



## **ORGANIZATION OF THE BLACK SEA ECONOMIC COOPERATION**

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#### **REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE BSEC WORKING GROUP ON CUSTOMS MATTERS INCLUDING THE JOINT OSCE - BSEC WORKSHOP ON BEST PRACTICES AT BORDER CROSSINGS - A TRADE AND TRANSPORT FACILITATION PERSPECTIVE**

**(Istanbul, BSEC Headquarters, 3-4 April 2013)**

1. The Meeting of the BSEC Working Group (WG) on Customs Matters including the Joint OSCE-BSEC Workshop on Best Practices at Border Crossings – A Trade and Transport Facilitation Perspective was held in Istanbul, at the BSEC Headquarters, on 3-4 April 2013.
2. The Meeting was co-chaired by Ms. Hülya ERBAY, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Customs and Trade of the Republic of Turkey; and Mr. Ihor TYMOFIEIEV, Head of Department of the Customs Infrastructure Development and International Cooperation, the State Customs Service of Ukraine.
3. The following Member States of BSEC attended the Meeting:
  - Republic of Albania
  - Republic of Armenia
  - Republic of Azerbaijan
  - Republic of Bulgaria
  - Georgia
  - Hellenic Republic
  - Republic of Moldova
  - Russian Federation
  - Republic of Serbia
  - Republic of Turkey
  - Ukraine
4. The following BSEC Observer attended the Meeting:
  - Arab Republic of Egypt

5. The following BSEC Sectoral Dialogue Partner also participated in the Meeting:

Union of Road Transport Associations in the BSEC Region (BSEC-URTA)

6. The following Guests attended the Meeting:

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

World Customs Organization (WCO)

The List of Participants is attached as Annex I.

7. The Agenda of the Meeting was discussed and adopted. The Agenda, as adopted, is attached as Annex II.

**STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF RESOLUTIONS, DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS RELATED TO CUSTOMS MATTERS**

8. The BSEC PERMIS representative informed on the state of implementation of the Resolutions, Decisions and Recommendations of the 16<sup>th</sup> BSEC Council (Belgrade, 19 April 2007), 24<sup>th</sup> BSEC Council (Bucharest, 8 June 2011), 26<sup>th</sup> BSEC Council (Belgrade, 11 June 2012), and 27<sup>th</sup> BSEC Council (Istanbul, 15 December 2012) related to customs matters.

9. The WG took note of the information provided by BSEC PERMIS and expressed its commitment to take appropriate measures in order to secure proper implementation of the Resolutions, Decisions and Recommendations of the Council.

10. The WG invited those Member States who have not yet appointed their representatives to the WG, to do so as soon as possible.

11. The Republic of Turkey informed that, as scheduled, the “*Workshop on the Provision, Maintenance and Use of X-ray Technology at Borders and Ports of BSEC Member Countries*” had not been held due to the insufficient participation by the Member States.

12. With this regard, as the Country Coordinator of the WG on Customs Matters, the Republic of Turkey called upon the Member States to participate actively in the events within the framework of the WG. The Republic of Turkey also informed that, upon the request of the Member States, they are willing to organize the mentioned workshop during the period of Turkey’s Country Coordinator term. The preliminary information on the draft agenda of the Workshop is attached as Annex III.

13. The Member States are invited to inform BSEC PERMIS of their participation by 3 May 2013.

14. The WG took note of the proposal by Ukraine, in its capacity as the BSEC Chairman-in-Office, to organize the “*Second Workshop on Cooperation among the Customs Laboratories of the BSEC Member States*” in the last week of May 2013, in Kiev.

15. In this regard, Ukraine will convey the draft agenda and exact time of the event through BSEC PERMIS in due course.

**THE “WAY FORWARD FOR AN ACTION PLAN ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE “ECONOMIC AGENDA TOWARDS AN ENHANCED BSEC PARTNERSHIP”**

16. The Working Group considered the themes approved by the Council in the document “The Way Forward on the Implementation of the BSEC Economic Agenda” on which it should focus on in 2013-2015:

a) Continuing the on-going process of harmonization of customs and border crossing procedures in conformity with the national legislations, with the aim of facilitating the movement of goods and people across national boundaries.

b) Promoting cooperation among the customs authorities of the BSEC Member States in line with the World Customs Organization requirements, including application of innovative technologies in this regard.

c) Exchanging, where and when possible, preliminary information on vehicles and goods crossing the borders of the BSEC Member States.

17. As the Country Coordinator for 2012-2014 of the BSEC WG on Customs Matters, the Republic of Turkey noted that the Action Plan for the period of 2012-2014, as well as the agenda items of the WG on Customs Matters are in conformity with the themes under Goal 2 of the BSEC Economic Agenda.

