



Economic Commission for Europe
Inland Transport Committee
Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport
165th session

Geneva, 6 (p.m.), 7 and 9 (a.m.) February 2024

**Report of the Working Party on Customs Questions affecting
Transport on its 165th session**
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I. Attendance

1. The Working Party held its one-hundred-and-sixty-fifth session on 6(p.m.), 7 and 9 (a.m.) February 2024 in Geneva. The session was attended by representatives of the following countries: Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Italy, Kuwait, Lithuania, Moldova (Republic of), Netherlands (Kingdom of the), North Macedonia, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Türkiye, United States of America and Uzbekistan. Representatives of the European Union were present. The following non-governmental organizations were represented: International Automobile Federation (FIA) and the International Road Transport Union (IRU). The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) secretariat attended the meeting.

II. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)

2. The Working Party adopted the provisional agenda, as prepared by the secretariat, in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/329.

III. Election of officers (agenda item 2)

3. In accordance with the Working Party's rules of procedure and established practice, the Working Party elected Mr. Anıl Şenmanav (Türkiye) as Chair for its sessions in 2024. Governments were strongly encouraged to nominate candidates for the post of Vice Chair in order to facilitate any future election process.

IV. Activities of United Nations Economic Commission for Europe bodies and other United Nations organizations of interest to the Working Party (agenda item 3)

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

4. The Working Party recalled that, at its previous session (October 2023), it decided to tentatively adopt the revised Terms of Reference (ToR) pending finalization of the European Union Council decision and to adopt its new name to "Global Forum on Customs Questions Affecting Transport including Border Crossing Facilitation". The Working Party was informed that the European Union formal position and agreement on the new ToR for WP.30 was established on 8 November 2023 and therefore a request has been submitted to the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) to endorse the new ToR including the new name of the Working Party at its session in February 2024. The new ToR of the Working Party including its revised Rules of Procedure (RoP) - rule 1 - have been prepared as new standalone documents by the secretariat (ECE/TRANS/WP.30.2023/7/Rev.2, ECE/TRANS/WP.30.2023/10) and has been uploaded on the introductory web page of the Working Party for easy reference.

5. The Working Party recalled that, at its 162nd session (February 2023), it decided to revert to the proposed strategy and action plan (as proposed in ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2023/2) once agreement on the ToR had been reached (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/324, para. 9). Since the revised ToR was adopted at its previous session, the secretariat prepared the document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2024/1, containing a revised version of the strategy and action plan that is based on the new ToR and the discussions undertaken since then, for consideration by the Working Party.

6. The Working Party, after having discussed ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2024/1, decided to revert to the issue at its next session thereby allowing the secretariat to prepare a further

revision of the document with a focus on the following amendments and allowing delegations to make further proposals:

- Para. 19, (b), (i) first bullet point: the words “users of paper TIR carnets” should be replaced with “contracting parties”, and the words “within a horizon of four years” should be replaced with “at the earliest convenience”;
- Para. 19, (b), (iii) on the digitalization of the harmonization convention. The sentences “technological solutions should be evaluated....., such a tool could operate, funded etc.” should be removed;
- Further enhance the list of challenges being faced at border crossings of different regions;
- Include other topics such as the Climate Change mitigation, border management and gender parity etc.

7. The Working Party recalled that ITC at its February 2023 session requested the secretariat, in close cooperation with the Committee’s Bureau and relevant subsidiary bodies, to develop an ambitious strategy document for reducing Green House Gas (GHG) emissions on inland transport based on international United Nations legal instruments under the Committee’s purview with priority actions for the ITC and all its relevant subsidiary bodies, supported by a strong action plan with milestones. The strategy document would be considered with possible adoption at the eighty-sixth plenary session of ITC in 2024.

