THE FOURTH ASEM PROCEDURES WORKING GROUP MEETING

BRUSSELS, 14-15 APRIL, 2000

1. The fourth meeting of the ASEM Procedures Working Group, chaired by the Republic of Korea, was held on 14-15 April 2000 in Brussels, Belgium. The meeting aimed to address the issues identified by the three ASEM Customs Directors General and Commissioners Meetings and issues of customs procedures area in ASEM Trade Facilitation Action Plan (TFAP). The meeting was attended by customs and other officials from the ASEM countries including the European Commission and World Customs Organization. (See Annex I: List of Participants)

2. Recently, fast development in transportation, communications and particularly, information technologies is rapidly changing the international trading environment. Therefore, customs procedures have to be further improved such as further simplification of procedures, reduction of unnecessary regulations, enhancement of transparency in customs law and information and modernization of customs administration. Thus, administrations should keep abreast with such rapid changes so that more trade facilitation could be granted, provided that such progress has been achieved in simplifying and harmonizing customs procedures between Asia and Europe through sharing customs information and strengthening customs cooperation. These efforts aim at reconciling trade facilitation with the prevention of fraud and illegal activities.

3. The main agenda adopted at the Meeting is as follows (See Annex II: Agenda of the 4th ASEM Procedures Working Group Meeting).

- Review of recent international developments in the area of customs cooperation since the last ASEM Procedures Working Group meeting.
- Review of progress in implementing ASEM Trade Facilitation Action Plan (TFAP) deliverables and follow-up of the Future of the TFAP in customs procedures area.
- Discussion on ways to strengthen mutual cooperation between ASEM customs authorities for the simplification and harmonization of custom procedures.

Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures Undertaken in Other International Organizations

4. The Working Group recognized that the follow-up to the works undertaken in other international bodies regarding simplification and harmonization of customs procedures would help the Working Group to share information regarding international developments in customs procedures and to seek possible common ground among ASEM partners in international organizations.

5. The Working Group was reported by the WCO on the revised Kyoto Convention completed in June 1999. The Kyoto Convention was revised to provide a comprehensive set of uniform principles for simple, effective and predictable customs procedures and raise the efficiency of customs control. The revised Convention reflects modern procedural techniques such as information technology and risk management and addresses the requirements of both traders and Customs administrations. The revised Convention will enter into force when it is accepted by 40 of the Contracting Parties to the current Convention. The Working Group expressed appreciation for the efforts of the WCO in finalizing the revision of the Kyoto Convention and hoped that the revised Convention would be adopted by ASEM partners as early as practicable.

6. The Working Group was reported by Japan and Germany on the G7 initiatives to harmonize and simplify customs procedures. The major initiatives are the harmonization and simplification of data elements and the facilitation of data interchange through development of standardized electronic formats. The G7 Customs Experts have completed the harmonization of definitions of data elements required for import and export customs procedures, and almost finished the work of developing the same electronic format for both export and import. In addition, the Experts have begun the work on the standardization of data for other government departments (OGD) requirements, which will pave the way for a Single Window System. The G7 Customs Experts will work with other organizations on the G7 initiatives and invite other countries to join the prototypes for early standardization of EDI. The Working Group welcomed the progress made by the G7 Group and expressed that it would be desirable for the G7 data set to be available to the ASEM business and trading communities. The European Commission stressed the importance of the respect of the EU Customs Union with regard to the implementation of the G7 results.

7. The Working Group was reported on the current status of discussion on trade facilitation within the WTO by the United Kingdom and exchanged views on this matter.

8. The Working Group was reported by Brunei Darussalam on the result of the APEC Sub-Committee on Customs Procedures (SCCP) meeting held in February 2000, Brunei Darussalam. At the meeting, a work program to forward integrity was endorsed and paperless trading was adopted as a new item of the Common Action Plan agenda. The SCCP meeting recognized that Trade Facilitation is another significant part of the SCCP work and agreed that Japan would be the contact point to the newly established CTI (Committee on Trade and Investment) ad hoc task force. The Working Group welcomed the progress in the initiatives of APEC SCCP.

Trade Facilitation Action Plan (TFAP)

9 The Working Group was briefed by the EC on overall progress in TFAP and recognized that greater involvement of the business sector significantly contributes to the success of TFAP.

10. The Working Group reviewed the working document provided by Japan on evaluation of the TFAP customs procedures aspects. Much progress has been made in individual TFAP deliverables of customs procedures area since the last Working Group meeting (See Annex III: Evaluation of the TFAP Customs Procedures Aspect). The Working Group agreed that Japan, the facilitator of TFAP customs area would submit the working document to the SOMTI VI to be held in May 2000, Seoul.

11. The European Commission presented a report on the recent progress in negotiations concerning customs cooperation and mutual administrative assistance (CCMAA) agreement. The Working Group welcomed the expansion of agreements on CCMAA between the EC and interested Asian countries.

12. The Working Group confirmed the importance of technical assistance and training program in the customs field and agreed to revert to this matter in the next meeting on the basis of further consideration by each ASEM country.

13. Several countries introduced their efforts in raising the transparency of customs procedures and recognized that there was much progress made by each Member in that area. ASEM Members agreed to continue their efforts to enhance the transparency of customs procedures.

14. The Working Group discussed the organization of additional seminars. It was agreed that Thailand would host the next ASEM seminar in the first half of 2001 and it would be necessary to secure financial support for the seminar as for the previous seminar held in Manila in February 1999. The seminar will focus on subjects recommended at the first seminar and Thailand will decide on specific subjects to be addressed at the seminar in consultations with interested members.

15. The Working Group was reported by Korea on the preliminary identification of major generic barriers in customs procedures, which was conducted as a follow-up action to the Future of TFAP adopted at the 2nd ASEM Economic Ministers f Meeting. The Working Group agreed to follow up on the work on identifying and addressing major generic barriers.

Others

16. The Working Group welcomed Japan's recent opening of ASEM Internet website on customs procedures and discussed Japan's proposal to establish ASEM Customs Procedures Database. The Working Group also expressed appreciation to Japan for providing Internet server and agreed to establish the database before ASEM Summit III is held. (See Annex IV)

17. In order to keep close cooperation and communication among the Members, the Working Group agreed to update contact points list whenever there is any change.

18. The Working Group agreed to hold the next Working Group meeting back-to-back with the next seminar during the first half of 2001 in Thailand.

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