
Project Working Group on Transport and Border Crossing (PWG-TBC)

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Almaty, Kazakhstan

**Identification, isolation and elimination of major bottlenecks along international
transport routes**

(Item 4.4 of the Agenda)

Note by UNECE/UNESCAP

UNECE activities on border crossing facilitation

1. The strategic importance of Central Asia makes it a unique region, and this is highlighted by its connective potential as a transport hub between two continents. The region also faces unique challenges, where all of the SPECA member countries are landlocked with divergent economic development.
2. Within the SPECA framework, UNESCAP and the UNECE offer capacity-building and other forms of technical assistance that contribute to the efficient and safe operation of regional transport infrastructures and the identification of bottlenecks. The numerous legal instruments administered by UNECE, as well as UNECE analytical, capacity building and technical assistance activities provide a solid basis for the development of harmonized regulatory frameworks for regional transport, particularly in the SPECA region.
3. Introduction, facilitation and development of international transport have always been a major objective of national Governments. However, since vehicles in international transport cross borders, facilitation and development of international transport raise specific problems, the solution of which requires cooperation and agreement among Governments. The objective of this cooperation is to develop coherent international infrastructure corridors and networks, simplified border-crossing and uniform rules and regulations that enable a high level of efficiency, safety and environmental protection in transport.

4. UNECE provides these indispensable intergovernmental cooperation platforms and addresses transport, across five key areas – accessibility, affordability, safety, security and environmental impact. Particularly as concerns SPECA countries, UNECE and its transport sub-programme has a special role to play in realizing these goals, given its long-standing expertise in the region and the availability of a vast array of tools and legal instruments.

International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods

5. Taking the international legal framework as a starting point, it should be mentioned that among the vast array of available legal instruments, several are aimed at the simplification and harmonization of procedures at border crossings and few are most prominent, broadly used in the SPECA region. For example, the International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods¹, generally known as the “Harmonization Convention” forms one of the most broadly accepted legal foundations of coordinated border management. There are 55 Contracting Parties to it, including all SPECA countries except Afghanistan. Contracting Parties are committed to streamlining administrative procedures at borders and reducing the number and duration of controls carried out by customs authorities.

6. On 30 November 2011, a new Annex 9 on rail border crossings to the Harmonization Convention, which introduced key principles for the facilitation of border crossing procedures for international rail freight entered into force. Since that time, the Working Party on Rail Transport (SC.2), in cooperation with WP.30, has undertaken the development of possible mechanisms for monitoring its implementation at the national level. Furthermore, in 2013, the SC.2 secretariat prepared a questionnaire on ways to monitor the implementation of the provisions in the new Annex 9. The questionnaire was distributed to all Contracting Parties and, on the basis of twenty-four received replies; the secretariat prepared an analysis of preliminary results, presented to SC.2 at its sixty-eighth session on 24-26 November 2014 (ECE/TRANS/SC.2/2013/6).

7. In November 2014 in accordance with Annex 8 of the Harmonization Convention, the secretariat launched an online survey concerning the implementation of Annex 8 on road border crossings at the national level. The preliminary analysis of the received answers shows that Contracting Parties are successfully implementing Annex 8, in particular: facilitation of visa issuance; provision of information to all parties involved in transport operations: creating priority

¹ Detailed information on Harmonization Convention, TIR Convention, eTIR project and other customs transit facilitation measures are available on http://www.unece.org/trans/main/itc/itc_doc_2015.html. Please refer to document ECE/TRANS/2015/17.

to urgent consignments (perishable goods and live animals); and improving infrastructure at border crossing points. At the same time there are number of areas where further actions might be required: transfer of control procedures from the border crossings to places of departure and destination of goods; low level of participation in the Agreement Concerning the Adoption of Uniform Conditions for Periodical Technical Inspections of Wheeled Vehicles and the Reciprocal Recognition of such Inspections (1997) and restricted application of International Vehicle Weight Certificates.

8. It should be noted that on 30 September 2014, the first International Vehicle Weight Certificate (IVWC) under Annex 8 to the Harmonization Convention was issued in the Republic of Moldova. Georgia and Ukraine were the first countries to accept the IVWC.

The Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets (TIR Convention)

9. The Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets (TIR Convention), of 1975, sets up the procedure that permits the international carriage of goods by road vehicles or containers from one customs office of departure to a customs office of arrival, through as many countries as necessary, without intermediate check of the goods carried and without the deposit of a financial guarantee at each border. The procedure includes the use of secure vehicles, an international guarantee chain, set up under the Convention, to cover duties and taxes at risk throughout the journey and each vehicle must carry an international customs document (TIR Carnet) which certifies the contents of the cargo as checked at the customs office of departure. All this results in minimum procedures and delays at borders and in lower transport costs, which in turn results in lower export and import costs.

10. UNECE organized a Regional Seminar on the application of the TIR Convention in Dushanbe, in May 2015, with the participation of officials from Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Azerbaijan, among others. Afghanistan has resumed its TIR operations only in 2013. The Seminar demonstrated the increased use of TIR in Central Asia, as well as the readiness of many countries in the region to proceed with computerization of customs procedures and establishment of single window concepts. The main message that emerged from the Seminar is that several countries in the region are now mature in their policy goals and strategic plans to achieve deeper integration and modernization of their trade and transport processes, especially border crossing procedures.

