



**Report of the First Meeting of NTB Focal Points in SEE
Bucharest, 31 October – 01 November 2006.**

INTRODUCTION

The meeting of NTB Focal Points in South Eastern Europe (SEE), held in Bucharest on 31 October – 1 November 2006, was organised by the Stability Pact Working Group on Trade Liberalisation and Facilitation (TWG) in co-operation with USAID. Trade officials from SEE and relevant international organisations participated in the event (list of participants attached).

The overall objective of the meeting was to provide an opportunity for the individual NTB focal points in each SEE country/territory to meet together with the TWG Secretariat and other experts to determine an action plan to further implement the Procedure on the elimination of NTBs as agreed by SEE ministers for trade. The meeting also allowed participants to compare the national strategies developed to this end. The meeting focused on the following topics:

- Review of National NTB reports;
- National Procedures for Inter-Ministry Co-operation on NTBs;
- Exchange of Information and Views on a Range of NTB Elimination Programs/Projects Currently Underway in SEE
- Establishing a Communication Network between NTB Focal Points and Other Donor Programmes and Projects
- Key issues for the preparation of the first Annual NTB Report
- Next Steps.

MATTERS DISCUSSED

The Chair Ms Mary O'Mahony, Stability Pact, opened the meeting. Following a "tour de table" to introduce the National Focal Points, Dr Christian Pitschas, World Trade Institute in Geneva summarised the national NTB reports, their contribution, the relation between NTBs and legislative measures, and adoption of treaties and standards towards EU membership. His presentation served as a basis for the following discussion on the way NTB focal points proceeded in preparing reports, the difficulties they encountered and how to get expected feedback.

- *Inter-Ministry Co-operation*

During the discussion countries stressed the importance of having consultations with the business sector, the need for an information network among the NTB focal points and



an exchange of information with relevant ministries in order to identify non-tariff barriers. Ms Darinka Panovska, NTB focal point from Macedonia, reported on the development of Inter-Ministry Cooperation on NTBs in Macedonia. She reported that based on the TWG's Agreed Approach on NTBs, efforts had concentrated on establishing an effective cooperation with relevant ministries to receive accurate information concerning NTBs. As a first step, all responsible ministries were informed of the the NTBs identified in the EC report and asked to supply the information necessary to prepare the first national report. After the first meeting with the relevant ministries, a formal structure (intra-governmental communication network) was created for addressing NTBs and for exchanging information. For the second meeting more representatives were invited and participation was on a higher level (directors and heads of the departments of the ministries).

She highlighted that communication by phone, e-mail and reminders of deadlines was important to ensure delivery of information in time and presence at the meetings. Discussions at the meetings concentrated on what kind of activities should be undertaken in order to eliminate the barriers, exchanging information on problems arising, recommendations and plans to make progress. Minutes of the meetings were prepared, including conclusions on what should be done and deadlines for requested information. A third meeting is planned for November.

Ms Diana Sturz, NTB focal point from Romania, presented the implications of institutional reforms to eliminate NTBs. Her presentation focused on trade facilitation in Romania, the international framework and rationale, strategic objectives and initiatives and the use of a market access data base. An important point, useful for future work of NTB focal points, was that the Romanian Council of Export, consisting of private associations of private companies, was responsible for elaborating the strategy. The four year strategy is implemented by the Government. Each year an evaluation is made and the strategy is revised.

During the discussion that followed, Albania presented its model for Inter-Ministry Cooperation. A Task Force composed of representatives from the business sector and line ministries and chaired by the Prime Minister had been established. The NTB focal point at the Ministry of Economy acts as a secretariat to the Task Group which meets once a month. The work of the Task Force is based on an action plan to abolish administrative barriers for business.

All participants agreed on the need to have a strong link between the business community and the focal point. A continuous flow of information was necessary to get an accurate picture of NTBs. This required a formalised procedure that was not dependent on any individual person. The focal point can identify problems and solve some of them, but an institutionalised organisation is necessary for continuous progress. As part of an organisational structure, the focal point's actions can have a greater effect. Countries would consider appropriate structures to facilitate the flow of information. Countries expected the new 'CEFTA 2006' to serve as an umbrella for the focal points future work on NTBs.



- *Relevant Support Programmes for Elimination of NTBs in SEE*

An exchange of information followed on a range of NTB elimination programmes and projects currently underway in SEE. Ms Liljana Sekerinska, World Bank, presented the Trade and Transport Facilitation Programme in SEE (TTFSE) Ms Lorenza Jachia summarised UNECE Conventions that facilitate the reduction and elimination of NTBs. Mr Zlatko Veterovski, Macedonian Customs Administration, presented the CLDP programmes to reduce NTBs in SEE through the SPS Groups and the Customs Working Group.

