



Agreed Approach for the Reduction And Elimination of NTBs under the Auspices of the Stability Pact Trade Working Group

At the Trade Working Group (TWG) meeting on 3 March 2005, in Vienna the Group discussed how to implement the Procedure to Eliminate Quantitative Restrictions and Measures with Equivalent Effect on Trade in Article 2 of the Memorandum of Understanding.

Based on final reports from the EC- and Swiss-funded studies on NTBs in SEE and on the Group's discussions in Vienna and at its meeting on 4 May 2005 in Chisinau, the TWG has agreed on the following concrete steps in its approach to identify, review and eliminate such non-tariff barriers to trade.

The main principles governing the approach are:

- The primary responsibility for the reduction and elimination of NTBs lies with the SEE countries themselves;
- The role of the TWG is to monitor progress made by the countries in reducing/eliminating NTBs and, where appropriate, to provide assistance to facilitate the countries' efforts in this regard.

The initial steps to be taken include:

1. Country representatives in the TWG will immediately bring the two reports *Helping to tackle non-tariff barriers in the Western Balkans* and *Helping to tackle non-tariff barriers in South Eastern Europe (the Eastern Balkans)* to the attention of all the appropriate experts in their respective countries. These reports will form the basis for countries' continuous efforts to identify, review and eliminate NTBs.
2. The World Trade Institute, Berne, will consolidate the corresponding tables in the two reports and merge the two reports' recommendations in a single document. This consolidated material, designed to facilitate the work of the experts, will be distributed immediately following the meeting of the TWG on May 4 2005.
3. Each country will initiate a review of its internal procedures for dealing with NTBs in general in the light of the recommendations contained in the reports, such as intra-governmental consultations and fora, and consultations with the private sector. In particular, each country will appoint an official as a central reference point for NTBs. The names and contact details of the central reference points will be provided to the TWG prior to 10 June 2005 and will be published on the Stability Pact website.
4. The internal review will be based on the individual consolidated tables and the procedure of identifying and eliminating different forms of NTBs should be addressed as set out below. In this way, the tables will be updated continuously and will serve as the substantive framework for the entire exercise and subsequent reviews by the TWG:
 - Tables 1 and 5 – issues relating to individual countries. Each country will report by 1 October 2005 in writing to the TWG on its plans to address these issues and the progress it has made.

- Tables 2 and 3 – bilateral NTBs. Following bilateral discussions (e.g. in Joint Committee meetings), any country may inform the TWG of a bilateral issue, which has not been resolved, in order to facilitate rapid resolution. Such information may be provided to the TWG as of the adoption of this document.
 - Where issues remain unresolved, the Secretariat will post these on a list to be reviewed on a regular basis by the TWG and, where appropriate, will mobilise technical assistance to facilitate resolution. These reviews will normally take place at the regular meetings of the TWG. The Secretariat will also systematically record issues, which have been resolved.
 - Table 4 – general issues (e.g. customs, standards, visa, transport). The Chair and Secretariat, in co-operation with relevant TWG members will bring the NTB reports and subsequent progress to the attention of the different organisations/fora dealing with these subjects e.g. TTFSE, EC-CAFAO, WCO, SECIPRO, UNECE and bilateral donors active in these fields. Regular updates on activities under these programmes will be sought and circulated to the TWG. The TWG will take such initiatives it deems necessary to resolve problems concerning these general issues. These activities will be carried out on an on-going basis,
5. Following completion of the first round of internal reviews as outlined above, each country will send the Group a written annual report of its plans to assess and improve its domestic procedures to deal with NTBs and the expected timetable for their implementation. The first reports, covering the year 2006, are to be sent to the TWG by 31 January 2007.
 6. Subject to availability of funding, the TWG will commission an independent regular survey of businesses to review the progress made in identifying and eliminating NTBs in order to propose possible improvements in the workings of the Procedure. It is hoped that the first such survey would commence in January 2007.
 7. The Ministerial Statement to be issued following the forthcoming meeting of SEE Ministers responsible for trade in Sofia on June 10, will contain specific commitments on the steps and deadlines for addressing NTBs in line with the MoU