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**TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE CZECH REPUBLIC
IN THE AREA OF TRADE FACILITATION**

Submitted by the delegation of the Czech Republic*

This report is submitted to the Centre for information and noting.

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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE CZECH REPUBLIC IN THE AREA OF TRADE FACILITATION

Technical assistance in the area of trade facilitation has been provided by the Czech Republic since 1997 in the framework of the project „**Support to Trade Facilitation Measures and UN/EDIFACT Implementation in Selected Eastern European Countries.**“ Funding for this project was first approved by the Czech Government in 1996 and subsequently regularly extended on a yearly basis.

Project objectives

The project aims at attaining the following objectives:

- Bring together representatives of relevant government authorities and institutions, and the business sector in beneficiary countries in order to create an understanding among them of the need for cooperation that is required for the implementation of trade facilitation measures;
- Increase the awareness in the public and private sectors about trade facilitation and electronic business issues;
- Set up national trade facilitation bodies that will be able to provide relevant services both to the national trading community and in relation to foreign partners;
- Foster the exchange of experience and cooperation among trade facilitation bodies in beneficiary countries;
- Prepare promotional and educational materials;
- Establish new contacts for the development of cooperation with beneficiary countries in trade facilitation and trade in general.

Implementation strategy

The project was implemented in cooperation among Czech experts (Czech national trade facilitation body - FITPRO), UN/ECE trade facilitation experts and specialists from the beneficiary countries. During the last 12 months, Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania were among the beneficiaries of the project. Seminars, consultations, and exchange of experience and information targeted at government officials and representatives of the private sector, as well as another international conference on electronic business were organized both in the Czech Republic and in beneficiary countries.

Progress achieved

The progress achieved today with regard to initial objectives of the project can be summarized as follows:

- The objectives of the project have essentially been attained in Ukraine, with the establishment of a National Trade Facilitation Council. The Council consists of representatives of main sectors involved in international trade and has undertaken a work programme in view of preparing the grounds in the country for an effective implementation of facilitation measures. Among the Council's main activities were: (a) development of draft laws on electronic documents and electronic signatures, (b) drawing up of proposals for the facilitation of customs procedures, to be used in the framework of transit corridors in Ukraine.
- Successful cooperation has been established with Belarus. A formal cooperation agreement has been concluded between FITPRO and the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Following a number of awareness-raising activities (such as a seminar on trade facilitation and e-commerce organized in Minsk in February 2000), an inter-ministerial working group on trade facilitation and electronic business was set up in July 2000 under the auspices of the Inter-ministerial Committee for Export Promotion headed by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.
- Contacts have also been made with potential partners in Lithuania and a first workshop for Lithuanian experts from the Ministry of Economy and the Confederation of Lithuanian Industry took place in Prague in January 2001. Consequently, a cooperation agreement was signed between FITPRO and the Confederation of Lithuanian Industry about assistance in the establishment of a trade facilitation body in the country.
- One line of activities under the project consisted of awareness raising with regard to trade facilitation and electronic business. Two international conferences on trade facilitation and electronic business have been organized under the auspices of the project, namely in Odessa, Ukraine (November 1999), and in Minsk (October 2000). The conferences, as well as other awareness-raising activities conducted under the project triggered considerable interest in the topic among both the government officials and business representatives and led to the understanding that trade facilitation should go hand in hand with electronic business.
- Productive relations have developed between UN/CEFACT and the beneficiary countries. Representatives of Belarus and Ukraine participated in UN/CEFACT Plenary session in March 2000, the UN/ECE Forum on electronic commerce for countries in transition in June 2000 and the second international conference on electronic business ET2000 in October 2000 in Minsk, and presented their activities at these important events. In addition to promoting their work to a broader international audience, participation in such events provided them with the opportunity to get acquainted with international dimensions of trade facilitation and current trends in electronic business, to receive first-hand information about UN/CEFACT's activities and projects, and to establish contacts with representatives of other countries responsible for the coordination of trade facilitation at the national level.
- The project also resulted in cooperation between customs, freight forwarding and transport experts from the Czech Republic and Ukraine. A similar initiative was started in relation to Belarus where the focus is proposed to be on customs issues.
- The experience accumulated in the course of project implementation was used as a successful case study during the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) seminar "Capacity Building for Development Cooperation", held in Prague in January 2000.

Conclusions

Tangible achievements of the project in Belarus and Ukraine show that attaining intended objectives is possible, but that due time needs to be allowed to implement the project activities. This is documented by the case of Ukraine which was the first country to join the project, as well as a later example of Belarus where a good start has also taken place. For this reason and following the evaluation of results attained so far in the framework of the project, the Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic decided to submit a proposal to the Government to extend the project for another year. This proposal was also supported by the Executive Secretary of the UN/ECE. In addition to the current beneficiaries it is suggested to extend the scope of the project to additional one or two countries, such as the Republic of Moldova or Kazakhstan.
