



Committee on Trade Facilitation

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE ON TRADE FACILITATION
26-27 JANUARY 2021**

AD HOC CHAIR: HE MR MIKAEL ANZEN (SWEDEN)

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1 ELECTION OF INTERIM CHAIR

1.1. The Chair of the Council for Trade in Goods, in his capacity as *Ad Hoc* Chair, welcomed delegations to the meeting of the Trade Facilitation Committee (TF Committee, Committee, or TFC). The proposed agenda had been circulated in WTO/AIR/TFA/14/Rev.1.

1.2. He updated the Committee on the process he had undertaken to appoint a new chairperson to the TF Committee for the remaining period of the 2020-2021 chairpersonship, following the departure of Ambassador Naut of the Dominican Republic.

1.3. He had sent communications dated 22 December 2020, 12 January, 20 January, and 22 January 2021 updating Members on progress being made.

1.4. He had indicated in his communication of 20 January that the GRULAC Group Coordinator, Ambassador Cheryl Spencer (Jamaica), had informed him that GRULAC had not proposed a candidate for Chairpersonship. He invited the Group Coordinators of the African Group, the Asian Group, and Developed Members to propose a suitable candidate chosen from among their constituencies to serve as Chairperson by cob on Friday, 22 January 2021.

1.5. He did not receive any nominee from any of the other three Regional Groups within that deadline. He therefore addressed a new communication to all delegations informing them about the situation and indicating the process that he intended to follow subsequently, including consultations with the all Group coordinators and delegations.

1.6. However, on 25 January he received a communication from the Group of Developed Members proposing the candidature of Mr Marcel VERNOOIJ, the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Netherlands, to chair the Committee for the remaining period.

1.7. Consequently, he addressed a communication to all delegations, copied to the Group Coordinators, informing them about this nomination, and in the hope that all Members would look positively on this candidature in order to allow the work of the TFC to continue running smoothly until the appointment of the Chairs of the subsidiary bodies of the Goods Council for the period 2021–2022.

1.8. In his communication he had also indicated that, unless he received any comment on the candidature of Mr VERNOOIJ by 26 January at 10 am, he would propose to the TF Committee to elect Mr VERNOOIJ as its new Chair at the end of the meeting.

1.9. However, in the meantime and within the deadline established in that communication, he had received another candidature from the same Group also within the deadline.

1.10. In light of the above, he was not in a position to submit a sole candidature to chair the TF Committee for the remaining 2020-2021 period. He therefore proposed that he would continue consultations with the Group that had now proposed two candidates in line with the deadlines and the procedures indicated in his communications dated 20 and 22 January 2021. He would keep all delegations informed about the consultation process in due time.

1.11. He reiterated his call to the Group Coordinators and all delegations to finalize the process as expeditiously as possible so as to allow the work of the TFC to continue to run smoothly.

1.12. As indicated in his communication dated 22 January 2021, he proposed that in order to facilitate today's meeting he, in his capacity as Chair of the CTG, would chair this meeting on an *ad hoc* basis.

1.13. It was so agreed.

1.14. The delegate from the United States requested to provide Members with an update on document G/TFA/W/25/Rev.2, a communication titled "Supporting The Timely And Efficient Release Of Global Goods Through Accelerated Implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement" under "Other Business".

1.15. The Chair added three items: (1) a presentation by the Trade and Environment Division on their use of an eAgenda; (2) the dates for the Committee's meetings in 2021; and (3) inviting Annex D partners and the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation to the next meeting of the Committee.

1.16. The agenda was adopted with the proposed changes.

2 MATTERS RELATING TO THE IMPLEMENTATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE TRADE FACILITATION AGREEMENT

NOTIFICATIONS BY MEMBERS

2.1. The Chair informed the Committee that a total of 16 new notifications had been received since the Committee's meeting on 20-22 October 2020. All notifications had been issued as documents in the G/TFA/N/ series.

Notifications under Articles 15 and 16 of the Trade Facilitation Agreement

2.2. The Chair turned to a notification from Guyana (G/TFA/N/GUY/4).

2.3. The delegate of the United States thanked Guyana for the notification.

2.4. The delegate of the European Union indicated the following:

2.5. The EU congratulates Guyana for its effort to update the Committee on the state of implementation of category C commitments and the areas where they saw gaps regarding required assistance. Notifications such as Guyana's are absolutely crucial to allow the TF Committee to have a clear view of the situation of developing countries and LDCs regarding category C commitments for which they require intervention by donors.

2.6. The EU takes due note of the very useful information and invites Guyana to get in touch with the EU delegation accredited to Guyana to share such information and to inform them about their needs so that the EU delegation could be better informed. The EU stresses the crucial role of coordination, in particular, with the main donors on the ground.

2.7. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to a corrigendum relating to a notification from the Kyrgyz Republic which was circulated in document G/TFA/N/KGZ/2/Add.1/Corr.1. The corrigendum rectified a clerical error in the original notification.

2.8. The delegate of the United States thanked the Kyrgyz Republic for its notification.

2.9. The delegate of the European Union said that they would revert to the notification on a bilateral basis.

2.10. The Chair informed the Committee that a notification had been received from Ecuador after the agenda had been issued and it would be on the agenda of the next regular Committee meeting.

Notifications under Article 17 of the TFA

2.11. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to a notification from Peru which was circulated in document G/TFA/N/PER/1/Add.1.

2.12. The delegate of the European Union indicated the following:

2.13. Regarding Peru's notification, the EU has two remarks regarding the request for extension of its initial date for implementing its category B provisions on advance rulings. The explanation notified is that more time is needed to "make the necessary arrangements to issue the regulatory provisions" so as to implement Peru's commitment. The EU would like to ask Peru to further explain and detail its situation regarding advance rulings and also inform why the notification was made almost a year after the initial timeline set for implementation.

2.14. The delegate of the United States indicated the following:

2.15. The United States thanks Peru for its notification and notes its use of Article 17, the Early Warning Mechanism, to extend the definitive implementation date for Article 3, citing the need to coordinate the legislation to implement this commitment.

2.16. In order to utilize the Early Warning Mechanism, Article 17 provides that developing country Members must submit their notification to the Secretariat 120 days prior to the original definitive implementation date. It appears that Peru submitted its notification 11 months after its original implementation date, which means Peru's request for an extension under Article 17 is untimely.

2.17. As such, the United States is not in a position to accept this notification.

2.18. Nevertheless, can Peru elaborate on how it plans to ensure that it will meet the new deadline it has set for itself?

2.19. The delegate of Peru indicated the following:

2.20. Peru would like to thank the EU and the US and takes note of their statements. We would like to note that the consultations that we have had in regard to the implementation of these provisions have been slowed down because of the COVID-19 situation. Peru is deploying its best efforts to ensure it can implement these provisions, particularly in regard to advance rulings, in line with the proposed deadline. With regards to details and the progress that has been made in terms of meeting the goal, this is something that we will have to come back to as soon as is possible.

2.21. The delegate of the European Union indicated the following:

2.22. The EU are satisfied if we come back to this notification next time, but to react to the US statement that they cannot accept the notification, we would like to recall Article 17.2 which says that "Where a developing country Member's request for additional time for implementation does not exceed 18 months or a least developed country Member's request for additional time does not exceed 3 years, the requesting Member is entitled to such additional time without any further action by the Committee". So, in our view, we note that the notification was late. We take note of Peru's difficulties and we are all aware of the COVID-19 situation, but we think that the extension does not have to be discussed by the Committee. I would be happy to hear the views of other Members and the Secretariat on this.

2.23. The Chair said that there was not a consensus on how to address Peru's notification. He proposed that the Committee take note of the notification and statements made and revert to it at the next Committee meeting. He also proposed that Members consult amongst themselves in order to find a way forward.

2.24. It was so agreed.

2.25. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to a notification from Ukraine which was circulated in document G/TFA/N/ UKR/1/Add.3.

2.26. The delegate of Ukraine indicated the following:

2.27. As of 1 January 2021, Ukraine had already implemented 70% of the provisions of the TFA. Pursuant to its notification (document G/TFA/N/UKR/1/Add.2) in 2020, Ukraine committed to implement 10 provisions, eight of which had been implemented by the end of the year. Two commitments (post-clearance audit and freedom of transit) notified as category C are being currently implemented.

2.28. Ukraine would like to highlight that implementation process of these provisions was started under the program EU4PFM (EU Public Finance Management Support Programme for Ukraine). A lot has been done since the arrangement of support for capacity building was concluded with the EU. Thus, some laws' amendments have been made, and a successful pilot NCTS (New Computerised Transit System) programme took place at the end of 2020. A significant progress in the implementation of one of the final phases of this programme should be noted.

2.29. All these gains would not have been possible without the broad support which secured significant contributions for us in terms of funding and technical expertise from EU partners, to whom we reiterate our gratitude.

2.30. But the COVID-19 pandemic has gravely wounded the world economy with serious consequences impacting all communities and individuals. Lockdown early in the spring of 2020 partly suspended the implementation processes in Ukraine. Thus, some procedures were delayed, e.g. the purchase of post-clearance audit ITC system, training courses of experts for the application of NCTS, implementing NCTS at the national level, and integration with the EU transit system.

2.31. Ukraine is aware of the importance of fulfilling its WTO obligations and makes every effort to comply with them. But in the meantime, the reality of 2020 is that not everything is under human control and contingencies mentioned above should be taken into account.

2.32. Ukraine would like to mention again that we have to stick to our international commitments but at the same time a comprehensive implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement, even a little behind, is crucial.

