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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade, Economic
Globalization and Financing for Development
Tenth session: Liberalization of foreign trade
Cairo, 22-23 November 2015

Information note*1. Background information*

The Technical Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade and Economic Globalization in the Countries of the ESCWA Region was established pursuant to ESCWA resolution 214 (XIX) of 7 May 1997, which was endorsed by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in resolution 1997/12 of 18 July 1997. The objectives of the Committee are: (a) to contribute to the identification of concerns and priorities of ESCWA member States with respect to multilateral trade agreements and negotiations; (b) to monitor developments in global trade negotiations and the establishment of economic and trade blocs, and coordinate the positions of member States in that regard; (c) to cooperate with the ESCWA secretariat in developing programmes to assist the countries of the region in designing appropriate national and regional policies for economic development to enable them to take greater advantage of the trends towards liberalization of foreign trade and economic globalization; (d) to develop joint programmes for training, information exchange and research with the countries of the region, in cooperation with other regional and international organizations.

The Committee held its first session in Abu Dhabi in 1999, the second in Manama in 2001, the third in Muscat in 2003, and its fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh sessions in Beirut in 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011, respectively. It should be noted that, at its fifth session, the Committee decided to modify its name by adding the “financing for development” component. Consequently, the Committee was redesignated as the Technical Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade, Economic Globalization and Financing for Development in the Countries of the ESCWA Region. At the twenty-seventh ESCWA session, held in Beirut from 7 to 10 May 2012, a decision was taken to change the frequency of the Committee’s sessions from biennial to annual, with alternating sessions focusing either on trade or on financing for development. Accordingly, the eighth session of the Committee, held in Amman on 7 and 8 October 2013, addressed financing for development and economic globalization. The ninth session of the Committee, held in Amman on 7 and 8 April 2015, also addressed financing for development. The present session focuses on liberalization of foreign trade.

2. Objectives

The tenth session of the Committee focuses on the completion of the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA) and the establishment of an Arab customs union. Thus the session will comprise a round-table dialogue, in which the Committee members will review the challenges and opportunities associated with the completion of GAFTA and the establishment of an Arab customs union. They will discuss the causes of low intraregional trade and identify policies and mechanisms for lifting the obstacles that still prevent member States from fully benefiting from GAFTA. The Committee will also discuss a number of relevant issues on

the basis of reports prepared by the secretariat including non-tariff measures related to foreign trade liberalization and their economic impact in four Arab countries; the institutional framework required for the establishment, monitoring and evaluation of an Arab customs union; the fiscal challenges facing Arab countries in the establishment of an Arab customs union; and various scenarios for the establishment of such a union.

Furthermore, the session agenda includes a presentation by the League of Arab States on the progress achieved in the negotiations on the establishment of an Arab customs union and will highlight the next moves in the negotiations; and a presentation by the World Trade Organization on the mechanisms for dealing with trade agreements between Arab and foreign States after the establishment of an Arab customs union.

The Committee will also address recurrent items on its agenda, such as the progress made by the ESCWA Economic Development and Integration Division in implementing activities relating to foreign trade within the framework of its programme of work for the biennia 2012-2013 and 2014-2015 and the recommendations adopted at its seventh session, given that it was the last Committee session to address trade-related issues. The Committee will also review the proposed ESCWA work programme for the biennium 2016-2017 in the field of liberalization of foreign trade.

A joint session is planned with the Committee on Transport, whose sixteenth session is taking place concurrently with the tenth session of the Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade, Economic Globalization and Financing for Development, to launch the ESCWA report entitled "Assessing Arab Economic Integration: Towards the Arab Customs Union" and present its main findings and outcomes.

3. Agenda and organization of work

Document E/ESCWA/EDID/2015/IG.2/L.1 contains the provisional agenda and annotations for the tenth session of the Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade, Economic Globalization and Financing for Development. Document E/ESCWA/EDID/2015/IG.2/L.2 sets out the proposed organization of work.

4. Participants

The session meetings will be attended by representatives of ministries of trade in member States. Relevant regional and international organizations have been invited to attend the session as observers. In accordance with the rules of the United Nations, governments participating in the session are responsible for the travel and accommodation expenses of their representatives. Similarly, representatives from regional and international organizations attending the session meetings as observers are expected to cover their participation expenses.

5. Date and venue

The tenth session of the Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade, Economic Globalization and Financing for Development will be held in Cairo, on 22 and 23 November 2015, at Marriott Hotel on Seray Al-Jazeera street. The registration of delegates will commence at 9 a.m. on Sunday, 22 November 2015, and the session will subsequently open at 10 a.m. on the same day. Session meetings will end at 1 p.m. on Monday, 23 November 2015.

6. Language

The proceedings of the tenth session will be in Arabic, with simultaneous interpretation into and from English.

7. Accommodation

Arrangements have been made with Marriott Hotel where the session meetings will take place. However, room reservation is the responsibility of participants. More information on the hotel is available on the following link: www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/caieg-cairo-marriott-hotel-and-omar-khayyam-casino.

8. Entry visas

Participants at the tenth session are advised to check with the Egyptian Embassy in their respective countries of residence whether an entry visa to Egypt is required. Those who do should attach to their visa application a copy of the invitation letter received from ESCWA. Should participants face difficulties, the ESCWA secretariat may assist in obtaining entry visas to Egypt, provided that coloured passport copies containing all necessary information are made available to ESCWA at least 30 days prior to the session.

9. Correspondence

All session-related correspondence should be addressed to the following ESCWA staff members:

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