8. The Working Party considered a presentation made by the ITC secretariat on the draft ITC strategy, as well as informal documents 3,4 and 5 which include and in-depth report on inland transport and climate change and submissions by the inland transport committee’s subsidiary bodies to the inland transport committee strategy. The Working Party also considered document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2024/2 which is not the contribution of the Working Party to the ITC strategy but rather a more generic research paper on how customs in general and more specifically the Working Party could contribute to the reduction of Green House Gas emissions.

9. The Working Party welcomed the presentations made on this topic by Mr. P.-J. Laborie of the European Commission and Mr. M. Lenherr from the Federal Office of Customs and Border Security of Switzerland. Mr. Laborie focused in his presentation on the green initiatives of the European Union and the role of customs on these initiatives, with the overall aim of becoming carbon neutral by 2050. He stated that customs can contribute to the reduction of CO² emissions by (a) improving traditional missions for instance avoiding illegal export of the European Union’s waste to third countries or dissuading importation of goods coming from supply chains which cause deforestation; (b) “greening” themselves by promoting paperless customs or reducing emissions of building, cars and equipment; and (c) introducing ideas for improvements, for instance on items classification taking into account carbon emissions created during their production, etc. In order to establish a fair competition between European Union’s producers and goods imported a carbon adjustment mechanism at the border has been adopted (CBAM¹). Mr. Lenherr focused his presentation on digital border crossings which includes the electronic declaration of the goods and means of transport, the digitalization of the routing slip procedures, the support controls such as risk analysis and in the future, the exchange of data. He mentioned that the Border Ticket / European Union Smart Border Project has objectives to accelerate cross-border traffic; provide proof of crossing the border; reduce the administrative burden and allow for more targeted controls. He stated that in order to ensure the maximum benefits, digital solutions should be complemented by equivalent adaptation of infrastructure and procedures.

10. The Working Party requested the secretariat to prepare a document for its next session, taking into account the exchange of views and information provided during the session, as well as the draft ITC strategy document, which is planned to be approved in February 2024 but will remain open to possible revisions and input from its subsidiary bodies, for consideration and possible approval, as the Working Party’s contribution to the ITC strategy.

¹ Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism

V. Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets (TIR Convention, 1975) (agenda item 4)

A. Status of the Convention

11. The Working Party was informed that, since the entry into force of the accession of Iraq, on 27 September 2023, the Convention now has seventy-eight contracting parties and that, since the activation of the system for Qatar, TIR operations can now be established with sixty-five countries. Detailed information on this issue as well as on depositary notifications is available on the TIR website.²

B. Revision of the Convention

Amendment proposals to the Convention

12. The Working Party took note that, at present, no amendment proposals to the Convention had been submitted for its consideration.

C. Application of the Convention

1. Comments to the TIR Convention

13. The Working Party took note that, at present, no proposals for comments to provisions of the Convention had been submitted for its consideration.

2. eTIR

(a) eTIR international system: interconnection projects

14. Following the recommendations on the implementation of the eTIR procedure along the middle corridor agreed during the TIR Executive Board (TIRExB) friends of the chair meeting which took place in Samarkand, Uzbekistan on 21 and 22 June 2023, the secretariat informed the Working Party on the follow up steps. In that regard, the secretariat informed that currently, interconnection projects have been initiated and national consultants have been hired using funds from the United Nations Regular programme of technical cooperation (RPTC) account for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Also, meetings have been organised with the customs authority of Islamic Republic of Iran where different solutions for interconnection of the national customs system have been discussed. In all cases, the eTIR National Application has been proposed as the interconnection tool, a solution that could drastically reduce the interconnection time and resources required. Secretariat will continue its efforts to finalize those four interconnection projects within the year, and start the project with Turkmenistan, aiming at a middle corridor using the eTIR procedure towards the end of the year.

