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Report of the Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport on its 129th session

Contents

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. Attendance	1	3
II. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)	2–3	3
III. Opening statement.....	4	3
IV. Activities of United Nations Economic Commission for Europe bodies and other United Nations organizations of interest to the Working Party (agenda item 2).....	5	4
V. Activities of other organizations and countries of interest to the Working Party (agenda item 3).....	6–7	4
VI. International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods, 1982 (“Harmonization Convention”) (agenda item 4).....	8–11	4
A. Status of the Convention.....	8	4
B. Annex 8 on road transport	9–10	4
C. Harmonization Convention and hinterland connections of seaports.....	11	5
VII. International Convention to Facilitate the Crossing of Frontiers for Passengers and Baggage Carried by Rail, of 10 January 1952 (agenda item 5)	12	5
VIII. Rail transit (agenda item 6)	13	6
IX. Customs Conventions on the Temporary Importation of Private Road Vehicles (1954) and Commercial Road Vehicles (1956) (agenda item 7).....	14	6
X. Other United Nations Economic Commission for Europe legal instruments for border crossing facilitation (agenda item 8).....	15	6

XI.	Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets (TIR Convention, 1975) (agenda item 9)	16–36	6
A.	Status of the Convention.....	16–17	6
B.	Revision of the Convention	18–27	7
1.	Preparation of Phase III of the TIR revision process.....	18–23	7
2.	Amendment proposals for the Convention.....	24–27	8
(a)	Introduction of a new Annex 9, part III	24–26	8
(b)	Amendment proposals to Annex 3	27	8
C.	Application of the Convention.....	28–36	9
1.	TIR-related electronic data interchange systems	28–29	9
2.	Settlement of claims for payments	30	9
3.	TIR Handbook.....	31	9
4.	Application of the TIR Convention in a Customs union with a single Customs territory.....	32	9
5.	Increase in the number of loading and unloading places.....	33–34	10
6.	Other matters	35–36	10
XII.	Prevention of the abuse of Customs transit systems by smugglers (agenda item 10).....	37	11
XIII.	Programme of work and biennial evaluation (agenda item 11).....	38–40	11
XIV.	Other business (agenda item 12).....	41–42	11
A.	Dates of the next session.....	41	11
B.	Restriction on the distribution of documents	42	11
XIV.	Adoption of the report (agenda item 13).....	43	12

I. Attendance

1. The Working Party (WP.30) held its 129th session from 4 to 7 October 2011 in Geneva. The session was attended by representatives of the following countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan. Representatives of the European Union (EU) were also present. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented: the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The following non-governmental organizations were represented: the International Road Transport Union (IRU), the International Touring Alliance and the International Automobile Federation (AIT/FIA), the Bureau International des Conteneurs et du Transport Intermodal (BIC).

II. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)

2. WP.30 adopted the provisional agenda prepared by the secretariat (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/257).

3. The representative of ECO requested that a regular separate agenda item on ECO activities be included in the provisional agenda of future sessions. The secretariat pointed out that ECO can introduce its activities under agenda item 3 "Activities of other organizations and countries of interest to the Working Party", where it is specifically mentioned, together with other intergovernmental organizations like the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the European Commission. As this was the first time that WP.30 was made aware of such a request, the Working Party invited delegations to reconsider this issue for its next session.

III. Opening statement

4. In her opening statement, Ms. Eva Molnar, Director, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Transport Division, recalled recent examples of close cooperation between UNECE and WCO, in particular, the hosting by UNECE of the annual PICARD (Partnership In Customs Academic Research and Development) Conference (Geneva, 14–16 September 2011). She highlighted a number of priorities in the WP.30 work, including making progress on the eTIR project, finding consensus on the amendment proposals to introduce a new Annex 9, part III to the TIR Convention on the authorization of an international organization and ensuring a smooth implementation of the TIR Convention and Harmonization Convention in the Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation. She was also of the view that the Working Party should become a forum where various regional intergovernmental organizations should consult with other countries and the private sector on new draft regional legislation before its adoption and entry into force.