Points highlighted during presentations and in the discussion afterwards were that the TBT Article in the new CEFTA Agreement could benefit from the UNECE International Model on harmonising technical standards developed by the UNECE. The “Diagnostic Study” and its practical cases prepared by World Customs Organisation were recommended to focal points as an instrument for trade facilitation and elimination of Non Tariff Barriers. The proper implementation of conventions and the TRIPS Agreement was stressed. Collaboration between TTFSE National Coordinators and NTBs focal points should be improved.

- *Communications Network Among NTB Focal Points*

The discussion on establishing a communication network, lead by Dr Per Wijkman, stressed the need to establish communication channels both between ministries in the same country and between countries on a bilateral and regional basis. The NTB focal points in the region should serve as an institutionalised communication channel for exchanging information in particular on NTBs of a regional character. The NTB focal points should meet on regular basis in the region and maintain telephone and e-mail contact between meetings.

- *Preparation of the 1st Annual Report on NTBs*

The session on the Annual NTB reports, lead by Dr Pitschas, focused on the proposed format and table of contents prepared at a previous meeting of the Trade Working Group. It was agreed to aim at a common understanding of the contents of the Annual report and to consider efficient ways for NTB focal points to prepare their reports. NTB focal points agreed on the importance of obtaining input from representatives from Chambers of Commerce and to liaise with traders. These were key sources of information. Local websites should also be an important channel of two-way communication. It was agreed that Tables 1 and 5 were to be updated and contain two additional columns: explanatory notes and updates to the table. These would demonstrate the progress made in tackling NTBs in SEE. Tables 3 and 4 were to be included in the Annual Report.

For the next meeting Chair asked the group to report back on whether the business community found the tables useful as a monitoring tool. A number of issues were identified as being of common interest throughout the region. Differences between different licensing systems, TBT's and customs and border crossing procedures were indicated as NTBs that could benefit from a regional approach. Participants were



encouraged to share information with each other on approaches that had been taken to address some of these in their respective administrations.

Copies of all presentations made at the meeting are attached to this report.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chair concluded the meeting by summarising the following main points agreed on.

General Principles:

- Prime Ministers to declare support for continued work on NTBs within the framework of CEFTA, when signing *CEFTA 2006*;
- *CEFTA 2006* to continue and intensify the work to identify and eliminate NTBs in the region ;
- Countries to consider appropriate procedures within CEFTA for identifying and eliminating NTBs in SEE;
- Procedures to have high-level commitment and support and visibility.

Pre-CEFTA 2006 Work Programme:

National focal points continue until further notice to:

- provide the framework for continued work on NTBs;
- meet a couple of times per year, otherwise communicating by telephone and e-mail;
- identify NTBs on a continuous basis;
- prepare the respective annual reports on NTBs, the first to be discussed at the next meeting of focal points ;
- Consider the formation in each country of a national inter-ministry/agency communication network ('Task force' chaired by high-level official).

Specific Steps to be taken prior to next meeting of focal points in early 2007:

- Parties to confirm focal points (names and contact details) to Secretariat to be entered on SP website and national websites and forwarded to all to facilitate better communication. Deadline 24 November;
- Existing country reviews to be put on websites in each country (Chamber of Commerce, relevant Ministry) and of Stability Pact;
- Secretariat with assistance of UNECE to inform which SEE parties adhere to instruments in the UNECE toolbox (Harmonisation convention, TIR convention, Agricultural Quality Standards, Single Window programmes, UNECE international model of technical harmonisation);
- Focal points in each Party to contact national coordinator for TTFSE, national PRO committees, country representative in Group of Customs Officials, country representatives in SPS programmes, and TBT experts;



- Focal points to prepare the 2007 annual report, update tables 1 and 5, prepare other tables in accordance with agreed table of contents by 31 January 2007. Draft table of contents to be circulated to focal points in advance;
- Administrations to consider appropriate intergovernmental communication network concerning NTBs in SEE (e.g. a body of NTB or other experts, meeting frequency, definition of tasks, and treatment of NTB issues with a regional dimension).

The next meeting of NTB focal points should take place in March 2007. The exact date and location will be advised in early 2007. USAID has kindly agreed to continue its sponsorship of these events.

The Chair thanked the speakers for their excellent contribution to the meeting. She thanked all participants for their constructive input into the meeting and on behalf of all participants the Chair thanked USAID for their support and the excellent organisation of the meeting.