(b) International TIR Data Bank

15. The Working Party welcomed the status report on the International TIR Data Bank (ITDB) delivered by the secretariat. It was informed about the current status of data recordings and usage figures in ITDB (1,184 web application users, 30,089 authorized TIR Carnet holders, 282 customs stamps and seals records and 2,691 customs offices operational for TIR procedures). It was further informed about the recent ITDB and eTIR project related achievements: in particular of the adaptation of European Union customs office data import (specific notes and data format variation) to ITDB, of the progress on implementation of the eTIR National Application JSON Based API extension (completed at 90 per cent) and of the recording of eTIR National Application training videos.

² www.unece.org/tir/

3. New developments in the application of the Convention

16. No new development was raised under this agenda item.

4. TIR-related electronic data interchange systems

17. The Working Party took note of the latest statistical data on the performance of contracting parties in the control system for TIR Carnets — SafeTIR system as contained in Informal document WP.30 (2024) No. 6.

5. Settlement of claims for payments

18. The Working Party took note of the current situation on the settlement of claims for payments made by customs authorities against national guaranteeing associations as contained in informal document WP.30 (2024) No. 7.

6. Other matters

19. Several Governments raised the importance of having the TIR Handbook updated as soon as possible, thus providing a consolidated updated version of the TIR Convention including all amendments that came into force since the latest version of the handbook that was published in 2018. The secretariat informed the Working Party that it already started its work on updating the TIR Handbook and that it would be ready towards the end of 2024. The Working Party was of the opinion that the online version of the TIR Handbook should be revised annually while the hardcopy could be produced every five years considering the administrative processes required in order to prepare those publications. It also suggested that the number of hardcopies produced should be kept at the minimum required, avoiding waste of paper. The Working Party agreed that the issue should be brought to the attention of the Administrative Committee for the TIR Convention, 1975 (AC.2) for its possible decision and asked the secretariat to transmit the issue to the AC.2 at its eighty-second session (8 February 2024). The European Union representative mentioned that, meanwhile, if the delegates wish to, they could use the website of the European Union which already provides an updated consolidated version of the TIR Convention in 24 languages.³

20. The Working Party recalled that the secretariat, in close collaboration with the delegation of the European Union and IRU, prepared a draft survey, contained in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2023/3. The survey was sent on 14 March 2023 to customs TIR focal points with 31 May 2023 as deadline for reply (see ECE/TRANS/WP.30/324, para. 20). The Working Party considered document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2023/8 and ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2023/9, incorporating consolidated replies including remarks received from the Customs Authorities and the National Associations, respectively.

21. The Working Party considered document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2024/3, which is prepared by the secretariat, that includes a consolidated and more concise version of the replies received from both the Customs Authorities and the National Associations, with the aim to receive guidance from the Working Party on the possible next steps to be followed.

22. The Working Party acknowledged that, in some of the replies to the questions, considerable discrepancies existed between the replies of Customs Authorities and the National Associations. The Working Party recognised that these discrepancies could be resulting from several factors, including different understanding of the questions or statistical errors. Some delegates suggested that digitalization of the certificates of approval could be a way forward, while recognizing the complexity of such a task since many actors are involved in this process. The secretariat informed the Working Party that the digitalization of the Certification of Approval by means of a new module in ITDB requires significant business processes and legal clarifications from the contracting parties before its development can start, following an analysis by the TIRExB. In this context, the secretariat informed the Working Party that the TIRExB had already agreed that this ITDB module implementation was to be resumed once higher priority tasks related to eTIR have been completed, and once the related process and legal pre-requisites are addressed. The Working Party considered this

³ www.unece.org/tir

issue as a matter of high importance and requested the secretariat to keep it in the agenda for further consideration at its next sessions.