IV. Activities of United Nations Economic Commission for Europe bodies and other United Nations organizations of interest to the Working Party (agenda item 2)

5. The Working Party was informed about the ongoing review of the UNECE 2005 reform conducted by the Executive Committee. As part of the review process, the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) prepared a briefing note on transport activities as well as a list of its latest achievements and expected future activities of ITC subsidiary bodies. Following consultations with the Chairs of the ITC bodies and ITC Bureau, these documents will be submitted to EXCOM for consideration.

V. Activities of other organizations and countries of interest to the Working Party (agenda item 3)

6. The Working Party was informed that the WCO and UNECE secretariats had transmitted to BIC a communication raising a number of questions on the possible introduction of a reference to ISO standard 1496 in the text of both the Customs Convention on Containers, 1972 and the TIR Convention, 1975. This issue will be pursued further at the Container Convention Administrative Committee on 1 and 2 December 2011.

7. WP.30 took note of the final report of the ECO-IRU 2010 transit caravan (Informal document No.9 (2011)) and was extensively briefed by the representative of ECO on the recent and planned activities of his organization in the area of border crossing facilitation, with the objective to facilitate road and rail transit in the whole ECO region by means of developing transport corridors and implementing the ECO Transport and Trade Facilitation Agreement (TTFA), and the TIR Convention and Harmonization Convention. The Working Party noted the importance of the TIR procedure for the ECO region and ongoing activities aimed at revitalizing the TIR system in Afghanistan and the accession of Pakistan to the TIR Convention. All countries, UNECE, IRU and other relevant international organizations were invited to enhance their cooperation with ECO.

VI. International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods, 1982 (“Harmonization Convention”) (agenda item 4)

A. Status of the Convention

8. The Working Party noted that the Secretary-General of the United Nations, acting in his capacity as depositary, has issued Depositary Notification C.N.534.2011.TREATIES-1 of 1 September 2011, communicating the entry into force on 30 November 2011 of a new Annex 9 on rail border crossing in the Harmonization Convention.

B. Annex 8 on road transport

9. The delegations of Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation informed the Working Party about various activities conducted at the national level with the aim to facilitate road transport, including the delegation to Customs of the functions of other border control authorities, modernization of border crossing points, non-intrusive X-ray scanning, dynamic weighing operations and online preliminary declarations for the

purposes of risk analysis. In particular, the delegation of Belarus informed WP.30 about the start, on 1 October 2011, of the application of the TIR electronic pre-declaration (TIR-EPD) system to preliminarily inform the Belarusian Customs authorities about goods imported under the TIR procedure.

10. The Working Party noted that the preparation of the OSCE¹-UNECE Handbook on best practices at border crossings was at the final stage. Some delegations wondered if there was still a possibility of contributing to the Handbook by providing national examples of best practice. The secretariat will liaise with OSCE to see if such contributions could still be accepted.

C. Harmonization Convention and hinterland connections of seaports

11. The Working Party was informed that, in July 2011, the secretariat transmitted to various international organizations a standard letter (Informal document No. 7 (2011)) soliciting their views on the possible preparation of a new annex to the Harmonization Convention on border crossing procedures at seaports. So far, the following stakeholders have responded: International Maritime Organization (IMO), IRU, International Union of Railways (UIC), Committee of the Organization for Cooperation between Railways (OSJD), Intergovernmental Organisation for International Carriage by Rail (OTIF), WCO and the European Commission. A majority of respondents indicated that they generally advocate the idea of preparing a new annex on border procedures at seaports, while pointing out that their participation in this activity could only be limited, due to lack of resources and, for some, expertise in the field. The secretariat felt that the industry concerned should become a driving force for drafting a new annex, as it had been the case for Annexes 8 and 9 to the Convention. WP.30 suggested that port authorities at big seaports be contacted for that purpose.