2.33. The delegate of the European Union indicated the following:

2.34. The EU welcomes Ukraine's statement which gives a full explanation as to the delay for implementation, in particular to the COVID-19 pandemic. The EU mentioned during its intervention at the Dedicated Session on Technical Assistance and Capacity Building Support last October, that in fact COVID-19 has created difficulties to implement aid, and the EU will come back on this issue at the WTO Aid-for-Trade seminar planned for the end of March 2021. We repeat that in our view Article 17.2 does not require any action by the Committee on this request because the extension requested is of less than 18 months (i.e. 12 months) and, therefore, the Committee has no action to take. We support Ukraine's statement.

2.35. The delegate of the United States indicated the following:

2.36. The US thanks Ukraine for your notification and notes your use of Article 17, the early warning mechanism, to extend the definitive implementation date for Articles 7.5, 11.3-11.8 and 11.10, citing the need to develop IT equipment and train staff.

2.37. In order to utilize the early warning mechanism, Article 17 provides that developing country Members must submit their notification to the Secretariat 120 days prior to the original definitive implementation date. It appears that Ukraine submitted its notification 50 days before its original implementation date, which means Ukraine's request for an extension under Article 17 is untimely.

2.38. As such, the United States is not in a position to accept this notification.

2.39. Nevertheless, can Ukraine elaborate on how it plans to meet the new self-identified deadline?

2.40. The delegate of Ukraine indicated the following:

2.41. Ukraine thanks the US and EU for their comments. We will convey this information to our capital, and would propose to discuss this issue bilaterally with the delegations that raised their comments.

2.42. The Chair said that there was not a consensus on how to address the notification, therefore he proposed that the Committee take note of the statements made and revert to it at the next Committee meeting. In the meantime, he encouraged Members to consult amongst themselves in order to find a way forward.

2.43. It was so agreed.

Notifications under Articles 1.4, 10.4.3, 10.6.2 and 12.2.2 of the Trade Facilitation Agreement

2.44. The Chair moved to the "transparency" notifications, mandated by Articles 1:4, 10:4:3, 10:6:2 and 12:2:2 of the TFA. They all had the objective of providing transparency, either in a broader context, providing information on publication sources, or providing information on specific items, such as a single window operation, the use of customs brokers, and customs cooperation.

2.45. Since the last meeting, nine transparency notifications had been received from nine Members.

2.46. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the first notification which was from Argentina (G/TFA/N/ARG/3).

2.47. The delegate of the United States thanked Argentina for its notification.

2.48. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to a notification from Barbados.

2.49. The delegate of the European Union indicated as follows:

2.50. The EU would like to make a general statement of principle and may comment on some specific notifications that are on the agenda. These transparency notifications are a priority as we have constantly stated. Transparency of the measures at the border are key to facilitate trade and in particular for small and medium and micro sized enterprises. These notifications became even more important due to COVID-19. The situation is that several countries that had committed to implement, either under category A or B (when the deadline for implementation passed) are not yet complying. We call on these Members to proceed without any delay and if they have specific difficulties, we strongly invite them to report to this Committee.

2.51. We note that many developing countries and LDCs have put these provisions under category C commitments and requested assistance for implementation of these transparency measures. It would be good to have a picture of what the situation is in this area. We could invite Members to update on their situation in this regard as well and not wait for the dedicated session.

2.52. Regarding the Barbados notification, we welcome it. Was there any information that Barbados could report as regards its commitment on consultation of stakeholders as notified in category B with a deadline on December 2020? Have there been any consultations with business and stakeholders on measures to adopt?

2.53. The delegate of the United States thanked Barbados for their notification.

2.54. The delegate of Barbados indicated the following:

2.55. We would like to thank the US and EU for their comments. We do take note of the question that has been raised by the EU and we will consult with capital and revert as necessary.

2.56. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to a notification from Dominica.

2.57. The delegate of the United States indicated the following:

2.58. The US thanks Dominica for its notification. We note that Dominica's Article 1.4 notification is missing important information. In our reading, Dominica has only listed the homepages for the websites of major government agencies but does not provide specific webpages to access information for items in subparagraphs 1.1 (a) through (j). For example, a trader looking for Dominica's fees and charges would have to search through the website for Dominica's Bureau of Standards, Environmental Health Division. Could Dominica provide the direct locations for the individual items in sub-paragraphs (a) through (j) of Article 1, indicating import, export and transit requirements? For example, could Dominica provide the direct location for the procedures to repeal or review a customs decision, penalty provisions, and fees and charges? In addition, could Dominica provide the description or practical steps needed for importation, exportation, and transit? Ease and accessibility in the publication of this information and locations of necessary forms to complete will assist small businesses in fully benefiting from the agreement.

2.59. The delegate of the European Union indicated the following:

2.60. The EU would like to support the US remarks on Dominica's information provided so far. It is absolutely crucial to get all detailed information that has been spelled out in TFA Article 1.4. We note that this is not an easy business, but it is crucial to help facilitate trade and get small entities to reduce their costs of trading with the WTO Members. We welcome future work in this area as promised.

2.61. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to a notification from the European Union.

2.62. The delegate of the United States thanked the EU for its notification.

2.63. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to a notification from the Kyrgyz Republic.

2.64. The delegate of the United States indicated the following:

2.65. The US thanks the Kyrgyz Republic for the notification. We note that the Kyrgyz Republic's Article 1.4 notification is missing important information. In our reading, the notification has only listed the homepages for the websites of major government agencies but does not provide specific webpages to access information for items in subparagraphs 1.1 (a) through (j). For example, a trader looking for the Kyrgyz Republic's penalties would have to search through the website for the Ministry of Justice or the Ministry of Economy.

2.66. Could the Kyrgyz Republic provide the direct locations for the individual items in subparagraphs (a) through (j) of Article 1, indicating import, export and transit requirements? For example, could the Kyrgyz Republic provide the direct location for the procedures to repeal or review a customs decision, penalty provisions, and fees and charges? In addition, could the Kyrgyz Republic provide the description or practical steps needed for importation, exportation, and transit? Ease and accessibility in the publication of this information and locations of necessary forms to complete will assist small businesses in fully benefiting from the agreement.

2.67. The delegate of the European Union indicated the following:

2.68. As detailed by the US, we think that further improvements should be made to the notification as it is not sufficiently comprehensive to help traders, in particular on Article 1.4, items (a) to (j). We look for complementary information to be provided by the Kyrgyz Republic.

2.69. The delegate of the Kyrgyz Republic said that the Kyrgyz Republic had taken note of the comments and he thanked the EU and US for their useful comments to improve the notification. They would revert back in due course.

2.70. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to a notification from Malaysia.

2.71. The delegate of the United States thanked Malaysia for their notification.

2.72. The delegate of the European Union indicated the following:

2.73. We are very grateful to Malaysia for this notification that we were looking forward to very impatiently. The notification provides relevant links to customs tariffs (both preferential and applied), valuation, classification, rules and regulations, fees and charges, tariff rate quotas and review and appeal processes. We would have one remark, which is that there are no direct links provided for import processes for animal-based products, requirements for halal certification or other products subject to import licensing requirements such as approved permits for imports of vehicles. Relevant information does exist on-line in various authorities' websites (see as an example the enclosed Guidance document on Halal import requirements). To further help traders, a suggestion is that the links to Customs pages and relevant Guidance could be broadened to provide further information to traders on import requirements.

2.74. On fees and charges, it is not always easy to grasp the level of fees that may be applied for the import of a specific product. Regarding Article 1.1(j) on procedures relating to the administration

of tariff quotas, the link lists applicable tariff rate quotas (TRQs) for agricultural products but it would be useful to get more information on the administration of these TRQs.

2.75. Finally, the link on Article 10.6.2 does not seem to work (something that happened to several Member States as well as in the EU). We apologize if we expanded on this notification; this should not be seen as a deterrent to notify, on the contrary, it is an indication of our interest in ensuring that traders have all pertinent information to trade, and that SMEs, in particular can manage through the complex procedures in place. The EU itself had to review its notification recently and this is a never-ending process that all of us have to go through.

2.76. We hope that this is not a deterrent to anybody. We understand it is complex, but it is important to keep transparency measures. We hope that in a friendly and constructive manner we can help each other in doing those reviews so that the benefit will go to the traders and the economic community.

2.77. The delegate of Malaysia thanked the US and EU for their comments. They would revert back to the Committee.

2.78. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to a notification from Tanzania.

2.79. The delegate of the United States thanked Tanzania for its notification.

2.80. The delegate of the European Union indicated the following:

2.81. The EU congratulates Tanzania for its notification. We must confess that we will probably have a bilateral talk because in some cases we did not understand the construction of the notification. For example, procedures for import are subject to a specific web-link under the "trade information module" and there are many links on export, import and transit procedures. Regarding import, we did not manage to open the link notified. The web-link regarding standards refers also refers to import procedures so we are not very clear as to where import procedures can be found in full? Regarding fees and charges, could Tanzania explain its policy and whether port authorities have a leverage in this domain given that there are two links notified, including one specific link regarding ports, for the aspect of fees?

2.82. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to a notification from Trinidad & Tobago.

2.83. The delegate of Trinidad and Tobago indicated the following:

2.84. Trinidad and Tobago welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the discussions at this meeting, regarding its implementation of the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation. Trinidad and Tobago acknowledges the unprecedented disruptions to the global economy brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has underscored now more than ever the importance of the implementation of trade facilitation reforms, to not only ensure business continuity and economic progress, but to also enable small countries like ourselves to facilitate access for essential food and health supplies.