VI. International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods, 1982 (Harmonization Convention) (agenda item 5)

A. Status of the Convention

23. The Working Party was informed that, since the tenth session of the Administrative Committee for the Harmonization Convention (AC.3), in 2014, only Turkmenistan has acceded to the Convention, in 2016, becoming the fifty-eighth contracting party to the Convention. More detailed information on the status of the Convention as well as on various depositary notifications is available on the ECE website.⁴

B. Issues in the application of the Convention

24. The Working Party recalled that, at its 162nd session (February 2023), it mandated the secretariat to circulate the 5-year survey on the application of Annex 8 of the Convention among the regular delegates from governments (and, in the absence thereof, TIR focal points) as addressees in April 2023 with 1 July 2023 as deadline for reply (see ECE/TRANS/WP.30/324, para. 26). The Working Party considered document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2024/4, which includes the results of the 5-year survey. The Working Party was informed that only three contracting parties replied to the survey, leaving no room for drawing any meaningful conclusions from the survey. The Working Party requested the secretariat to re-circulate the survey to contracting parties that have not responded so far with a new deadline until end of March for reply. In parallel, the Working Party advised the secretariat to directly contact the delegates from those contracting parties that have not responded so far to ensure the survey is indeed received. The secretariat, depending on the results of these efforts, will prepare a revision of document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2024/4 for the next session of the Working Party for its consideration.

25. The Working party took note of information provided by the secretariat on the Sustainable Inland Transport Connectivity Indicators (SITCIN) developed by the secretariat in the framework of a United Nations Development Account (UNDA) project with the support of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and the participation of Georgia, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Paraguay and Serbia. The indicators were also used by the customs authority of Uzbekistan in a project requiring the evaluation of Uzbekistan international border crossing points. The relevancy of some SITCIN indicators on border crossings were inspired by the Harmonization Convention. The secretariat suggested that the Working Party could discuss and examine if these indicators could be used also for evaluating the implementation of the Convention itself. In order for the Working Party to consider the SITCIN indicators as the appropriate tool to evaluate the implementation of the Harmonization Convention as a whole, the Working Party requested the secretariat to prepare a document for the next session of the Working Party for its consideration.

26. The Working Party also took note that the ECE secretariat, in collaboration with the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE), finalised the preparation of the publication on the “practical guide to cross-border facilitation” which will be ready in three official languages of ECE during the year.

⁴ www.unece.org/tir

VII. Convention on the Facilitation of Border Crossing Procedures for Passengers, Luggage and Load-Luggage carried in International Traffic by Rail (agenda item 6)

Status of the Convention

27. The Working Party was informed that Belarus became the second contracting party to the Convention after Chad, having signed (23 September 2022) and ratified (21 August 2023) the Convention.

28. The Working Party took note that, in accordance with article 22(1), this Convention shall enter into force three months after the date on which five States have deposited their instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval, or accession. Therefore, the convention is not yet into force.

VIII. Customs Conventions on the Temporary Importation of Private Road Vehicles (1954) and Commercial Road Vehicles (1956) (agenda item 7)

A. Status of the Conventions

29. The Working Party was informed that the status 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 have eighty and twenty-six contracting parties, respectively. More detailed information on this issue as well as on depositary notifications is available on the WP.30 website.⁵

B. Issues in the application of the Conventions

30. The Working Party recalled that, at its last session, it was briefed about the latest developments in the context of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between ECE and the Alliance Internationale de Tourisme / Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (AIT/FIA) on the revitalization and digitalization of the two Conventions and, in particular, the development of an eCPD (Carnet de Passage en Douane) system.

31. The Working Party was informed that, the first session of the ad hoc informal group of experts on digitalization of CPD took place on 14 December 2023. The Working Party considered document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2024/5, that included the report of the first session, summarizing the deliberations that took place. The experts that had attended the meeting, among other issues, requested transforming the ad hoc informal group of experts on digitalization of CPDs to a formal group of experts, ensuring sessions with interpretation and translated documentation in the three ECE official languages. Against this background, the Working Party requested the secretariat to prepare a document for its next session that includes the draft Terms of Reference (ToR) of such a formal group of experts, for consideration and possible adoption by the Working Party. The Working Party also took note that such a group of experts could start its official sessions after having its ToR eventually endorsed by the Inland Transport Committee and the executive committee (ExCOM) of ECE. The Working Party was informed that the next online session of the ad hoc informal group of experts will take place in April 2024, and the relevant documentation requested by the experts will be disseminated during the first week of March, by e-mail. The experts will be informed in due time by the secretariat on the exact day of group's second session.