VII. International Convention to Facilitate the Crossing of Frontiers for Passengers and Baggage carried by Rail, of 10 January 1952 (agenda item 5)

12. WP.30 took note of document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2011/13 and Corrigendum 1 thereto, prepared by the secretariat and containing a summary of replies received by the secretariat on a draft text of Protocol to the International Convention to Facilitate the Crossing of Frontiers for Passengers and Baggage carried by Rail, of 10 January 1952, introducing amendment provisions to the text of this Convention. Out of the ten Contracting Parties to this Convention, six had sent replies. Although not conclusive, the Working Party agreed that, on the basis of the replies received, it seemed premature to assume that the Protocol in its current wording was acceptable for a sufficient number of Parties in order to request the Secretary-General of the United Nations to issue a depositary notification, officially informing Parties of the text of the Protocol. In order to seek a solution on how to continue discussing the issue, the Working Party requested the secretariat to contact OSJD and OTIF, informing them of the status quo which has been attained, viz. that Contracting Parties to the 1952 Rail Convention seem to agree to the principle that the Convention should be extended to include specific amendment clauses, but cannot agree on the exact format before having obtained, from interested parties such as OSJD and OTIF, more information on exactly which kind of substantial proposals would contribute to bringing the Convention in line with twenty-first century rail transport

¹ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

requirements. The Working Party decided to revert to this issue when more information from OSJD and OTIF would have been obtained.

VIII. Rail transit (agenda item 6)

13. WP.30 noted that no new countries had acceded to the Convention on International Customs Transit Procedures for the Carriage of Goods by Rail under Cover of Agreement on International Goods Transport by Rail (SMGS) Consignment Note.

IX. Customs Conventions on the Temporary Importation of Private Road Vehicles (1954) and Commercial Road Vehicles (1956) (agenda item 7)

14. WP.30 adopted the comments and best practices for the application of the 1956 Convention, as contained in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2011/8 by AIT/FIA.

X. Other United Nations Economic Commission for Europe legal instruments on border crossing facilitation (agenda item 8)

15. The Working Party invited delegations to raise, under this agenda item, any issues which might arise in the implementation of other UNECE Conventions on border crossing facilitation.

XI. Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets (TIR Convention, 1975) (agenda item 9)

A. Status of the Convention

16. The Working Party was informed that on 13 June 2011 (reissued for technical reasons on 3 August 2011), the Secretary General of the United Nations had issued Depository Notification C.N.321.2011.TREATIES-1, regarding proposals to amend Annex 6 and Annex 9, Part I, as contained in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2010/3/Rev.1–ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/2010/4/Rev.1 and Corrigendum 1 (English only) and Corrigendum 2 (French only) thereto. These amendments will enter into force on 1 January 2012, considering that no objections seemed to have been received by the Secretary General by 1 October 2011. Furthermore, the Working Party was informed of the issuance on 13 June 2011 (reissued for technical reasons on 2 August 2011) of Depository Notification C.N.326.2011.TREATIES-2, regarding proposals to amend Articles 1, 8, 10, 11 and Annex 6 of the Convention, as contained in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/AC.2/2010/3/Rev.1 and Corrigendum 1 (English only) thereto. These proposals will enter into force on 13 September 2012, unless, by 13 June 2012 any Contracting Party to the Convention has notified the Secretary-General of the United Nations of its objection.

17. IRU informed WP.30 that, on 1 October 2011, a guarantee agreement was signed between the Afghanistan Customs and the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and

Industry (ACCI). As a result, the application of the TIR procedure in the country is expected to restart within next few months.

B. Revision of the Convention

1. Preparation of Phase III of the TIR revision process

Use of new technologies

18. The Working Party took note of the outcome of the nineteenth session of the Informal Ad hoc Expert Group on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure (GE.1) that took place in Belgrade on 13–14 September 2011 at the kind invitation of Serbian Customs Administration. It noted, in particular, the development of Extended Markup Language (XML) Schemas that concluded the work of GE.1 on Chapter 4 of the eTIR Reference Model. The report of the nineteenth session of GE.1 will be submitted to WP.30 for endorsement at its next session.