2.85. It is against this backdrop, that Trinidad and Tobago through its National Trade Facilitation Committee and alongside its wider CARICOM counterparts continues to actively pursue implementation of the TFA and associated Projects. As such, Trinidad and Tobago is pleased to submit its transparency notification under Article 10.4.3 regarding the operation of its Single Electronic Window – TTBizLink.

2.86. Trinidad and Tobago's Single Window was established in 2009 and its development has been ongoing, with the introduction of services on the system utilizing a phased approach. Trinidad and Tobago is currently undertaking a Project for the Strengthening of its Single Electronic Window for Trade and Business Facilitation by way of a USD 25 million country loan. In addition to advancing development of the TTBizLink system, this loan is also being utilized to fulfil approximately 50% of Trinidad and Tobago's Category C commitments, where there have been difficulties in securing donor support. Trinidad and Tobago anticipates that matters such as these will be discussed at the upcoming Global Review on the Operation and Implementation of the Agreement, in accordance with Article 23.1.6 of the TFA.

2.87. Trinidad and Tobago also wishes to take this opportunity to report that it has met its definitive dates notified to the WTO for implementation of its category B commitment on Article 5.2 (Detention) and category C commitment on Article 7.1 (Pre-Arrival Processing), which were due for implementation by 31 December 2020.

2.88. Accordingly, Trinidad and Tobago wishes to reiterate its commitment to implementation of the TFA, and acknowledges the challenges that small island developing states may face during this time. Trinidad and Tobago welcomes the experience sharing/thematic discussions in the Committee on measures taken by Members to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Trinidad and Tobago extends support and encourages WTO Members to also give due consideration to those countries who may have invoked Article 17 of the TFA – Early Warning Mechanism – to seek an extension of their implementation dates for either categories B or C commitment, as a result of difficulties brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.89. The delegate of the European Union indicated the following:

2.90. The EU would like to commend Trinidad & Tobago for the comprehensive notification, for the update to the Committee on its situation and we would like to state again that we welcome such interventions from Members where they state where they stand with regard to the implementation of its category B and C commitments. This is absolutely needed for donors to have a clear view of where the gaps remain in providing assistance in category C commitments.

2.91. In addition, we would like to say and recall that by next February, to our understanding, LDCs should inform about their arrangements and indicative dates for category C commitments. We are well aware of the difficulties created by COVID-19 but referring again to Trinidad & Tobago's statement, we should not wait for the Dedicated Session to get an updated view of the situation of the countries needs and situation regarding category C commitments because waiting for too long is a waste of time. The sooner we are informed of difficulties in capacity the easier it is to revert to our colleagues in the area of aid and to see how things can develop. I would like to state again that the EU is currently preparing its programming on aid for the period 2021-2028. We are not in a capacity to notify our commitments, nor to give an idea of the general amount that will be allocated to TF and Aid-for-Trade, nor geographical distribution. We will probably have the capacity to do so in October but because we are doing this internal work of programming, the earlier we get an update on category C commitments of LDCs and developing countries and where the gaps are, the better equipped we will be for the dedicated session.

2.92. The delegate of the United States thanked Trinidad and Tobago for its notification and its statement.

2.93. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to a notification from the United Kingdom.

2.94. The delegate of the United Kingdom indicated the following:

2.95. As Members will no doubt be aware, the United Kingdom ceased to be a Member State of the European Union on 31 January 2020. Following that date, the UK and the EU entered into a time-limited transition period. This meant that the UK remained a member of the EU's customs union and single market, and, subject to certain exceptions, EU law continued to apply to and in the United Kingdom. During this transition period, we duly notified the Trade Facilitation Committee of our transparency measures as part of EU notifications.

2.96. The transition period came to an end on 31 December 2020. We then deposited our instrument of continued acceptance for the Trade Facilitation Agreement on 1 January 2021, demonstrating our commitment to all aspects of the Agreement and to working with Members towards its full implementation worldwide.

2.97. The United Kingdom looks forward to continued collaboration with Members and playing a strong role within this Committee.

2.98. At the heart of trade facilitation is the need for global trade to be predictable, consistent and transparent. The United Kingdom is, therefore, delighted to contribute to the ongoing transparency efforts of this Committee with this notification under Articles 1.4, 10.4.3, 10.6.2 and 12.2.2. This

notification seeks to offer clear, simple and comprehensive guidance to traders in the United Kingdom and other customs territories. Where appropriate, step-by-step guidance has been provided.

2.99. We remain at the disposal of Members for any enquiries that they might have.

2.100. The delegate of the United States thanked the United Kingdom for its notification.

2.101. The delegate of the European Union thanked the United Kingdom and welcomed their notification, which had a particular interest for EU bilateral trade.

2.102. The Chair informed the Committee that Myanmar had submitted a notification after the agenda had been issued. It would be included on the agenda of the next regular Committee meeting.

Notifications under Article 22 of the Trade Facilitation Agreement

2.103. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notifications under Article 22 of the TFA. There were three separate notifications identified under Article 22 - Article 22.1, notifications by donor Members on their recent capacity building activities, Articles 22.2 and 22.3, notifications from information on contact points. Since the meeting of 20-22 October 2020, 16 Members had provided 18 notifications under Article 22.

2.104. He turned to the notification from the United Kingdom under Article 22.1 and 22.2.

2.105. The delegate of the United Kingdom indicated the following:

2.106. The United Kingdom has been a strong supporter of building capacity in developing country partners to implement the Trade Facilitation Agreement.

2.107. Our notification today shows this continued commitment in 2020, when the UK provided over GBP 50 million over 10 programmes. Some key Aid for Trade programmes were piloted this year to provide support to developing countries to assess and mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on trade, including providing logistical support for the smooth movement of critical goods across borders.

2.108. Trade facilitation efforts will be critical to ensure strong flows of goods and services throughout this ongoing pandemic, and onwards, when we enter a period of global economic recovery.

2.109. We would like to take this moment to highlight a few programmes that illustrate the depth and quality of support that the UK is providing around the world.

2.110. In 2020, the UK continued to contribute to the World Bank's Trade Facilitation Support Programme. This initiative is improving border processes and removing the red tape which make it harder to trade.

2.111. Our Trade Facilitation Capacity Building programme operates in partnership with the World Customs Organisation and UNCTAD. In the last twelve months, it has delivered technical assistance across several areas of the TFA to beneficiaries including Eswatini, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi and Zambia, in particular on National Trade Facilitation Committees.

2.112. Members seeking further information on these and other UK programmes are advised to contact their local UK embassy in the first instance.

2.113. The UK looks forward to continuing to work with partners around the world to identify capacity building needs and strengthen the global capability to implement the Trade Facilitation Agreement.

2.114. The delegate of the United States thanked the UK for its notification.

2.115. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to a notification from Madagascar.

2.116. The delegate of the United States thanked Madagascar for its notification.

2.117. The delegate of the European Union indicated the following:

2.118. We thank Madagascar for its notification and we call on other Members that are yet to make their notification under this Article to do so, so that we can coordinate assistance on the ground.

2.119. The Chair informed the Committee that Cuba submitted a notification after the agenda was issued. It would be included on the agenda of the next regular Committee meeting.

2.120. The delegate of Japan indicated the following:

2.121. Japan welcomes all the notifications made by Members to date. We note that some LDC Members have not notified the Committee of definitive dates for implementing provisions they have designated in Category B. Since the extended notification deadlines that they requested respectively in February last year are approaching, we are looking forward to receiving the notifications before their respective deadlines, which are 21 and 22 February.

2.122. We also recognize that some developing country Members failed to provide certain notifications within the relevant deadlines. Japan encourages those Members to submit notifications as soon as possible, and if they are having difficulties, to explain the reason why in the Committee.

2.123. The delegate of Tanzania indicated the following:

2.124. I am taking the floor to thank the EU for the questions that they have raised against the notification made by Tanzania. I want to inform that we have taken notes of the questions and we will refer to capital and get the responses. We would appreciate if you could share the questions with us in writing so that we can communicate clearly what is required.

2.125. The Committee took note of the notifications addressed under agenda items A, B and C and of the information contained therein, as well as the statements made.

STATUS OF RATIFICATION AND NOTIFICATION PROCESS

Update by the WTO Secretariat

2.126. At the request of Members, the WTO Secretariat provided an update on the status of ratifications and notifications covering implementation, transparency and technical assistance and capacity building.

2.127. Since the meeting of 20-22 October, the United Kingdom had notified its acceptance of the Protocol of Amendment. The overall rate of ratification stood at around 93%, with 153 Members already having ratified.

2.128. Turning to notifications of category B commitments, 84% of LDCs (26 Members) that had designated their category B commitments had also notified their category B definitive dates ahead of the deadline.

2.129. Nine LDCs had requested an extension of the deadline to notify these dates, for varying amounts of time. Four of those Members, Afghanistan, Lao PDR, Senegal and Solomon Islands had already provided their dates ahead of their requested deadline.

2.130. The remaining five Members - Burkina Faso, Chad, Djibouti, Mauritania and Sierra Leone were required to notify their definitive B dates by 21 February 2021.

2.131. The forthcoming deadline, which was coming up on 22 February 2021, was for the notification by LDCs of their category C indicative dates as well as the notification of their donor arrangements for technical assistance and capacity-building support. Of 32 LDC Members that had

notified Category C designations to date, 75% (24 Members) had already notified category C indicative dates ahead of the deadline.

