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**Customs Convention on the International Transport of
Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets (TIR Convention, 1975):
Revision of the Convention:
Preparation of Phase III of the TIR revision process**

Report of the Informal Ad hoc Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure on its twenty-ninth session*

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* This document was submitted late due to resource constraint.

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I. Attendance

1. The Informal Ad hoc Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure (further referred to as “the Expert Group”) held its twenty-ninth session on 14 and 15 November 2018 in Rotterdam, at the kind invitation of the Dutch customs administration.
2. The session was attended by experts from Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Serbia, Sweden and Turkey. Experts from the European Commission (EC) and the International Road Transport Union (IRU) also attended the session.
3. At the start of the session, Mr. P. van den Beukel (Manager for Policy and Enforcement), delivered an opening statement on behalf of Dutch customs, welcoming the delegates to the offices of the General Customs Directorate in Rotterdam. With reference to the important role Dutch customs fulfil in the global flow of goods, the recent accession of various countries to the TIR Convention as well as the challenges linked to the upcoming Brexit (whatever form or shape it would take), he mentioned the continued interest of Dutch customs for the TIR procedure and, in particular the efforts to have it computerized, which could count on full support from Dutch customs.

II. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 6 (2018)

4. The Expert Group adopted its provisional agenda as contained in Informal document GE.1 No. 6 (2018).

III. New information and communication technology developments in the TIR system (agenda item 2)

5. The Expert Group recalled a presentation at its previous session by a representative from the EC on the possible use of the blockchain technology for the Excise Movement and Control System (EMCS) of the European Union and in a project to digitalize the Carnet Admission Temporaire/Temporary Admission (eATA) and noted that the expert in charge of those projects would inform the Expert Group about the results of the projects’ proof of concept and, possibly, make a demonstration at one of its future session.
6. The Expert Group regretted the absence of an expert who could present how eTIR could possibly benefit from transboundary trusted environments, a technology that the Russian Federation has been advocating as an alternative to the currently envisaged mutual recognition of holder authentication.

IV. eTIR pilot projects (agenda item 3)

Projects related to the Memorandum of Understanding between ECE and IRU

7. The Expert Group noted that eTIR transports continued to be carried out between Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Turkey, and that efforts were undertaken by both countries to extend the scope of the project to include more transport companies and more customs offices. It took note that the Turkish customs administration had sent a proposal to the Iranian

customs administration to conclude a bilateral agreement, based on the provisions of draft Annex 11, which would allow the expansion of the scope of the project to all customs offices and all TIR Carnet holders. The Expert group also noted that the electronic exchange of data started during the eTIR pilot project between Georgia and Turkey was ongoing.

8. The Expert Group also noted that ECE and IRU continued to work towards launching eTIR pilot projects with new countries. With regard to the intermodal eTIR project between Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, the customs administrations of all countries concerned have confirmed their willingness to take part in the project and have accepted the standard conditions for computerization projects to be launched in the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding signed by ECE and IRU on 6 October 2017. The Working Party also took note that the customs administrations of Azerbaijan and Iran (Islamic Republic of) had expressed an interest to launch an eTIR project along the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). The representative of the EC indicated that they would support individual European Union Member states taking part in eTIR projects but that the EC was not yet at a stage where they could engage in a European Union-wide project.

9. The Expert Group welcomed a proposal to annex to this report the main principles for eTIR projects launched in the framework of the ECE-IRU Memorandum of Understanding and its Contribution Agreement, being the document sent to customs administrations in reply to their letters of intent to take part in an eTIR project.

V. Annex 11 of the TIR Convention (agenda item 4)

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2018/16

10. The secretariat informed the Expert Group about the progress made by WP.30 at its 150th session in discussing the text of draft Annex 11 in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2018/16. The Expert Group took note of changes proposed by the secretariat as an outcome of that session and reflected in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2019/3-ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/2019/7 for discussion at the 151st session of the Working Party. GE.1 recommended the secretariat to substitute the term “advance cargo information” in Article 1 (b) of Annex 11 by “advance TIR data” (see also paragraph 19 of this report) and to amend the eTIR specifications accordingly if the Working Party would agree with this recommendation. Furthermore, it recommended to amend the Explanatory Note to Article 3, paragraph 2 to include a reference to a longer deadline for customs or economic unions to connect to the eTIR international system.

VI. eTIR conceptual, functional and technical documentation (agenda item 5)

A. Contributions by the network of eTIR focal points

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 7 (2018)

11. The Expert Group took note of Informal document GE.1 No. 7 (2018) and, in particular, that thirty-six countries have nominated one or more eTIR focal points.¹ The representatives of Denmark and Italy informed the Expert Group that they will represent their countries in the network eTIR focal points.

