



15 January 2021

(21-0511)

Page: 1/2

Committee on Trade Facilitation

Original: English

## SHARING EXPERIENCES RELATED TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS

### COMMUNICATION FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

#### *Revision*

The following communication, dated 15 January 2021, is being circulated at the request of the delegation the European Union.

- 
1. We would like to share with the Membership the following proposal for consideration at the next formal Trade Facilitation Committee meeting.
  2. We have noted with interest the contributions made by Members and international organizations for the informal TFC meeting of 30 September 2020. These contributions have highlighted the nature of the challenges that WTO Members had and continue to face in fighting COVID-19. They also stress the impact on the real economy, supply chains, and specifically, the adjustments to customs procedures that were deemed necessary.
  3. There seemed to be a growing acknowledgement at both the informal TFC meeting of 30 September and the formal TFC meeting of 20-21 October, that the crisis makes the Trade Facilitation Agreement even more relevant. The pandemic has accelerated Members' reforms and renewed efforts to implement the Trade Facilitation Agreement in numerous areas, including transparency, simplification, automation, and cooperation at the borders, to mention only a few.
  4. We would like to seize this opportunity and propose the following:
  5. We believe that it is timely to identify within these contributions what key difficulties and challenges Members and businesses have encountered when importing, exporting, or transiting territories during the crisis. It would also be useful to share what particular reforms and changes Members and businesses have made in response. Such a compilation will constitute a good basis to discuss recommendations to address the ongoing pandemic, and what next steps would be appropriate for 2021.
  6. In order to facilitate the preparation of such a discussion we propose the following:
  7. First, to invite the WTO Secretariat to prepare a compendium document of the contributions of COVID-19 responses that the TFC Members and Observers have provided the TF Committee so far. It should include the presentations made by Members and international organizations. The compendium report should be structured similarly to the TFA. For each provision, the report should present the issues/difficulties as well as the actions/reforms taken by Members when applicable. The source of the information should be clearly indicated. For example, under transparency, the report should present all measures reported by Members such as reshaping of websites, updates of transparency notifications. If some issues or actions do not fit under an existing TFA provision, they should be grouped under "Other TF-related COVID-19 measures" (for example the protection of customs staff operating on the ground).

8. Whenever pertinent, identification of specific problems and solutions adopted could be done by different categories of Members (for example specific difficulties for landlocked WTO Members/LDCs) or for different categories of operators (for example SME operators).

9. Such a consolidation of existing measures reported by International Organizations, Members and eventually business (within existing contributions already shared in the TFC) would avoid duplication of efforts among entities working on TF measures to cope with COVID-19 challenges. This would also be a useful tool to help better structure the discussions of the future TFC meetings under the agenda setting "sharing of experiences at times of COVID-19" that we propose to be set up during 2021 as a pilot experience.

10. As a second step, the TFC could consider discussing this document or part of it in order to outline what main recommendations may emerge and what sharing of practices may be important to do without delay now that vaccine distribution is about to commence. Such discussions could take place in the TFC or informal meeting and should be Member-driven.

11. Having in mind the review by the Committee that is planned for February 2021 in accordance with Article 23 (1) (1) (6)<sup>1</sup>, we would also like to propose that a meeting of the TFC be organized at the soonest possible in 2021 to allow for the WTO Secretariat to provide a preliminary compilation in time for the review. This would help the TFC organize its discussions in a structured manner.

---

---

<sup>1</sup> "The Committee shall review the operation and implementation of this Agreement four years from its entry into force, and periodically thereafter".