18. The Member States stressed the importance of the priority themes mentioned above. With this regard they encouraged the ongoing projects which are as follows:

1. The Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation “Simplified Customs Corridor”;
2. The Republic of Turkey and Georgia “Joint Use of Border Gates”;
3. The Republic of Turkey and Ukraine “Preliminary Data Exchange”;
4. The Regional Project SEED “Systematic Electronic Exchange of Data”, and as well as new project proposals elaborated to this end.

19. The Republic of Turkey proposed to incorporate the ongoing projects as well as new potential proposals into the Road Map for their smooth implementation.

20. The Republic of Turkey further stated that there might be a reference in the Road Map to the WCO’s Globally Networked Customs which aims at setting up a standardized way for Customs Authorities to exchange information.

21. The WG took note of the proposal by the Republic of Serbia on the above-mentioned SEED Project as an utility block within the Globally Networked Customs of the WCO.

22. The Co-Chairperson noted that “The Workshop on Best Practices of Border Crossings”, based on the OSCE-UNECE Handbook, held in 3 April 2013 in Istanbul before the WG Meeting, is a concrete step for the implementation of the Goal 2 with the aim to promote cooperation among the Customs Authorities.

23. The WG took note that the workshops scheduled within the framework of the Action Plan will promote the smooth implementation of the Economic Agenda as well.

24. The Co-Chairperson called upon the BSEC Member States to inform BSEC PERMIS on the project proposals within the scope of the priority themes, if any, by 15 May 2013.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BSEC PUBLIC COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

25. The BSEC PERMIS representative informed that the Working Group at its last meeting started the discussion on the ways and means to implement the BSEC Public Communication Strategy. The Working Group was informed on the Decision adopted by the Council for implementation and invited the Member States, the BSEC Working Groups and the BSEC PERMIS to take into consideration the list of proposals which were expressed during the Coordination Meeting of the Communication Officers of the BSEC Member States for the Implementation of the BSEC Public Communication Strategy (Istanbul, 15 October 2012) in order to increase the visibility of BSEC.

26. The Working Group decided on the following key messages regarding its activities and achievements based on the themes on which the Working Group will focus its work in 2013-2015 under Goal 2 - Cooperation among the Customs and Border Crossing Administrations:

- Facilitating the movement of goods and people across national boundaries;
- Strengthening cooperation among customs authorities based on innovative technologies.

27. With this regard, the Republic of Turkey proposed to BSEC PERMIS to consider possibility of organizing a painting competition among elementary school students of the BSEC Member States.

28. The delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan made a proposal to BSEC PERMIS on possibility for elaboration of an e-brochure on the activities of BSEC on annual basis to increase the awareness of BSEC towards the stakeholders.

## **HARMONIZATION AND SIMPLIFICATION OF CUSTOMS PROCEDURES**

29. The Representatives of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Armenia, Republic of Moldova, Republic of Turkey, Ukraine, the BSEC-URTA and UNECE provided information on this issue.

30. The WG discussed the benchmarking for improvement of border crossing procedures, application of ICT for customs operations and exchange of experience on implementation of Single Window concept in BSEC Member States.

31. In this regard, the delegation of Ukraine presented comprehensive information about their ongoing joined customs control projects with the Republic of Moldova and the Republic of Poland, and expressed their readiness to share their experience with the BSEC Member States.

32. The Delegation of the Republic of Moldova also presented information on the finalized project on ICT tool and stated that the said tool is an effective instrument for sharing data and also experience with internal stakeholders on a monthly basis.

33. The Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan pointed out that their country has been implementing Single Window System since 2009 and attached importance to increasing the capacity of a customs organization, using the best ICT tool.

34. The Republic of Turkey informed the WG that Benchmarking Projects were conducted within the Customs 2013 Program including the joint project with participation of Customs Administrations of Finland, Lithuania, Poland and the Republic of Turkey. These projects aim at harmonizing customs procedures among the EU member and/or candidate states.

35. The Republic of Turkey informed that benchmarking tools were used in the frame of the "Project Caravanserai" the pilot of which has been finalized among the Republic of Turkey, Georgia and the Republic of Azerbaijan. In this respect, a checklist, which indicates the criteria to be used during the site visits, was created. Final outcome was reported together with the recommendations.

36. In this context and in conformity with the priorities set out in the implementation of the Economic Agenda, the WG invited the interested Member States until 15 May 2013, to make their proposals to conduct benchmarking exercises indicating partners (not more than two for each Member State).

37. The representative of Ukraine proposed to establish a special ad-hoc group with the task of studying the benchmarking experiences of other countries. The WG agreed to consider this issue at its next meeting.