¹ The list of eTIR focal points is on the eTIR web site: www.unece.org/trans/bcf/eTIR/focals.html

B. eTIR conceptual, functional and technical documentation

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 5, 6, 7 and 8 (2017), Informal document GE.1 No. 9 (2018)

12. The Expert Group welcomed Informal document GE.1 No. 8 (2018) which contains all the amendments it had already approved, and which will be included in the next version of the eTIR specifications (the latest published version -4.2- is contained in Informal documents GE.1 No. 5, 6, 7 and 8 (2017)).

13. The Expert Group requested the secretariat to consider whether the inclusion of activity diagrams in the functional specifications would further improve them. Furthermore, it recalled that if Annex 11 and the relevant changes to the TIR Convention would be adopted in February 2019, all eTIR specifications, including the not yet completed functional specifications, would have to be finalized, ideally sufficiently ahead of the entry into force of Annex 11 (June 2020 in the case at hand). The Expert Group requested the secretariat to prepare, for its next session, a proposal on the alignment of the finalization of Annex 11 and the eTIR specifications.

14. Finally, the Expert Group mandated the secretariat to prepare a survey and circulate it among TIR and eTIR focal points to assess:

- the readiness of TIR contracting parties to connect to the eTIR international system once Annex 11 and the eTIR specifications have been adopted, and
- the intention of TIR contracting parties not to accept Annex 11 and, if so, for which reason.

15. Furthermore, the Group decided that the deadline for replying to the survey shall be set to 31 January 2019 and requested the secretariat to present preliminary results to WP.30 at its February 2019 session and the final results at the 30th session of the Expert Group.

C. Amendments

Documentation: Informal document GE.1 No. 9 (2018)

16. The Expert Group considered the various amendment proposals and considerations contained in Informal documents GE.1 No. 9 (2018) and took the following decisions:

1. Accompanying document and fallback procedure

17. The Expert Group welcomed a demonstration of the Custom Portal developed by the IRU and extensively discussed the revised Chapter 1.2 of the eTIR Concepts document. The Expert Group agreed with the proposed fallback procedure and, consequently, mandated the secretariat to update the fallback part of the use case descriptions contained in Chapter 3 of the document. Furthermore, the Expert Group proposed the inclusion of activity diagrams or tables to further clarify the fallback procedure. Finally, acknowledging the difficulty to start an electronic fallback procedure if the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) system of the office of departure would be unavailable, the Expert Group considered the possibility that the guarantee chain could issue to transport companies using eTIR a TIR Carnet with a very long validity, or no validity date, which could be used if an eTIR transport could not be started for technical reasons at the office of departure.

2. Reconciliation procedure

18. The Expert Group discussed the three levels of reconciliation foreseen by the European Union New Computerized Transit System (NCTS): (1) NCTS allows for resending

messages; (2) direct contact (email or phone) with focal points from other administrations is used in cases where messages cannot be resent by the system (this network of focal points is also used to authorize the start of a procedure under fallback); (3) the European Union help desk assists in solving systemic issues.

19. The Expert Group welcomed the offer by the representative of the EC to submit, for its next session, a copy of the guidelines that set the obligations of the European Union network of focal points.

3. Pointers

20. The Expert Group welcomed a presentation by the Netherlands and discussed the various options available in the World Customs Organization (WCO) data model to use pointers to indicate the position of errors or amendments in messages. The Expert Group was of the view that the XPath standard was the best option, that eTIR messages should be amended accordingly and that the appropriate Data Maintenance Requests (DMRs) should be submitted to WCO.

4. Advance cargo information

21. Considering the discussions which took place at WP.30 on the matter, the Expert Group proposed the term “advance TIR data” as a possible replacement for the term “advance cargo information”.

5. Amended list of messages

22. The Expert Group agreed to update Table 1.2 in Chapter 2.4.2 of the eTIR Concepts document and mandated the secretariat to include this change in the list of approved amendments to the eTIR specifications.

VII. Other business (agenda item 6)

A. World Customs Organization activities

23. The Expert Group took note that at the May 2018 meeting of the Data Maintenance Projects Team (DMPT) there had been a discussion about the lack of clarity about who is allowed to submit DMRs. At the outset of DMPT meetings, only customs could submit DMRs, but, since version 3.0 of the WCO Data Model, data requirements regarding border crossing, presented by other participating governmental agencies and international organizations, have also been considered and sometimes included in the WCO Data Model, despite the fact that the WCO document explaining the DMR procedure only refers to customs administrations as submitters of DMRs. Therefore, the delegates of the DMPT discussed the need to review the document on the DMR procedure and agreed to request a group of interested members to revise, in collaboration with the WCO secretariat, the DMR procedure, which will be presented at the January 2019 DMPT meeting. To date, delegates from Mexico and Brazil had indicated an interest to participate in the drafting group.