2.132. So far, one LDC, Bangladesh, had already informed the Committee of its donor arrangements and progress in the provision of technical assistance in advance of the 22 February 2021 deadline.

2.133. With regard to earlier deadlines between 2017 and 2020, six Members were yet to submit their ABC categorization notification. Two Members were yet to notify their category B indicative dates and one Member had yet to notify its category B definitive dates.

2.134. The deadline for notification by developing countries of their category C definitive dates had also passed. Three Members were yet to submit their notifications.

2.135. Regarding the notification by developing country Members to notify their technical assistance arrangements for provisions in category, 13 Members had yet to submit their notifications.

2.136. Moving on to implementation notifications, 28% of LDCs had notified under category A, 20% in category B and 43% in category C. There remained 9% of LDCs that had yet to do so. Regarding landlocked LDCs, 35% had notified in category A, 26% in category B and 39% in category C.

2.137. For developing countries 60% of them had notified under category A, 17% had notified under category B, and 22% had notified under category C. There remained 2% of developing countries that had not yet notified.

2.138. The overall rate of implementation commitments stood at 69.5%. The rate of TFA implementation commitments of developing and LDC Members stood at 60.3%.

2.139. According to the notifications received, the TFA would be more or less fully implemented by 2028, with a small number of provisions to be implemented by some Members beyond 2028.

2.140. Since the Committee meeting of 20-22 October, 10 transparency notifications had been submitted. Two notifications of technical assistance arrangements had also been submitted.

2.141. The delegate of Nepal, as a focal point of the LDC Core Group on Trade Facilitation delivered a statement on behalf of the LDC Group:

2.142. First, my delegation would like to extend sincere appreciation to the Secretariat for providing updates on the ratification and notification of the Trade Facilitation Agreement.

2.143. We LDC Members are well-aware of various notification obligations under the TFA and most Members have fulfilled their notification obligations in a timely manner. However, because of various constraints and limitations including insufficient skills and capacity and resource constraints, some of us are still in the process to notify, and all Members of the Group are working hard towards meeting the upcoming deadline in February.

2.144. It is also observed that few LDC Members have yet to notify the provisions that already passed the deadline. For instance, capacity building requirements for category C measures has not been notified by some Members yet. Such technical assistance is linked with the implementation of category C measures. In this context, notification of indicative and definitive dates of category C without notifying capacity building requirements may be difficult as implementation is linked with the support from donor Members.

2.145. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted LDCs most severely and their focus is fully concentrated to combating the pandemic. Therefore, they have not been able to consult among the agencies concerned and stakeholders in the matter of TFA notifications. In this context, those LDC Members may need some additional time to fulfil the notification obligations.

2.146. As the entire state mechanism is fully engaged with the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, we will be able to fulfil our notification obligations under the TFA once the COVID-19 situation becomes normal. Additionally, notification of category C measures is not only related to the commitment of LDC Members, but also highly rely on the additional commitments and

disbursements of assistance by the donor Member countries and other international organizations to effectively implement the category C measures.

2.147. Fixing the dates of category C provisions seems much more challenging for us due to resource and capacity constraints. Therefore, we sincerely urge all donor Members to join hands to effectively implement the category C measures of the TFA in LDCs from the very beginning with need based additional supports.

2.148. The delegate of Chad indicated the following:

2.149. Chad supports the statement made by Nepal on behalf of the LDC group. It is true, we must remember that the TFA does have provisions that aim to accelerate the movement of goods without undue delays, including goods in transit. Likewise, it has provisions to ensure affective cooperation between customs authorities and other relevant authorities when it comes to trade facilitation. There are provisions on technical assistance on customs issues which contribute to improving transparency by strengthening possibilities in global value chains. The TFA is, therefore, very important when it comes to support granted to ensure LDCs integrate into global trade, and our Focal Point has very clearly highlighted the very large constraints that are faced by the majority of LDCs.

2.150. COVID-19 had devastatingly affected LDCs and almost wiped out the authorities' ability to promote trade development and economic growth. The impact of the pandemic and various lockdowns have had a huge impact on services in LDCs. It had a devastating effect, also, on the exports of LDCs which are, of course, a very important revenue source. It has slowed and halted goods in ports and other places, and LDCs are therefore unable to export them.

2.151. In the light of this, LDCs have encountered great difficulties when it comes to meeting their deadlines. Efforts are being made, as the Focal Point has said. LDCs are working as hard as they can to ensure that they respect the deadlines when possible, but we do believe that an extension of the deadlines with regard to our notifications is essential for us at this stage.

2.152. As a group of countries, we find it very difficult given the financial and resource constraints we face. Therefore, we hope that the Membership will be able to show some flexibility when it comes to LDCs. If there happens to be a case where an LDC does not meet its deadline, then at least the Members will take note of the very vulnerable situation that LDCs find themselves in, particularly in light of the global health crisis, and where possible, will take measures to facilitate the LDCs and maybe find some way to extend the deadlines as appropriate.

2.153. COVID-19 is, of course, something that we will hear more about later on from the EU but we do think it is relevant that the LDCs in the coming meetings of the Committee share their experience of how the health crisis has impacted them, particularly how it has impacted the economic fabric of our societies as well as what it has done in other areas of life. We agree with what has been said by the Focal Point and we call on Members to show flexibility with regard to LDCs in cases where they are unable to respect the notification deadline.

2.154. The Committee took note of the information and of the statements made under items A, B, C and D of this agenda item.

2.155. That concluded Agenda Item 2.

3 EXPERIENCE SHARING/THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS

3.1. This segment of the meeting was conducted in informal mode, with the understanding that information Members were willing to share would be made available on a dedicated website <https://tfadatabase.org/trade-facilitation-committee/meeting/2021-01-26> with related links also being included in the minutes of the meeting. If a delegation requested it, their intervention would also be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

Presentation by the European Union: "Sharing Experiences Related to the COVID-19 Crisis" (G/TFA/W/31/Rev.1)

3.2. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to a communication from the European Union contained in document G/TFA/W/31/Rev.1, entitled "Sharing Experiences Related to the COVID-19 Crisis" as follows: The EU proposal invites the WTO secretariat to compile all the presentations made by Members and international organizations on the trade facilitation measures that they have taken in relation to COVID-19 during the period covering the informal meeting of September 2020 up to the conclusion of the four year review of the TFA.

3.3. Subsequently, following an initial discussion of the item in informal mode, it was agreed to revert to the discussion in the formal mode of the meeting, to allow for discussions to taken place between the proponents and Members that had expressed concerns.

3.4. In the formal mode, the Chair proposed that a revised proposal would be circulated on 1 February and in the absence of any further comments, the proposal would be deemed to have been accepted by the Committee.

3.5. It was so agreed.

Presentation by the World Customs Organization (WCO): The Work of the WCO in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

3.6. The representative of the World Customs Organization made the following presentation:

3.7. I would like to start my intervention on a light note. Today is the International Customs Day. This year we celebrate it under the theme "Customs bolstering Recovery, Renewal and Resilience for a sustainable supply chain". 26 January commemorates the inaugural session of the Customs Cooperation Council held on this day back in 1953 (68 years ago). Happy International Customs Day to all colleagues with a Customs background.

3.8. Members might remember that in my presentation to the informal TFC Meeting on 30 September 2020, I informed the Committee that the WCO has compiled a repository of 115 Members' practices, which is available on the dedicated section of the WCO website. The information on our website is organized per Member.

3.9. The WCO Secretariat studied and analysed these practices and issued a Secretariat Note on "What Customs can do to Mitigate the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic". The Secretariat Note highlights measures in four categories: (i) facilitating the cross-border movement of relief and essential supplies; (ii) supporting the economy and sustaining supply chain continuity; (iii) protecting staff and (iv) protecting the society. In the Annex to the Secretariat Note, the four categories are illustrated by selected Members' practices. The information provided by WCO Members and the Secretariat Note are available on the WCO website as well as in the COVID-19 TF Repository which is hosted by the TFA Facility.

3.10. As everybody knows, the WCO has a Working Group on the WTO TFA (TFAWG). This Working Group will hold its next meeting on 8-9 March 2021. For this forthcoming Meeting, we have outlined the TFA Articles and the Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC) provisions that can support the implementation of the measures in one of these four categories – the category of facilitating the cross-border movement of relief and essential supplies. We encourage Members to attend the forthcoming TFAWG Meeting of the WCO in March 2021.

3.11. Under the COVID-19 project funded by the Government of Japan, based on the practices submitted by our Members, the WCO is developing guidelines on disaster management and supply chain continuity. The preliminary draft of these guidelines was presented to the WCO Permanent Technical Committee (PTC) in October 2020. The guidelines are grouped in three sections linked to different phases of the disaster management cycle – preparedness, response and recovery. The guidelines provide a combination of recommendations and best practices and are illustrated by specific Members' practices. The project team is currently organizing a series of regional workshops. The Asia Pacific region and the Africa regions have been completed. The workshop on the Americas will start on 1 February to further collect Members' practices and discuss the draft guidelines with

the WCO Members. The final draft of the guidelines will be presented to the PTC in May 2021. As soon as this draft is issued to the WCO Members, we can share it with the WTO Secretariat. This final draft is expected to be available in March 2021. What is now available is the preliminary draft.

3.12. In December 2020, the WCO Council issued a Resolution on the Role of Customs in Facilitating the Cross-Border Movement of Situationally Critical Medicines and Vaccines. It contains recommended measures to be implemented by Customs and by the WCO Secretariat. As a follow-up to the Resolution, the WCO Secretariat started collecting Members' practices on facilitating the cross-border movement of the COVID-19 vaccines. We have already uploaded two Members' practices to the website, and they have already been uploaded on the dedicated section of the WCO website.