11. This comes at a most opportune moment, as the intergovernmental process towards the computerization of the TIR procedure (eTIR), have gained momentum. In Geneva, TIR

Contracting Parties, including SPECA countries, have concluded the work on the technical and conceptual aspects of eTIR and have established a dedicated expert body to work on developing the appropriate legal framework for computerization. At the same time, Contracting Parties have agreed on launching a pilot project on eTIR that would serve as a basis for identifying any potential drawbacks in the system before complete operationalization of eTIR.

UNESCAP activities on cross-border transport facilitation

12. In order to improve the efficiency of international transport routes and corridors, both transport infrastructure and facilitation issues need to be addressed. Major bottlenecks along international transport routes need to be identified, isolated and eliminated.

13. The UNESCAP secretariat, in cooperation with UNCTAD and UNECA, has been implementing the Development Account Project entitled “Capacity Building for Control Authorities and Transport Operators to Improve Efficiency of Cross-border Transport in Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries” from 2012 to 2014. As support to the SPECA programme, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have been selected for pilot implementation of the project through the Almaty - Bishkek - Dushanbe transport corridor.

14. The project uses the “cluster” concept of UNCTAD to bring stakeholders together to discuss the issues of cross-border and transit transport and the upgraded UNESCAP Time/Cost-Distance Methodology to identify, quantify and isolate bottlenecks to be addressed in transport process. Under the project, the new comprehensive toolkit, namely Cross-border and Transit Transport Process Management Toolkit (CT-TPM Toolkit) was developed and translated into Russian to facilitate its application in Central Asia by countries.

15. In 2013, the CT-TPM Toolkit was applied by clusters with the help of national supporting institutions to identify the existing bottlenecks impeding the smooth operation of the selected transport corridor Almaty - Bishkek - Dushanbe, and series of meetings of clusters at national and corridor levels were held to formulate and adopt cluster action plans on transport facilitation at national level. Three meetings of clusters at corridor level bringing together the members of clusters from all three countries were held in, respectively, Tajikistan (February 2014), Kazakhstan (May 2014) and Kyrgyzstan (August 2014). The meetings discussed and adopted cluster action plan on transport facilitation at corridor level and recommendations for practical implementation of cluster action plans at national and corridor levels.

16. The UNESCAP secretariat is implementing the UNECE-led United Nations Development Account global project “Strengthening the capacities of developing countries and countries with economies in transition to facilitate legitimate border crossing, regional cooperation and integration”, aimed at enhancing the capacities of the participating developing countries to exchange electronic transit information between the Customs authorities. Within the framework of this project the Workshop on Customs-to-Customs Data Exchange was organized in Kyrgyzstan on 7-8 September 2015 to build the capacity in the field of electronic transit data exchange between the Customs authorities of the countries of Central Asia and to discuss the recommendations on the measures for enabling such data exchange.

17. In addition, the UNESCAP secretariat developed three transport facilitation tools to address the operational issues that impede the international road transport. They are briefly described below:

17(a) The Secure Cross-Border Transport Model provides a conceptual and standard basis for design of a cross-border vehicle monitoring system using new technologies, including ICT, satellite positioning and electronic seals. It prescribes standardized components, their interaction and institutional requirements. The application of the system based on the model can secure and facilitate the trade and transport, giving the control authorities the confidence, to open up more international land routes for trade and transport. Further details are available on the ESCAP website at the link: <http://www.unescap.org/resources/secure-cross-border-transport-model>

17(b) The Efficient Cross-Border Transport Models provide practical solutions to the challenges in cross-border operations of land transport. With recent developments of trucking industry and technologies, the models use prime commercial cooperation to overcome institutional barriers and conflicts of commercial interests in international land transport. More details on the model are available at: <http://www.unescap.org/resources/efficient-cross-border-transport-models>

17(c) The Model on Integrated Control at Border Crossing provides more efficient information flow and sharing among various agencies at border crossings by application of modern technologies (including ICT as a centre) and streamlined process of documentation and procedures, while maintaining adequate controls. It promotes optimized use of modern equipment by different agencies. Further details are available at: <http://www.unescap.org/resources/model-integrated-controls-border-crossings>.

The Project Working Group may wish to:

- Support and encourage Member countries to actively participate in the abovementioned activities of the UNECE secretariat, as far as border crossing facilitation is concerned;
- Invite SPECA countries to think about introducing new technologies in the implementation of the UN Conventions by joining those electronically processed (Additional Protocol to CMR (e-CMR), e-TIR);
- Encourage the relevant government authorities of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to support the practical implementation of action plans on transport facilitation at both national and corridor levels;
- Consider future application of the CT-TPM Toolkit in other SPECA countries for identification of operational barriers and bottlenecks and elaboration of solutions to improve the performance of the transport corridors in SPECA region;
- Encourage the SPECA countries to apply the UNESCAP transport facilitation tools.