B. Other activities of interest

24. The Expert Group took note that the TIR Administrative Committee (AC.2), at its sixty-eighth session, had decided to provide IRU access to the International TIR Data Bank (ITDB) and that this decision would allow, inter alia, to automatically check the status of TIR Carnet holders in the course of eTIR transports carried out in the framework eTIR (pilot) projects.

C. Date and place of next session

25. The Expert Group was not yet in a position to agree on a date for its next session. It requested the secretariat, in coordination with the Chair, to propose dates, possibly towards the end of May 2019.

Annex

Main principles of TIR computerization projects

I. Objectives

The ECE-IRU TIR Computerization Project (hereinafter referred to as “Project”) aims at:

- Assisting customs administrations to move towards the full computerization of the TIR procedure;
- Using the exchange of electronic messages to conduct TIR transports (hereinafter referred to as eTIR transports) and to avoid the use of the paper TIR carnets;
- Developing new eTIR transports corridors, including for intermodal transports where possible;
- Improving existing systems at ECE, customs administrations and IRU, to meet the Project’s requirements; and
- Proposing amendments to the eTIR conceptual, functional and technical specifications based on the outcome of the Project, if necessary.

II. Principles of the Project

- Provisions of the TIR Convention, 1975 apply;
- The Project consists of exchanging electronically the information related to electronic guarantees (hereinafter referred to as “e-guarantees”) and operations of eTIR transports (hereinafter referred to as eTIR operations) between the stakeholders involved in the Project;
- The Project shall be based on the existing systems at ECE, customs administrations and IRU;
- Customs administrations shall be connected either to IRU-RTS (Real Time SafeTIR) and TIR-EPD (electronic pre-declaration) systems, or to the ECE eTIR international system;
- eTIR transports may be accompanied by a “print-at-home” version of the TIR Carnet that meets the requirements of Annex 1 of the TIR Convention or an another agreed accompanying document;
- The relevant national provisions concerning data protection shall apply;
- The Project may start after ECE and IRU have accepted the formal willingness of at least two (2) customs administrations to participate therein.

III. Stakeholders

The following stakeholders shall take part in the Project:

- Economic Commission for Europe (ECE);
- International Road Transport Union (IRU);
- Customs administrations;

- National associations; and
- TIR Carnet holders.

IV. Technical details of the Project

- IT² systems will be interfaced by means of web services;
- The electronic information shall, to the extent possible, be exchanged in real time;
- All electronic data exchanged in the Project will be replicated between IRU and ECE systems;
- The eTIR international system will receive data on TIR operations by means of the standard eTIR messages, directly from customs administrations or via the IRU systems;
- The IRU systems will receive data on TIR operations, directly from customs administrations (by means of, for example, but not limited to existing TIR-EPD and RTS messages) or via the eTIR international system by means of the standard eTIR messages;
- The IRU systems will send data on issued e-guarantees to the eTIR international system.

V. Roles of the stakeholders

- Roles of ECE:
 - Develop, manage and maintain the eTIR international system;
 - Provide assistance in terms of technical training, testing and implementation of new features;
 - Store eTIR operation data;
 - Make e-guarantees and eTIR operation data available to customs administrations;
 - Transmit eTIR operation data, which are received directly from customs administrations, to the IRU systems;
 - Monitor and compile statistics;
 - Manage the Project in coordination with IRU; and
 - Provide feedback to the TIR governing bodies on the outcome of the Project and if necessary transmit proposals of amendments to the eTIR conceptual, functional and technical specifications.
- Roles of IRU:
 - Develop, manage and maintain IRU systems;
 - Provide assistance in terms of technical training, testing and implementation of new features;
 - Manage e-guarantees;

² Information technologies

- Store eTIR operation data;
- Make e-guarantees and eTIR operation data available to customs administrations;
- Transmit e-guarantees and eTIR operation data, which are received directly from customs administrations, to the ECE eTIR international system;
- Ensure that e-guarantees are included in the existing guarantee contracts between the customs administrations and their national guaranteeing associations;
- Monitor and compile statistics;
- Manage the Project in coordination with ECE; and
- Provide feedback to the TIR governing bodies on the outcome of the Project.
- Role of customs administrations:
 - Specify, develop and test applications that allows the national ICT customs system to interface with the IRU systems and/or the eTIR international system; and
 - Adapt their national procedures and provide technical training to national customs officers.
- Role of national associations:
 - Issue and manage e-guarantees;
 - Participate in the tests required for the Project; and
 - Adapt their procedures and provide the required technical training to their TIR Carnet holders and their staff.
- Role of TIR Carnet holders:
 - Perform eTIR transports;
 - Adapt their procedures; and
 - Participate in the tests required for the Project.