19. The Working Party reaffirmed the importance of computerization of the TIR procedure. Some delegations stressed the need to proceed step-by-step in order to avoid a possible disruption of the TIR procedure in less technically developed countries. WP.30 took note that a progressive introduction of the eTIR system was already foreseen in the eTIR Reference Model, thus allowing countries to join a computerized system as soon as they are ready. The Working Party noted that GE.1 had made sure that not only all functionalities provided in the current paper-based TIR system would be available in the eTIR system, but also the use of modern technologies to bring numerous additional benefits to the Customs and transport industry, as identified in the eTIR Reference Model. The secretariat also recalled that the concepts contained in version 3.0 of the eTIR Reference Model (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2011/4) were the very same that had already been approved in version 2.0. WP.30 accepted version 3.0 of the eTIR Reference Model as a basis for its work, without prejudice to the outcome of its deliberations on the whole eTIR project.

20. The Working Party reconsidered the amendment proposal contained in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2011/5 and decided to follow the recommendation of GE.1 not to amend the guarantee validation procedure described in the eTIR Reference Model.

21. Some delegations stressed that the eTIR project has multiple aspects and that the acceptance of version 3.0 of the eTIR Reference Model only addresses the conceptual and technical aspects of the project, leaving aside its legal, administrative and financial dimensions. The importance of capacity-building and transfer of technology was also underlined. Therefore, these delegations were of the view that, once those issues had been addressed, WP.30 would need to reconsider the eTIR Reference Model. Some other delegations did not agree with this view and highlighted the considerable efforts and time spent by the dedicated experts in GE.1 developing the eTIR Reference Model, in line with the mandates of the Working Party. They pointed out the necessity for rapid progress on eTIR and felt that less technologically advanced countries should neither be left aside nor block the computerization. Countries having additional technical proposals were invited to bring those before GE.1 for consideration. In this context, WP.30 reiterated its standing invitation to all countries to participate in the work of GE.1 and contribute to the eTIR project by nominating an eTIR focal point.

22. The Working Party took note of document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2011/9 with a brief summary of the eTIR project and recalled that this document was produced for information purposes only and the eTIR Reference Model remains the only reference document of the eTIR project.

23. WP.30 confirmed that the legal, administrative and financial dimensions of the project will also need to be addressed before the eTIR project is launched. The Working Party took note that GE.1 had already started working on the financial aspects of the eTIR project. It noted that various countries and organizations had shared financial information on similar projects and that, with the help of the Turkish Customs administration, a first assessment of the development and maintenance costs of the eTIR international system had been carried out. The secretariat will prepare a cost-benefit analysis for the next session of GE.1, taking into account all the inputs already received as well as those that will be provided before 30 November 2011. In line with its mandate, GE.1 will carefully review the cost-benefit analysis before submitting to the Working Party for consideration.

2. Amendment proposals for the Convention

(a) Introduction of a new Annex 9, part III

24. Having recalled its previous discussions on the proposed new Annex 9, part III (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/256, paras. 26 and 27), the Working Party considered a revised secretariat document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2010/4/Rev.3, containing various alternatives for items (o), (p) and (q) on audit requirements for an authorized international organization, as well as some further proposals on the text. The delegation of the Russian Federation pointed out that its contribution to item (p) is not properly reflected in the above document and should be corrected.

25. WP.30 noted that, as before, four delegations were not in a position to agree to any available option for (o), (p) and (q) and reiterated their arguments and request to delete these items, while some other delegations continued to argue in favour of keeping these provisions, in one form or another. To make progress, the Working Party took a decision to approve the amendment proposals, as contained in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2010/4/Rev.3, without items (o), (p) and (q), and to submit these proposals to the TIR Administrative Committee for consideration and, possibly, adoption. At the same time, the Working Party decided to continue its discussions on the three outstanding items. To advance on this issue before the next session, WP.30 invited the Chair to conduct informal consultations among the countries concerned.

26. The secretariat reminded WP.30 that the introduction of audit clauses would be in line with the request by the Economic Commission for Europe at its sixty-fourth session in March 2011 (see ECE/TRANS/WP.30/256, para. 5). The secretariat stated that it would accept any decision taken by Contracting Parties with regard to the inclusion or deletion of audit clauses (o), (p) and (q), but pointed out that good governance and transparency in the TIR system would be impossible to ensure without the proper monitoring tools provided for in the underlying audit provisions. Without security provided by audit clauses, the UNECE secretariat cannot accept any responsibility for the risk, at some point in time, of any irregularity in the implementation of the authorization. This responsibility will remain with Contracting Parties.