38. The representative of UNECE informed the Working Group that the UNECE Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport (WP.30) started considerations how to incorporate benchmarking and performance indicators in the text of the Harmonization Convention of 1982. The BSEC Member States were invited to take part in these discussions and to bring their experience and expertise in this area. The next session of WP.30 will take place in Geneva in June 2013. The Working Group took note of this invitation.

39. The WG underlined the increasing role of ICT tools in the border crossing procedures that promote trade facilitation, particularly through developing and improving such a mechanism of simplifying border formalities as single window systems.

40. The WG also took note of the information provided by the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine on national policies and best practices on implementation and operation of the single window system in their respective countries.

41. The representative of the BSEC-URTA made reference to the initiative of launching a new BSEC Pilot Project on early introduction of the UNECE International Vehicle Weight Certificate in the BSEC Region, discussed at the first meeting of the Task Force on Elaboration of a Road Map for the BSEC Pilot Project on the Introduction of the International Vehicle Weight Certificate held in Istanbul, on 11 March 2013. The representative reminded that Task Force invited the Member States to inform BSEC PERMIS formally on their interest to participate in the BSEC Pilot Project till 15 April 2013.

42. The WG agreed to consider the agenda item on harmonization and simplification of customs procedures on a regular basis.

#### **CONSIDERATION OF POSSIBILITY TO ESTABLISH A MECHANISM OF EXCHANGE OF PRELIMINARY INFORMATION AMONG THE INTERESTED CUSTOMS ADMINISTRATIONS OF THE BSEC MEMBER STATES**

43. The Working Group on Customs Matters continued consideration of this issue. In particular, the participants emphasized the importance of exchange of information among the Customs Administrations of the interested Member States and exchanged their views on ways and means to promote this practice within the framework of BSEC.

44. The Republic of Turkey informed the Working Group on its ongoing projects and presented the progress achieved since the last meeting of the Working Group. The Working Group took note of the information on technical preparations that are ongoing between the Customs

Authorities of the Republic of Turkey and Georgia, and on a Pilot Project that will start between the Republic of Turkey and Ukraine.

45. The Delegation of the Republic of Turkey informed the WG on the country's accession to the EU-EFTA Common Transit Convention and the NCTS as of 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2012.

#### **EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON THE OUTCOME OF OSCE-BSEC WORKSHOP ON BEST PRACTICES OF BORDER CROSSINGS, BASED ON THE OSCE-UNECE HANDBOOK**

46. The Joint "OSCE-BSEC Workshop on Best Practices at Border Crossings – a Trade and Transport Facilitation Perspective" was held in Istanbul on 3 April 2013, as a sub-event of the BSEC Working Group on Customs Matters. The Summary Proceedings of the Workshop are attached as Annex IV.

47. The Workshop has been organized in conformity with the priority theme on the on-going process of harmonization of customs and border crossing procedures, defined by the BSEC Economic Agenda.

48. The WG expressed its appreciation to the Republic of Turkey, the Country-Coordinator of the WG, the OSCE, the UNECE and BSEC PERMIS for organizing "The Workshop on Best Practices of Border Crossings", based on the OSCE-UNECE Handbook.

49. The WG decided to submit to the Committee of Senior Officials the following draft decision:

***"The Council:***

- took note of the Summary Proceedings of the "Joint OSCE-BSEC Workshop on Best Practices at Border Crossings – a Trade and Transport Facilitation Perspective" held in Istanbul on 3 April 2013,***
- stressed the importance of the exchange of experiences regarding the best practices at border crossings among the BSEC Member States for continuing the on-going process of harmonization of customs and border crossing procedures; and***
- invited the Member States to consider the ideas and conclusions retained at the Workshop in support of the efforts of the Member States to adjust their border crossing procedures and train their staff to more effectively meet the challenges posed by the current trends of increased trade volume and complexity."***

#### **PARTICIPATION OF THE MEMBER STATES IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS ON CUSTOMS MATTERS**

50. The WG took note of the consolidated table regarding the "Participation of the Member States in the International Conventions on Customs Matters", attached as Annex V.

51. The WG invited the BSEC Member States to inform BSEC PERMIS on changes of their status of participation in the International Conventions on Customs Matters.

#### **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

52. On behalf of the International Road Transport Union (IRU), the representative of the BSEC-URTA made a presentation on the TIR-IT tools and the status of implementation of Green Lanes in the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Serbia, and called upon the BSEC Member States to consider further implementation of these facilitation tools.

**DATE AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

53. The date and venue of the next Meeting of the WG will be communicated to the BSEC Member States through BSEC PERMIS.

**ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE MEETING**

54. The Working Group adopted the present Report for its submission to the Committee of Senior Officials and the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs for their consideration.

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