3.13. We stand ready to cooperate with the WTO Secretariat and, if necessary, deliver a more detailed presentation at a future meeting of the TFC.

Presentation by Sri Lanka: "The Effective Interventions by The Department of Customs of Sri Lanka During The COVID-19 Outbreak" (G/TFA/W/30)

3.14. The Director General of Customs Sri Lanka indicated the following:

3.15. By now Sri Lanka has undergone two episodes of pandemic situations; one was in March 2020 when the country was completely locked down for a couple of months. During the current second episode of the pandemic situation, the country was partially locked down.

3.16. In the October 2020 meeting, we shared some of the measures that were taken by Sri Lanka Customs in particular, and by the Department of Commerce and other departments, in general. I will now present the interim measures that have been taken by Sri Lanka Customs and the Department of Commerce during this episode of the pandemic situation.

3.17. During the first phase of COVID-19, Sri Lanka Customs managed to release the majority of essential items. They were exempted from physical examinations but were subject to random inspections through enhanced scanning. We improved the process during the second phase of COVID-19.

3.18. Currently we cover approximately 40% of low risk import containers without any physical examination.

3.19. Compared to previous years, especially before the first episode of the pandemic in Sri Lanka when Customs physically examined 95% of import consignments, this is outstanding progress as far as the facilitation of trade is concerned. During the first outbreak of COVID-19, the online submission of customs declarations was limited to the import sector but necessary arrangements were made to expand that capacity to the export and the industry and service sectors as well. Even with the greatest challenges faced by Sri Lanka Customs, we were able to launch a pilot project of Authorized Economic Operators as required under TFA Article 7.7, which was a category C commitment. The validation process will be started very soon.

3.20. Very recently the Government took a decision to open the Bandaranayake International Airport and it has commenced operation for international passengers' movements. It has established proper procedures to ensure the safety of passengers and staff. The most important part, as highlighted in many of the WCO and WTO forums, is managing COVID-19 vaccines that are due to be imported. The procedures that we have adopted are provisional clearance procedures that have been formatted to import with zero taxes and without insisting on other regulatory control. That was mainly to facilitate the importation of vaccines into the country.

3.21. Sri Lanka Customs established an enquiry point in January 2020 as required under Article 1.3 of the TFA which is in operation 24/7 and provides excellent contribution to the public and other stakeholders. We are planning to strengthen it to provide increased facilitation for stakeholders.

3.22. The streamlining of a trade information portal in terms of the step by step process is being progressed under the donorship of the EU which is managed by ITC Geneva.

3.23. As the key administer that provides the political will for the implementation of the TFA, the Secretary to the Ministry of Finance has appointed a study group to commence a preliminary study on the single window. The group has started its work. For convenience, most of the details are published on the Customs website <http://www.customs.gov.lk>.

3.24. The first meeting of the NCTF for 2021 has been scheduled for February.

3.25. The Ambassador of Sri Lanka indicated the following:

3.26. Though Sri Lanka is a small developing country having capacity and financial resource constraints, it attaches very high significance towards introducing innovative and *sue generis* systems to enhance trade facilitation measures in general and in times of the current pandemic. The presentation made by Sri Lanka Customs and the document circulated amply highlight this commitment.

3.27. I also wish to inform this Committee of yet another set of initiatives implemented by Sri Lanka Ports Authority. This initiative can be seen as a step in realizing the optimal goal of establishing a Single Window System in the future.

3.28. In his presentation today, the Director General of Customs said that Sri Lanka is working towards this goal, and has already undertaken certain technical evaluation. The main concern we have in that regard is funding and the lack of availability of funds. We have requested funding from donors in order to realise the optimum goal of establishing a single window system, which is still pending.

3.29. The Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) has taken steps towards the clearance of all imports at the Port of Colombo through electronic payments via the Internet. This allows port users to make payments from their homes or offices to clear goods from the Port of Colombo. This special facility will enable port users to make their port payments easily without hassle.

3.30. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, all terminals of the Port of Colombo have been made readily available with necessary arrangements towards required services for all stakeholders. At present, the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) and all other terminals of the Port of Colombo have also maintained all port operations with the implementation of a strategic crisis management plan.

3.31. Accordingly, complying with the Government Health Regulations, steps have been secured to protect port employees and port users from the pandemic by facilitating the payment of imported goods through the internet efficiently and expeditiously.

3.32. Together with such extensions, facilities have been offered by the SLPA with three payment methods for the clearance of FCL and LCL cargo through respective clearance agencies via website www.slpa.lk.

3.33. I think the Sri Lankan intervention during the last agenda item indicates that Sri Lanka's measures are WTO consistent, and actually are WTO plus arrangements. We will continue to maintain such measures at times of pandemic because those favourable to other traders and exporters in generating the most secured income for the country.

Presentation from the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation

Information on the presentation can be found under the following link: [https://tfadatabase.org/uploads/thematicdiscussiondocument/Global Alliance 20200126 WTO TF A Meeting - GATF Vaccine.pdf](https://tfadatabase.org/uploads/thematicdiscussiondocument/Global%20Alliance%202020126%20WTO%20TF%20A%20Meeting%20-%20GATF%20Vaccine.pdf).

Declaration on Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMES) – Annex 3: Recommendation on Trade Facilitation and MSMES contained in document INF/MSME/4

3.34. The delegate of Uruguay, in its capacity as Coordinator of the MSME Group, made the following statement:

3.35. The purpose of including this item on the agenda is to highlight the recent adoption of the Recommendation on Trade Facilitation and MSMEs last December by the Informal Working Group (IWG) on MSMEs.

3.36. We are all aware that burdensome customs procedures are a key challenge faced by MSMEs. The 2016 World Trade Report showed that one of the main obstacles encountered by MSMEs interested in trade is the burden of customs and regulatory procedures. Bureaucratic delays and "red tape" pose a burden for moving goods across borders. Trade facilitation – the simplification, modernization and harmonization of export and import processes – has therefore emerged as an important issue for the world trading system and particularly for MSMEs.

3.37. Acknowledging that the benefits of implementing the Trade Facilitation Agreement, which entered into force in 2017, accrue particularly to MSMEs, Members of the IWG on MSMEs call for the full implementation of the TFA and invites WTO Members, the WTO Secretariat and donor organizations to work together in order to design and provide MSME-related capacity building and technical assistance. The recommendation also emphasizes the importance for MSMEs of the effective application of trade facilitation disciplines that contribute to reducing transit times and costs, and calls upon the constructive cooperation between Members with a view to enhancing freedom of transit. Likewise, in view of speeding up customs procedures, Members will agree to endeavour to identify opportunities to adopt digital solutions.

3.38. Furthermore, better supporting MSMEs through implementation of the TFA is of utmost importance to our Group. Our objective is not to advocate for changes to the TFA, but rather to explore good practices, engage with the private sector on the design of trade facilitation measures, and develop possible recommendations that could help promote MSME-friendly implementation of the Agreement – so that the TFA provisions are implemented by WTO Members in a way that takes into account the needs of MSMEs.

3.39. We will continue to highlight MSME-related considerations in Committee discussions into the future.

3.40. The delegate of Canada indicated the following:

3.41. As our friend from Uruguay has pointed out, our purpose to include this item on the agenda today is to bring the attention of all TF Committee delegates to the recent and ongoing efforts of the Informal Working Group on MSMEs. Among the package of recommendations and declarations adopted by a number of the Group's participants last December, the "Recommendation on Trade Facilitation and MSMEs" highlights certain aspects in the context of the Trade Facilitation Committee and our implementation of the Agreement.

3.42. I join Uruguay in stating Canada's belief that the benefits of the Trade Facilitation Agreement accrue particularly to MSMEs. In that context, the MSME Working Group saw value in exhorting all Members to do all that is possible to make the TFA a success in all our jurisdictions.

3.43. Our former Director-General, Mr Roberto Azevêdo, highlighted the importance of this Committee's work during his remarks on MSMEs Day in 2018. And his remarks continue to ring true today. For example, he argued that "[B]y streamlining, simplifying and standardising customs procedures the TFA will help to cut trade costs and alleviate administrative burdens. And because these costs and burdens weigh most heavily on MSMEs, they stand to benefit the most from their removal." He also noted that "the new national trade facilitation committees can provide a useful line of communication for MSMEs to give their views on a range of trade facilitation issues."

3.44. I recall that several of the experience sharing presentations the Committee has seen over the past couple years attest directly to the value Members place on reaching out and including their MSMEs in their NTFC work. Finally, the Director-General observed in his remarks that the TF Committee provides a useful forum to raise MSME related issues and that there was "...huge energy behind this discussion – and huge interest as well, especially from the private sector."

3.45. Once again, our discussion earlier today reveals that continued interest from the private sector. So, please do have a look at the MSME Declaration and the TF related recommendations. We will continue to promote them in our work in this Committee.

3.46. The Committee took note of the information shared.

3.47. That concluded agenda item 3.

4 REQUEST FROM THE GLOBAL EXPRESS ASSOCIATION TO ADDRESS THE TRADE FACILITATION COMMITTEE

4.1. The meeting reverted to formal mode.

4.2. The Chair recalled the request from the Global Express Association (GEA, which represents DHL, FedEx and UPS) to address the Trade Facilitation Committee. He went on to indicate the following:

4.3. The request was raised at the Committee meeting of 20 October 2020. Following the Committee meeting, the GEA sent a letter to the Chair of the TF Committee outlining their request in more detail. This letter was circulated to the Committee on 9 December 2020.