(b) Amendment proposals to Annex 3

27. The secretariat reported that, due to resource constraints, it had not been in a position to liaise with the European Commission or technical experts in order to prepare a complete code list to report defects in load compartments of vehicles used for the TIR procedure, as requested by the Working Party (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/256, para. 28). WP.30 took note of the confirmation by the secretariat that it would prepare the requested example of best practice for consideration by the TIR Administrative Committee.

C. Application of the Convention

1. TIR-related electronic data interchange systems

28. The Working Party was informed by IRU about the functioning of the IRU SafeTIR system. From 1 January to 31 August 2011, IRU had received 2,000,025 SafeTIR messages with an average transmission delay of 5.6 days. Seventy-eight per cent of messages had been transmitted in real-time (within 24 hours). The Customs administrations of Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Georgia, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia and Ukraine transmitted data in real-time. In the same period, IRU had issued 6,329 reconciliation requests and had received replies to 3,240 (41 per cent) of them with an average delay of 36 days. In addition, a total number of 1,925,527 requests were made by Customs authorities to check the status of TIR Carnets in the IRU Real-Time SafeTIR database. During the same period, 44,007 were lodged, free of charge, to the Customs authorities of 15 countries through the TIR-EPD system.

29. The delegations of Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Latvia, Lithuania and Uzbekistan reported on the achievements in the implementation of TIR-EPD and SafeTIR in their countries. In particular, the State Customs Committee of Uzbekistan, the national guaranteeing association and IRU had signed MoU on the implementation of Real-Time SafeTIR and TIR-EPD, which are now being introduced step-by-step.

2. Settlement of claims for payments

30. The Working Party was informed by IRU of the current situation on the settlement of claims for payments made by Customs authorities against national guaranteeing associations. From 1 January to 31 August 2011, IRU received 1,931 pre-notifications and 628 notifications (from all Contracting Parties) as well as 118 payment requests. The number of pending payment requests as of 31 August 2011 amounted to 6,243. In the same period, 67 payment requests had been paid and 382 had been closed without payment. WP.30 also took note that the TIR Executive Board (TIRExB) was conducting an online survey of Customs administrations regarding Customs claims raised in 2007–2010.

3. TIR Handbook

31. The Working Party recalled that the 2010 version of the TIR Handbook was available in all six United Nations languages, both electronically and in hard copies.

4. Application of the TIR Convention in a Customs union with a single Customs territory

32. WP.30 noted that the member States of the Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation had basically approved a draft intergovernmental agreement on the functioning of the TIR procedure in the Customs Union, which inter alia provides the following:

- only one pair of vouchers No. 1/No. 2 of a TIR Carnet is used for any TIR operation within the Customs Union.
- a common TIR guarantee level of Euro 60,000.
- harmonized application of Article 38 of the TIR Convention, stipulating that any exclusion from the TIR procedure in one member State is automatically extended to the other member States.

- electronic data interchange between Customs offices of departure (entry) and destination (exit), making the return of vouchers No. 2 by post redundant.

The above draft agreement was undergoing internal approval procedures. It had also been decided that the issue whether or not the TIR procedure can apply to domestic transports of goods under Customs control between two Customs offices of member States of the Customs Union without crossing the territory of third countries would be addressed by a separate protocol which was under preparation. WP.30 was also informed by the delegation of Belarus about practical aspects of the application of the TIR procedure in the Customs Union. The Working Party thanked the three delegations concerned for this information and invited them to keep WP.30 informed of any further developments.

5. Increase in the number of loading and unloading places

33. WP.30 took note of Informal document No. 10 (2011) by Turkey, containing statistical data as well as examples of TIR Carnets to justify its proposal to increase the total number of Customs offices of departure and destination for one TIR transport from four to eight and to amend the relevant provisions of the TIR Convention. The Working Party also considered a blueprint of a new TIR Carnet, prepared by IRU, that could be used to cover a maximum of eight Customs offices (Informal document No.11 (2011)).

