

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

STATE CUSTOMS COMMITTEE OF THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

Seminar on Single Window and Data Harmonization in Central Asia

5-7 May 2008

Baku, Azerbaijan

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Seminar on Single Window and Data Harmonization in Central Asia took place in Baku, Azerbaijan, on 5-7 May 2008. The Seminar was jointly organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) under the United Nations Development Account project (5<sup>th</sup> Tranche), entitled Capacity Building in Support of Trade Integration with Emphasis on Integrated Trade Information Flow Management and Trade Facilitation in Central Asia.
2. The Seminar was attended by 36 participants, representing the customs agencies, ministries responsible for trade, Single Window operators and academia from the countries of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies in Central Asia (SPECA): Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as representatives and experts from Hong Kong (China), Sri Lanka, Sweden, Thailand, and Turkey. The Seminar was opened by Mr. Aydin Aliyev, Chairman, State Customs Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, followed by Mr. A. Dayaratna Silva, Acting Director of Department of Commerce, Head, Regional Economic Cooperation Division, Ministry of Export Development and International Trade, Sri Lanka, and by Mr. Xuan Zengpei, Director, Trade and Investment Division, ESCAP. In six sessions, the Seminar addresses issues related to (a) the development, establishment and operation of a Single Window for international trade, (b) international standards and tools for simplifying and harmonizing trade data for the use of a Single Window, (c) success stories in implementing and operating Single Window facilities in Asia and Europe. Participants shared information about their stages in conceptualizing and developing a Single Window as well as experiences, challenges and lessons learned in its implementation and operation. The Seminar also included a round table, in which an idea of establishing a regional experiences-sharing platform, the Asia-Pacific forum for efficient trade, was presented, and needs and priorities for technical assistance and capacity building support in establishing a Single Window were discussed.

3. After active and constructive deliberations, the Seminar participants reached the following conclusions and recommendations:

- (i) The Seminar stressed the importance of trade facilitation, and especially a Single Window for international trade, in reducing trade transaction costs, in particular customs and transit procedures for landlocked and transit developing countries, with a view of their geographical disadvantage and future potential.
- (ii) The Seminar noted that establishing and operating a Single Window for international trade is a complex issue and therefore it requires considering all its components, including business model, ICT system, legal implication and data simplification and harmonization.
- (iii) The Seminar recommended that customs agencies be appointed as lead agencies in the development, implementation and operation of a Single Window, where desirable; otherwise it was also noted that this role could be given to any most powerful governmental body involved in import/export-related procedures that would be able to push for the respective reforms.
- (iv) The Seminar highlighted that coordination and collaboration among all relevant governmental agencies and business needs to be reinforced to achieve successful implementation of a Single Window.
- (v) The Seminar also took note of different stages of countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia in developing a concept of a Single Window. Some countries have already initiated first steps in developing a Single Window (such as Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan), while others are still in the process of studying various concepts and existing best practice examples (Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan).
- (vi) In that connection, the Seminar stressed that drawing on experiences and best practices from successfully operating Single Window systems in Europe and Asia, such as those in Sweden, Thailand and Hong Kong, China, in particular, is crucial for the learning process about the subject in the Caucasian and Central Asian countries, so that the countries can choose the best option matching to their needs.

- (vii) The Seminar recognized the role of international standards and tools for Single Window as well as trade documentation and data harmonization, such as those being developed by ECE, United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) and ESCAP. The Seminar also recommended that ESCAP and ECE examine possibilities of developing a Single Window glossary as a tool that would provide countries at the starting level with the agreed terms, indicators and benchmarks for establishing a Single Window and measuring its impact. In this regard, the need of technical expertise and capacity building support from these UN organizations was seen as indispensable.
  
- (viii) The Seminar also recognized the importance of human capacity development in customs agencies, for which workshops, seminars and training activities organized by ESCAP, ECE and other international and regional agencies, are vital. The topic-specific capacity building activities should be provided continuously to experts in the Caucasian and Central Asian countries at all levels, including technical level.
  
- (ix) In this regard, the Seminar welcomed the establishment of the UN Regional Network of Experts for Paperless Trade in the Asia-Pacific (UN NExT) by ESCAP and ECE, with its mission to provide a technical expertise and peer-to-peer support in the area of Single Window, paperless trading and trade documentation alignment. Some countries pledged their support to the Network by providing their expertise.
  
- (x) The Seminar confirmed that the next seminar under the United Nations Development Account project on trade facilitation in Central Asia (5<sup>th</sup> Tranche), focused on electronic trade documents, will take place in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, at the end of 2008.

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