12 February 2021, subject to potential adjustments due to the ongoing COVID pandemic and the United Nations liquidity crisis.

⁶ ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/business/union-customs-code/ucc-work-programme_en IA/DA

⁷ ec.europa.eu/info/european-union-and-united-kingdom-forging-new-partnership_en Covid 19

⁸ ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/covid-19-taxud-response/guidance-customs-issues-related-covid-19-emergency_en

⁹ ec.europa.eu/knowledge4policy/node/6657_et

C. Restriction on the distribution of documents

42. The Working Party decided that there would be no restrictions in the distribution of documents issued in connection with its current session.

XII. Adoption of the report (agenda item 11)

43. The Working Party instructed the secretariat to issue the listed decisions, preceded by a succinct summary of its discussions, as official report of its 155th session. The report should be circulated among registered participants for final adoption.

Annex

List of decisions on main issues discussed at the 155th session of the ECE Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport (WP.30), 13 and 15 October 2020 (for the draft agenda, please refer to ECE/TRANS/WP.30/309/Rev.1)

The Working Party:

1. Takes note of document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/2020/8 and comments by the European Commission on behalf of the member States of the European Union and decides to continue discussions at its next session, requesting delegations to pursue their national consultations about the status and relevance of the 17 legal instruments under the auspices of the Working Party (agenda item 2).
2. Considers document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/9-ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/2020/25 and agrees with the new lay-out. Considers Informal document WP.30 (2020) No. 7/Rev.1 – AC.2 (2020) No. 6/Rev.1 and decides to transmit the required amendment proposal to introduce the new lay-out in the legal text of the TIR Convention to AC.2 for further consideration and, possibly, acceptance pending formal adoption (agenda item 3 (b)).
3. Considers document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/4 and decides, due to the current circumstances and in view of the upcoming computerization of the TIR procedure, not to consider this issue until further notice (agenda item 3 (b)).
4. Endorses the report of GE.1 in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/5 and confirms that, for the eTIR procedure, one and only one guarantee per transport should be used (agenda item 3 (c) (i) d).
5. Takes note and approves 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 and requests the secretariat to post them on the eTIR website and continue compiling more Q&A (agenda item 3 (c) (i) d).
6. Endorses document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2020/7, containing a set of amendment to the eTIR conceptual, functional and technical documentation approved by GE.1 at its twenty-seventh, twenty-eighth, twenty-ninth, thirtieth and thirty-first sessions (agenda item 3 (c) (i) d).
7. Takes note that the secretariat transmitted the excerpt of the WP.30 report on the Belarus issue to the Belarus authorities and that there seems to be progress towards finding a mutually acceptable way out of the situation at hand (agenda item 3 (c) (v) b).
8. Requests the secretariat to send a reminder to TIR focal points from customs and associations, seeking their views on the study on the reasons for the decline in the sale of TIR Carnets, with 31 October 2020 as final deadline (agenda item 3 (c) (v) b).
9. Takes note of the intention of ECE and AIT/FIA to conclude a Memorandum of Understanding on the revitalization and digitalization of relevant United Nations inland transport conventions and mandates the secretariat to continue its efforts (agenda item 6 (b)).
10. Takes note of document ECE/TRANS/WP.5/2020/10 and, in particular, welcomes the establishment of the Observatory on Border Crossings Status due to COVID-19; takes note of the WP.5 meeting where the document was discussed (agenda item 8).
11. Decides to conduct its 156th session in the week from 9–12 February 2021, subject to potential adjustments due to the ongoing COVID pandemic and the United Nations liquidity crisis (agenda item 10 (b)).
12. Instructs the secretariat to issue the listed decisions, preceded by a succinct summary of discussions as official report of its 155th session (agenda item 11).