4.4. It was agreed at the October 2020 meeting that the Chair would carry out consultations with the Committee in order to have an exchange of views on how to engage with the private sector, taking into consideration that they were not part of the Annex D partner organizations.

4.5. Accordingly, an informal meeting was convened on 13 January 2021 to hold a first consultation on the request. As had been proposed at the October meeting, the Secretariat outlined the practice in other Committees regarding their engagement with the private sector. There followed an exchange of views and it was my impression that that there was interest in the Committee to accommodate the request. There were different suggestions of how that might be done including through thematic sessions. There were also views expressed that the engagement should not be too narrow in focus regarding, for example, hearing the views of only one sector.

4.6. My conclusion at the end of the discussion was that further consultations were required in order to articulate more precisely such participation. Such consultations have not as yet been organized.

4.7. The delegate of the United States indicated the following:

4.8. We support the participation of the private sector addressing the TF Committee. Associations like the GEA possess a global visibility of Members' practices and unique perspective of the functioning of the TFA that Members lack.

4.9. We believe this type of intervention by the private sector with regional and global perspective should be welcomed on an ongoing basis and ensures our Committee work is operationally effective.

4.10. The delegate of the European Union indicated the following:

4.11. The EU is very favourable to hearing business' views on the implementation of the TFA and hopes that the Committee will have further opportunities to hear from business and from a wider sector than the GEA. Perhaps it is good to start with one. Why not have GEA start with their presentation? We hope that we get a broad view from business regarding the implementation of the TFA as well as their recommendations. This would be a sort of reality check that would be very much welcomed. We took note that the WCO has regular possibilities to hear from business and maybe if the WCO would share with us how they proceed, particularly in terms of the type of associations that the WCO consult with so that the Committee enlarges the spectrum of business entities that may be welcomed to report in an informal manner.

4.12. The delegate of Brazil indicated the following:

4.13. We agree with the US and EU and support the request of GEA to address the TFC.

4.14. The delegate of Chinese Taipei indicated the following:

4.15. His delegation also favours the Committee having a dialogue with business sectors. Their feedback on how the TFA is working will help Members deliberate the implementation of the TFA in the Committee. Therefore, we welcome the request from the Global Express Association to address the Committee in an appropriate way that is acceptable to all Members.

4.16. The delegate of Turkey indicated the following:

4.17. Turkey would like to support the idea of the private sector directly engaging with the Committee and would like to support GEA's intervention in this regard. The private sector's input into the Committee would allow both private sector and policy makers to ensure that the TFA is implemented in a way that covers all parts of the global supply chain and different sectors within international trade.

4.18. The delegate of Norway indicated the following:

4.19. Norway already said in the informal discussion that we are very favourable to having the private sector also sharing experiences with the TFC. What strikes me is that whereas we are very clear in the TFA on our cooperation with other international organizations, we left out the private sector as such. On the other hand, we have pointed in the Agreement to the need for each and every one of us to have consultations with the private sector and interested parties. In addition, when each Member was crafting its NTFC the private sector was one of the parties which clearly had a role in it. So, we need to find an efficient way of opening up the Committee for more direct discussions with the private sector but not only with the GEA which represents three large companies. All other companies could be represented in some way in discussions in the Committee, as well other interested parties.

4.20. The delegate of Singapore indicated the following:

4.21. Singapore would like to support the request of GEA to address the Committee and generally is in support of greater engagement with the private sector.

4.22. The delegate of the United Kingdom indicated the following:

4.23. Echoing what was said before, it is important to recognise the fundamental role that the private sector played in the development of the Trade Facilitation Agreement itself and, since then, in informing the discussions in capital and here in Geneva regarding its implementation, including through continued engagement within National Trade Facilitation Committees.

4.24. The United Kingdom has worked with business stakeholders in our own NTFC to find shared priorities for trade facilitation, particularly in light of the pandemic response. The voice of the private sector has helped us as we delivered policy measures to ensure supply chain resilience over the course of what has been a very difficult year.

4.25. The United Kingdom accepts that there is a clear role for the private sector in our discussions but it is important to consider first who participates, how they participate, and on what matters they participate. There are useful precedents for this in other WTO Committees, which may or may not be applied in our situation.

4.26. We support further work taking place to determine best practice across other Committees before we take a decision on this matter.

4.27. The delegate of Japan indicated the following:

4.28. We believe the importance of the role of the business sectors in the implementation of the TFA, and welcome its further participation.

4.29. The delegate of South Africa indicated the following:

4.30. We would like to know why agenda item 3, the request for GEA to address the Committee, is not put under "experience-sharing". We would like to know if when they come to address the Committee will they then be put under experience-sharing rather than having an agenda item that

is a stand-alone because we believe they cannot make proposals to the WTO Members - Members can make proposals. However, GEA can share their experience, which her delegation welcomes.

4.31. The Chair indicated the following:

4.32. Right now, we are just discussing if we can invite GEA and if we do invite them, it will be under experience-sharing. Like other delegations said, it would under an informal setting. We heard comments that we might invite other private sector entities to participate as well, having to come back to the modalities.

4.33. The representative of the World Customs Organization made the following presentation, at the request of the European Union:

4.34. The WCO would like to thank the EU for inviting us to comment on our Organization's cooperation with the private sector. The WCO has have a longstanding tradition of cooperation with the private sector through its working bodies' structure. We have private sector observers which are mainly associations that are observers in many of our committees and working bodies. This is not the case for all bodies. Working bodies, such as those enforcement-related bodies that deal with sensitive information, are closed for private sector participation.

4.35. The WCO also has in place for already 15 years its Private Sector Consultative Group (PSCG), consisting of 27 Members from private sector associations and individual companies, covering diverse sectors and all six WCO regions. Some of the current Members are the GEA, ICC, IATA, IRU and many more. The role of the PSCG is to advise the WCO Secretary General, the Policy Commission, Council and other WCO bodies on cross-border trade related matters from a private sector perspective. The PSCG played a critical role during the COVID-19 pandemic when it met on a weekly basis together with the WCO Secretary General, the Deputy Secretary General and the Council Chair to share updates on issues occurring on the ground, which were then communicated to the Customs community more widely, towards mitigating the disruptions at the borders.

4.36. The WCO stands ready to provide more information on this as and when required.

4.37. The Chair said he understood that the Committee looked positively on the GEA request and the question of how to invite them could probably be sorted out before the next committee meeting on 2 and 3 March.

4.38. If was so agreed.

4.39. This concluded agenda item 4.

5 REVIEW OF THE OPERATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGREEMENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE 23.1.6 OF THE TRADE FACILITATION AGREEMENT

5.1. The Chair recalled that Article 23.1.6 states that "The Committee shall review the operation and implementation of this Agreement four years from its entry into force, and periodically thereafter". The Trade Facilitation Agreement entered into force on 22 February 2017, therefore, the first review of the Agreement was required to be carried out this year.

5.2. He went on indicate the following:

5.3. Given the importance and significant of the TFA, particularly in this challenging period of COVID-19, this review is a first milestone in the Committee's work to oversee the implementation of the Agreement. These first four years have allowed a significant period of time for the Agreement to mature to a certain degree. It has been a challenging period, in light of the complexities of the Agreement itself and in terms of the implementation of the Agreement utilizing the flexibilities provided in the Agreement for implementation by developing and least developed countries. The four years have covered the majority of deadlines provided in the Agreement for the application of the flexibilities. There remain two implementation deadlines for least developed countries – 22 February 2021 for indicative dates and 22 August 2022 for definitive dates for the implementation of category C provisions.

5.4. Therefore, I believe that the Committee is in a position to have a significant review of the operation and implementation of the Agreement this year. The first step in this exercise, in my opinion, is for the Committee to agree on the modality for the review.

5.5. The delegate of Nepal on behalf of the LDC Group/Core Group indicated the following:

5.6. First, I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to the Secretariat and you for the brief overview of the periodic review of the operation and implementation of the Agreement as provisioned in the Article 23.1.6 of the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA).

5.7. The TFA contains provisions for expediting the movement, release, and clearance of goods, including goods in transit.

5.8. It has rules of ensuring freedom of transit where governments are encouraged to improve transit of goods to other countries, including providing dedicated transit lanes, minimizing transit documentation requirements, and allowing advance filing for processing of documents.

5.9. It further contains provisions for technical assistance and capacity building in this area.

5.10. It had been estimated that the full implementation of the TFA would reduce trade costs by an average of 14.3% and boost global trade by up to USD 1 trillion per year, with the biggest gains in the poorest countries.

5.11. While going through the implementation status of the Agreement, it makes clear that LDCs are only concentrated on and worried about fulfilling the TFA obligations rather than benefiting from it by effective implementation of the provisions. For instance, they have been facing various difficulties even to notify their different obligations of the Agreement and some LDCs have not even been able to notify their technical assistance requirement to implement the Category C measures. Hence, benefiting from the implementation of the Agreement as envisioned during the negotiations seems far below the expectation and thinking of LDC Members at this moment.

5.12. Developed and some developing country Members have already implemented all the provisions of the Agreement. However, LDCs have not been able to harness possible benefits from the implementations of the TFA provisions in developed and developing country markets. This may be mainly due to their insufficient capacity. Our trade supportive institutions are not sufficiently capable to serve our business communities and exporters by disseminating relevant and sufficient information of destination markets.

