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Committee on Trade Facilitation

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## SHARING EXPERIENCES RELATED TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS

### COMMUNICATION FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

#### *Revision*

The following communication, dated 1 March 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 of COVID-19 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' 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 trade facilitation measures Members have taken in response to unique and unprecedented conditions under the pandemic.
6. In order to facilitate the identification of such measures 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 COVID-19 related trade facilitation measures taken by the Members and reported to the Committee, including the challenges and difficulties addressed, if mentioned in the contribution. The source of the information should be clearly indicated. 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). The listing of measures under this proposed structure is without prejudice to the rights and obligations of the Members. The WTO Secretariat role is to list the notified or shared measures as they are voluntarily reported by the respective Members, observers and international organisations without making any judgment on their rationale or legal standings *vis-à-vis* the WTO Agreements & provisions.

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.

10. This compilation could serve the purpose of better structuring the discussions of the future TFC meetings under the agenda setting "sharing of experiences at times of COVID-19".

11. 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.

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