34. The Working Party delivered a number of remarks on the content of the blueprint which would be taken into account by IRU. At the same time, WP.30 stressed that, before addressing technical issues in detail, a conceptual decision should be taken on the underlying proposal. The European Union pointed out that the need to increase the number of Customs offices to eight seemed to have been proved by Informal document No.10 (2011) and that now substantial discussions on how proceed with this issue could start. The Russian delegation reserved its position on the proposal, due to the fact that an increase in the number of Customs offices could lead to more complicated control procedures and higher risk of loss of the goods and their incorrect declaration. IRU confirmed that, should the underlying proposal become part of the Convention, the TIR guarantee chain would provide the necessary guarantee coverage. Finally, WP.30 decided to revert to this issue at the next session.

6. Other matters

35. The delegation of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia informed the Working Party about the problems experienced by transport operators of his country at the border with Greece, due to a strike of the Greek Customs authorities. In reply, the representative of Greece pointed out that the right of workers to declare a strike is provided for in the Greek labour legislation and that the Greek Customs administration notifies, via Greek embassies and consulates, about the days of forthcoming strikes as well as about the goods which can still be cleared by Customs during those days. The Working Party invited TIR focal points from various countries to better communicate with each other in case of expected strikes, in order to minimize the possible negative consequences for the transport industry.

36. WP.30 took note of several reported cases where a TIR Carnet had been opened to cover passenger cars travelling on their own wheels. The Working Party reminded that, according to Explanatory Note 0.3 (a) (iii), the TIR procedure does not apply to such transports.

XII. Prevention of the abuse of Customs transit systems by smugglers (agenda item 10)

37. The secretariat informed the Working Party that on 4 August 2011, it had posted two Fraud reports on incidents, reported by Polish Customs authorities, where the data of validity of the TIR Carnet had been falsified.

XIII. Programme of work and biennial evaluation (agenda item 11)

38. The Working Party approved the programme of work for the years 2012-2016, as contained in document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2011/12, subject to the deletion of item 7 in part B "Activities of a limited duration". WP.30 also approved its programme of work as well as parameters for its biennial evaluation for the 2012-2013 biennium, prepared in line with the new template established by the UNECE Executive Committee (ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2011/11).

39. The delegation of Iran (Islamic Republic of) was of the view that the work of WP.30 could become more efficient and effective if, instead of having three meetings per year, the Working Party would hold only two sessions, in conjunction with the meetings of the TIR Administrative Committee. This proposal, if accepted, would spare both the resources of the secretariat required for the organization of WP.30 meetings and of developing countries to send their representatives. The Iranian delegation invited the Working Party to consider if, in the future, the WP.30 June session could be abolished. The Working Party took note that reducing the number and duration of meetings was also under consideration by various United Nations organizations.

40. The Working Party considered document ECE/TRANS/WP.30/2011/10 prepared by the secretariat and containing draft terms of reference for WP.30. The delegation of Iran (Islamic Republic of) expressed the view that, due to a global nature of some conventions under the auspices of WP.30, Contracting Parties which are not UNECE member States should be given an opportunity to participate in the Working Party in full capacity, rather than in consultative capacity, according to the UNECE Rules of Procedure. The secretariat clarified that this issue should be addressed not in the terms of reference, but in the rules of procedure, and volunteered to prepare, for the next session, separate draft rules of procedure for the Working Party. Finally, WP.30 felt that delegations might need more time to study the proposed terms of reference and decided to come back to this issue at its next session. In the interim, delegations were requested to transmit their comments, if any, to the secretariat.

XIV. Other business (agenda item 12)

A. Dates of the next sessions

41. The Working Party decided to hold its 130th session from 7 to 10 February 2012.

B. Restriction on the distribution of documents

42. The Working Party decided that there were no restrictions with respect to the distribution of documents issued in connection with its current session.

XV. Adoption of the report (agenda item 13)

43. The Working Party adopted the report on its 129th session on the basis of a draft prepared by the secretariat.