5.13. Most LDCs are in the process of notifying the indicative and definitive dates of category C measures. Furthermore, effective implementation of category C measures has a strong connection with significant additional supports from our development partners in terms of resource, technological, institutional, and human capacity building so as to strengthen and reconnect our domestic supply chain through development and utilization of ICT and e-commerce.

5.14. Hence, there is a long way to go until the effective implementation of the category C measures in most LDC Members.

5.15. Additionally, some importers in developed and developing markets may also have insufficient information about the benefit that goods from the LDCs have in market access. This indicates a need for further interventions in raising awareness among importers in developed and developing countries of the needs of the LDCs. Capacity constraints, technology constraints, and limited awareness, among others are hindering implementation of TFA in most LDCs.

5.16. Additionally, landlocked least developed countries have further difficulties, especially within their territory, to develop and maintain sufficient trade infrastructure including digital infrastructure, without which reforms at border administrations may only facilitate imports rather than export and productivity.

5.17. Trade facilitation for LDC Members requires good integration of the entire domestic business with ICT systems and e-commerce so that the domestic supply chain could be made operational and

linked with cross-border trade. On top of that, bridging a huge digital divide among and within the countries has become urgent in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.18. In this context, the periodic review may need to cover all these aspects where an evidence-based assessment of different levels of benefits from the implementation of the TFA, gaps in harnessing potential benefits and possible ways out could be wisely laid down. Such benefits may need to link with export competitiveness and productivity enhancement of LDCs. It would help carry out a fair judgement of the achievements in comparison with the expected ones while concluding the TFA negotiations. This would be highly supportive to ensuring needs-based additional supports in capacity building in LDCs.

5.19. The delegate of the United States indicated the following:

5.20. We are very gratified to be in the position to undertake the four-year review of the operation of the TFA. From our perspective, it's been a rewarding four years, and we are encouraged by the cooperative atmosphere of the TF Committee and the successful operation of the unique approach of the TFA.

5.21. Over the past four years, we have had informative and helpful experience-sharing by a wide-array of Members, guests, and observers. We have had thoughtful interventions and reports on progress and metrics about how implementation has worked on the ground. We look forward to our work continuing and accelerating over the next four years.

5.22. Looking forward to this year, we have undertaken some initial discussions in Capital and with other Members about what is practical and possible as an outcome of our four-year review. Some of our initial thoughts include updating the standing items on the Committee agenda, as we initially proposed in October 2020, as well as thinking about the possible role and contribution of the private sector to the TF Committee, as we already discussed under the GEA agenda item. As we also communicated to the Committee in February 2020, we are interested in leveraging the valuable experience sharing from the Committee into some concrete Committee recommendations and practices.

5.23. Finally, we are interested in exploring ways of discussing updated technical assistance needs as we prepare to plan for the next four to ten years of assistance planning and commitment.

5.24. Starting discussions with Members early this year, and having regular meetings devoted to an outcome on the four-year review, will help us achieve an outcome at the end of the year we can present to Ministers.

5.25. We look forward to hearing other Members' thoughts on the four-year review and areas of interest, and we stand ready to work with all Members.

5.26. The delegate of Norway indicated the following:

5.27. I would like to give some preliminary views on the up-coming review. The TFA entered into force on 22 February 2017 – we have in principle one month to get the review going.

5.28. Although we can make use of the experience of other committees' reviews, it is important to reflect on what we want to review, as the wording of Article 23.1.6 is relatively general.

5.29. Focus of the work for the first four years of operation of the TFA, both in the WTO and of each individual Member, has been the implementation of the Agreement - putting in place National Trade Facilitation Committees, making sure commitments have been enforced and that plans and programs for implementation have been made and followed. A review should reflect this joint effort, where we were at the start and how far have we come. The building blocks we have for such a review is each Article and what we each have done to implement each one.

5.30. But implementation of commitments is only one part of the story. What have been the effects of our implementation? It would be useful to include in the review the economic benefits of the Agreement. How trade costs have been reduced, what this has added to the global economy and to each of our countries. The WTO estimates, at entry into force were that if all WTO Members

implemented both commitments and best endeavours obligations the reductions in trade costs could on average be more than 14%, with an annual increase in global exports of 2.7% and of global GDP of more than 0.5%. The benefits for developing Members were supposed to be much greater than for developed Members. Should we not get figures on the table from the WTO Secretariat, the OECD, UNCTAD and the World Bank to enlighten us and the general public on this?

5.31. The operation of the Agreement could also include a review of what we have done within the TFC to increase our understanding of best practices, of implementation challenges and possibly of new problems. In that vein, it would be hard not to reflect this past year with the pandemic and the positive implications of trade facilitating procedures.

5.32. Norway looks forward to the review, based on informative submissions from all Members on their implementation. With facts in place, the review should also give us a good basis to improve the operation and implementation of the Agreement (perhaps through the formulation of certain recommendations).

5.33. The delegate of the United Kingdom indicated the following:

5.34. The United Kingdom recognises the importance of the review mechanism in Article 23.1.6 in successfully driving forward the operation and implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement.

5.35. Ensuring the success of this Agreement is of great interest to other Committees within the WTO, observers, and of course Members of this Committee.

5.36. We would welcome further discussion in the immediate term to allow Members to design the process and set out the substantive items forming part of this review. We think it would be beneficial to work towards a one-year model for this review.

5.37. The review process should be Member-driven and, at the very least, cover core commitments from within the Agreement, particularly those in Section 1 and the implementation of National Trade Facilitation Committees.

5.38. Consideration should be given to the inclusion of broader quantitative and qualitative analysis of the positive impacts of the implementation of the Agreement on global trade facilitation, as well as who should provide that analysis.

5.39. In light of time constraints, the United Kingdom supports scheduling future meetings on this topic based on the assumption of continuing restrictions in light of the pandemic.

5.40. The delegate of Switzerland indicated the following:

5.41. Switzerland welcomes this first opportunity to discuss the review of the Trade Facilitation Agreement. At the outset, we would like to encourage all Members to come forward, share their views in a constructive spirit, and contribute to make sure this review will be successful.

5.42. Since this is the first review of the Agreement, it will be particularly important to give enough time to Members to define the issues that should be discussed in this review. In this light, we encourage you, Chair, or your successor, to keep this item on the agenda for the next meeting, since Members may need some time to discuss and sort out their thoughts on what should be reviewed, before actually carrying out the review.

5.43. For Switzerland, first and foremost, the review should help us establish a clear picture of where Members have come since the Agreement was signed, and the road ahead of us. As we know, implementation is still incomplete and this review provides an opportunity to dig deeper and understand better the challenges that remain.

5.44. One aspect that sets the TFA apart from other WTO Agreements are the Special and Differential Treatment provisions. Switzerland would be particularly interested in reviewing this part of the Agreement and discuss its implementation and operation with Members.

5.45. Of course, we remain open to discuss other issues and we support the items that have been brought forward by previous speakers.

5.46. The delegate of the European Union indicated the following:

5.47. The EU welcomes previous speakers' interventions. In fact, this is the first time we have a first tour de table of Members' views on the scope and modalities of the review and implementation of this agreement. The EU is of the view that the process should be gradual with the objective to lead to a comprehensive and detailed and consensual report by the end of the year

5.48. The review objective in our view should be to give a comprehensive and realistic image of where we stand in terms of implementation of the Agreement four years after entry into force. And it would also be the opportunity to understand better how COVID-19 has impacted and continues to impact on operations of customs globally.

5.49. In order to start the process and following what Switzerland mentioned in particular, we are of the view that it would be very useful that developing countries and LDCs continue informing us about their needs for assistance. As well as the state of play of their implementation and the related implementation challenges. That would be very crucial. The Agreement provides for Members to address the problems that emerged during the review period so we will welcome Members' suggestions in this area.

5.50. This exercise should also be the opportunity to consider how we can improve our common work. The review could contain a formal aspect referring to the work done by the Committee. I know that different Members have expressed a very clear appreciation of the challenges that this innovative Agreement contains. We are also of the view, as other Members mentioned, to have a reality check, as much as possible, as to implementation. If possible, we could have the views of business, with the modalities to be agreed within this Committee.

5.51. I think that the other issue we should mention, as has already been supported by other speakers, is that we probably need additional meetings this year to conclude our review. We stand ready to work with all the Members to achieve something satisfactory and which can highlight the benefits of the implementation of the Agreement and could be accessible to a wider audience.

5.52. The delegate of Cote d'Ivoire indicated the following:

5.53. Our delegation is pleased to see this item on the agenda and we would like to endorse the statement that was made by the representative of the LDCs. We believe that the two main items that the review would focus on – the implementation and functioning of the Agreement – are very important. With regard to the item on implementation, we need a lot of details about the measures to enable Members to properly identify the difficulties and challenges they have encountered, especially the LDCs and developing countries. Furthermore, the review should enable us to see what the benefits have been for developing countries and LDCs of implementing this Agreement. This is very important since developing countries and LDCs engaged in the negotiation and implementation of this Agreement because of the expected benefits in terms of the reduction of trade costs and the resulting trade gains. From this point of view, our delegation supports the statement to this effect made by Nepal on behalf of the LDCs.

5.54. The review should not be superficial. We should have quantifiable, measurable figures and statistics to identify what difficulties have been encountered by LDCs. We must be able to see if the commitments undertaken by the developed countries in terms of technical assistance for developing countries and LDCs have been respected. We need to focus on working out in a clear way everything that should be included in the review to ensure that after its completion, we see an improvement in the implementation of the TFA.