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

IX. Introduction of new technologies in rail, road, road-based mobility, inland waterway, logistics and intermodal transport until 2030 (agenda item 8)

32. The Working Party welcomed Mrs. H. Becha, UN/CEFACT Vice Chair and took note of her presentation on the Multi-Modal Transport Reference Data Model (MMT-RDM). In the presentation, Mrs. Becha touched upon that, in the current era of real-time supply chain collaboration and real-time standard data exchange structures using cloud-based services, a more flexible and interoperable way of standardizing business semantics is required for information exchange throughout supply chains. The development by the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) of Reference Data Models (RDMs) paves the way for the required new approach.

33. The MMT reference data model is based on the UN/CEFACT Core Component Library (CCL), which brings together the data exchange requirements of international multimodal transport processes including related trade, insurance, customs and other regulatory documentary requirements, based on the integration of trade facilitation tools and e-Business best practices. The UN/CEFACT MMT Reference Data Model is a subset of the Buy/Ship/Pay Reference Data Model and a sister to the Supply Chain Reference Data Model (SCRDM), as well as to the future Cross Border Management Reference Data Model (CBMRDM).

34. The secretariat informed the Working Party that in the framework of eTIR, the UN/CEFACT code lists are already used. In addition, the secretariat suggested to the Working Party that, cooperation could be expanded on the work on digitalization of CPDs and possibly on the Certificates of Approval.

35. The Working Party suggested some topics that could be addressed under this agenda item at its future sessions, such as the usage of electronic seals on international transports, as well as possible usage of the container security devices, and the use of artificial intelligence on risk analysis.

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

36. There were no interventions under this agenda item by any regional economic commission, or customs union as well as by other organizations. The Working Party requested the secretariat to prepare this agenda item for its next sessions without mentioning any specific organization or countries in order to have a more flexible approach.

XI. Other business (agenda item 10)

A. Dates of the next session

37. The Working Party tentatively decided to hold the 166th session on 4 and 7 (p.m.) June 2024, subject to potential adjustments due to the ongoing United Nations liquidity crisis.

B. Restriction on the distribution of documents

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

C. List of decisions

39. The list of adopted decisions is attached as annex to the final report.

XII. Adoption of the report (agenda item 11)

40. In accordance with established practice, the Working Party adopted the report on its 165th session on the basis of a draft prepared by the secretariat.

Annex

List of decisions taken at the 165th session of the Working Party

<i>Reference in final report (para.)</i>	<i>Short description of decision</i>	<i>Actor</i>	<i>Deadline</i>
2	The Working Party adopted the provisional agenda, as prepared by the secretariat, in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/329.	WP.30	
8	The Working Party requested the secretariat to prepare a document for its next session for consideration and approval as the Working Party's contribution to the ITC strategy	Secretariat	Next session
10	The Working Party requested the secretariat to prepare a revised version of the document on the future strategy and action plan of the working party.	Secretariat	Next session
24	The Working Party requested the secretariat to re-circulate the survey on Annex 8 to the Harmonization Convention to contracting parties that have not responded so far with a new deadline until end of March for reply. In parallel, the Working Party advised the secretariat to directly contact the delegates from those contracting parties that have not responded so far to ensure the survey is indeed received. The secretariat, depending on the results of these efforts, will prepare a revision of document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2024/4 for the next session of the Working Party for its consideration.	Secretariat	End of March / next session
25	The working party requested the secretariat to prepare a document for the next session of the working party for its consideration on the possible use of SITCIN indicators to evaluate the implementation of the harmonization convention.	Secretariat	Next session
31	The working party requested the secretariat to prepare a document for its next session including the draft terms of reference of a group of experts on eCPDs for consideration and possible adoption by the Working Party.	Secretariat	Next session