5.55. The delegate of Chad indicated the following:

5.56. Chad endorses the statement made by Nepal on behalf of the LDCs which clearly demonstrates the concerns and other problems encountered by developing countries and LDCs. Thank you to the European Union for having carefully listened to the concerns of the developing and LDCs when it comes to the implementation of the TFA. This Agreement contains certain benefits with

regard to technical assistance which enables developing countries and LDCs to decide at which point they will implement the various provisions of the Agreement and to identify which provisions they cannot implement until they have received technical assistance and support to reinforce capacity. The TFA special and differential treatment provisions are very crucial for us and so this must be taken into account for LDCs and developing countries. We also agree with Switzerland to keep this item on the agenda for the next meeting.

5.57. The delegate of Japan asked the Secretariat or Members that any documents to be prepared for the review, if any, be circulated well in advance, so that Members can make good use of them.

5.58. The Chair proposed that while awaiting the selection of the Chair for the remaining period of 2020-2021 term, he would hold consultations to see how best to conduct the review. The Committee would revert to this issue at its next formal meeting.

5.59. It was so agreed.

5.60. The Committee took note of the information and of the statements made.

Sharing Experiences Related to the COVID-19 Crisis (G/TFA/W/31/Rev.1) – proposal by the European Union

5.61. The Chair reverted to the EU proposal "Sharing Experiences Related to the COVID-19 Crisis" (G/TFA/W/31/Rev.1). Following discussions that had taken place between the proponents and Members that had expressed concerns regarding the proposal, the Chair proposed that a revised proposal would be circulated on 1 February and in the absence of any further comments, the proposal would be deemed to have been accepted by the Committee.

5.62. It was so agreed.

5.63. That concluded agenda item 5.

6 OTHER BUSINESS

6.1. The delegate of the United States indicated the following regarding "Supporting the Timely and Efficient Release of Global Goods Through Accelerated Implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement" - Communication from Australia; Brazil; Colombia; European Union; Iceland; Japan; Norway; the Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu; and the United States (G/TFA/W/25/Rev.2).

6.2. On behalf of the co-sponsors, we are pleased to inform Members that Mexico and Thailand have joined the communication as co-sponsors. We welcome all Members to join the communication which supports the accelerated implementation, where possible, of the TFA. I welcome any Members with questions about this communication to please do not hesitate to contact me and I thank you for your attention this afternoon.

6.3. The delegate of the Republic of Korea indicated the following:

6.4. The Republic of Korea is happy to co-sponsor this communication. Under the COVID-19 crisis, accelerating the implementation of the TFA has great importance in terms of access to essential medical supplies. We would like to appreciate the US for this initiative and the Republic of Korea will continue to double its efforts to implement the TFA.

6.5. The delegate of Brazil indicated the following:

6.6. Brazil reiterates that it is committed to the full implementation of the TFA and takes this opportunity together with the other cosponsors to invite other Members to endorse the communication supporting the timely and efficient release of global goods through accelerated implementation of the WTO TFA.

6.7. The delegate of Thailand indicated the following:

6.8. Thailand would like to thank the US for the initiative shown in the communication, and it is pleased to inform the meeting that we have joined as a cosponsor to the communication. We believe that the proposed action as stated in the communication can be an effective means for supporting the global COVID-19 response by ensuring the smooth and continuous trade in goods and facilitating the movement of essential goods and vaccines.

6.9. The delegate of Norway indicated the following:

6.10. Norway is really happy to co-sponsor this communication. COVID-19 has brought to the forefront the positive impacts of trade facilitating measures that limit physical, person to person contact, including through electronic payments and submission of documents through electronic means.

6.11. We want to address specifically one of the elements in our communication. An important trade facilitative measure which was focused on long before the WTO trade facilitation negotiations, as well as during those negotiations, was the elimination of consular transactions, also called legalization. Such elimination did not achieve consensus during the negotiations themselves, even though many Members pointed to the increased costs and delays, not least for SMEs, and for little or no real purpose other than as income for those Members that apply the legalization. With the pandemic, a new argument has arisen regarding the need to eliminate this practice and with the WTO focus on SMEs, an older argument has been reinforced because legalization particularly does hurt the small trade. So, we think that it is about time that we act upon this issue.

6.12. The delegate of Turkey indicated the following:

6.13. Turkey would like to support the communication co-sponsored by several Member countries.

6.14. We agree that Articles contained within the communication are important for realizing benefits of trade facilitation and helping Member countries to battle COVID-19 on customs procedures. Turkey would like to underline the importance of coordination and cooperation among all government agencies and between private sector stakeholders in COVID-19 times. The TFA provides a great opportunity under Article 8 and Article 23.2. Under Article 8, the concept of border agency cooperation allows Members to coordinate better on their border controls and facilitation measures between government agencies. Article 23.2 brings the private sector into the picture and the COVID-19 crisis showed us that well-functioning NCTFs are not only bodies for implementing trade facilitation reforms but also allow countries to overcome great crises in international supply chains.

6.15. The delegate of Chinese Taipei indicated the following:

6.16. As we know, the TFA plays a critical role in keeping goods moving across borders in a smooth manner. The benefits of TFA implementation not only improve transparency and customs practice, but also becomes a crucial component of export opportunities.

6.17. It has been nearly four years since the TFA entered into force on 22 February 2017. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it gives us the opportunity to review the efficiency of implementation of the Agreement.

6.18. In this regard, we would also like to thank the US and related cosponsors for their communication which offers views on how to continuously move the TFA forward under the current pandemic crises.

6.19. The delegate of South Africa indicated the following:

6.20. Since this item has been raised under AOB, we will not read a statement but we just want to indicate that we do have issues that we would like to follow up on and we will try to contact our colleagues from the US or any other cosponsor and follow up with them.

6.21. The delegate of the United States indicated the following:

6.22. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Members who have intervened this afternoon in support of our efforts and, in particular, I would like to thank the Republic of Korea for its notice that it is also joining as a cosponsor. I look forward to following up with South Africa.

e-Agenda

6.23. The Chair recalled that at the October meeting of the Committee it was agreed to ask the Secretariat to make a presentation on current use of an eAgenda by a Committee. The Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade had an established practice of using an eAgenda. The Secretariat made a presentation on its use of the eAgenda.

6.24. The delegate of the Russian Federation indicated the following:

6.25. Specific trade concerns (STCs) are the main focus of the work of the TBT and SPS Committees. The agenda should be specifically tailored for each Committee. When we look at the agenda of the Committee on Trade Facilitation, we have different topics of discussion mainly on the review of notifications and experience sharing. Therefore, we consider that introduction of e-Agenda for the TFA is preliminary. We should come back to the topic of the e-Agenda when we will have trade concerns included into the charge of the Committee on Trade Facilitation.

6.26. The delegate of Canada indicated the following:

6.27. I think the spread of eAgenda through the organization is a good thing. The take-up has been quite significant and helpful for Members. Speaking as a formal TBT delegate, the access to statements probably helps all of us to become familiar with the concerns raised within those committees. Regarding the differences between the Committees, I agree that this is something we would need to take into account. The Market Access Committee will have a mock-up of an e-Agenda system which takes into account all of the Committee's processes. The one aspect of the e-Agenda that seems to be most useful, at least from my perspective, is the advance notice of agenda items, be they STCs or notifications for review, or experience-sharing presentations, or even indications that Members will be providing some experience-sharing at the next Committee meeting. The sooner we know about something happening the sooner we will be able to ask questions during the Committee, which enriches the discussion. Potentially, we can provide our own experience-sharing by adding an agenda item ourselves to what is already there. Canada encourages the Secretariat to continue its work in this regard. I hope that the e-Agenda can be adapted to the needs of the TF Committee and look forward to being able to use that system in planning our meetings.

6.28. The Chair said that he understood the e-Agenda to be a transparency tool enabling delegates to see the points on the agenda. In this committee, STCs were not a big issue but the e-Agenda could be useful for the TF Committee.

6.29. The delegate of the United States indicated the following:

6.30. The US requests that if a Member wishes to add this item to the next committee meeting, that the Member do so given that this organization is a member-driven organization.

6.31. The delegation of the European Union indicated the following:

6.32. The issue was under AOB and we were not aware of it. Informally, this is a very interesting presentation. It is always useful to learn from other Committee's functioning, even though there are differences in the TBT and SPS committees' work as was previously mentioned.

6.33. The delegate of Brazil indicated the following:

6.34. We do not have a formal position. We believe that the e-Agenda is a good goal in the future.

6.35. The Chair proposed that if a Member so requested, the item would be put on the agenda of the next Committee meeting.

Dates of meetings

6.36. The Chair indicated the following:

6.37. You will recall that at the meeting of 20 October 2020, the following dates were identified for 3 subsequent meetings of the Committee in 2021: 2 and 3 March; 27 and 28 July; and 19 to 21 October.

6.38. Based on the discussions held this morning and in light of the four-year review of the Agreement to be undertaken this year, it appears to me that there is quite an amount of work to be carried out by the Committee. I therefore propose that the Committee hold an additional meeting in April and I can propose the dates of 22 and 23 April. There is also another slot for an additional July meeting but we can revert to that at a later stage.

Invitation to Annex D partner organizations

6.39. Members agreed to invite the partners from the Annex D organizations, as well as the Global Alliance on Trade Facilitation, as observers to the next Committee meeting.

6.40. The Committee took note of the information and of the statements made under the agenda item.

6.41. That concluded agenda item 6.

6.42. The meeting was adjourned.
