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CEFACT: AN INTERNATIONAL PRIVATE/PUBLIC SECTOR PARTNERSHIP

The Centre for the Facilitation of Procedures and Practices in Administration, Commerce and Transport (CEFACT) constitutes a partnership between the public and private sectors for their mutual benefit. For the private sector, working with governments to improve commerce is critical to improving international competitiveness. For governments, working with the private sector to reduce procedural barriers to trade is critical to improving both their own administrative effectiveness and the economic well-being of their countries.

This issue of the Bulletin presents an exposition (TRADE/CEFACT/1998/CRP.19) by the Chairman of the CEFACT, Mr. Henri Martre, at the Trade Facilitation Seminar, carried out between 9 and 10 March of 1998, at the Headquarters of the World Trade Organization, Geneva, Switzerland. Its main purpose is to explain the importance of CEFACT's partnership between the public and private sectors; how this partnership works, and the trade facilitation instruments it has created.

How the private and public sector work together in CEFACT

Government representatives participate through their delegations in the CEFACT plenary, where the rules allow non-UN/ECE member countries to participate on an equal footing with UN/ECE member countries.

For the private sector, there are three main channels for participation, the last two of which are also available to national representatives. These are:

1) Participation in the CEFACT Plenary of international private sector organizations recognized by the UN's Economic and Social Council such as the:

- International Chamber of Commerce;
- International Article Numbering Association;
- International Chamber of Shipping;
- Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Communications.

2) Participation in mandated working groups of nominated technical experts from private industry. Since many of these nominated experts represent larger constituencies in the form of national or sectoral user groups which may have anywhere from ten to several hundred members, the end result is the position of thousands of experts being represented.

3) National and regional trade facilitation organizations, with large private-sector memberships, who

promote CEFACt's work locally, often participate in national delegations, and maintain ongoing communications with the secretariat.

In addition, we have ongoing communications with large industry groupings. For example, in industries such as shipbuilding, aerospace, defence and power plant construction, globalization is increasingly supported by Continuous Acquisition Life cycle Support, often referred to as CALS. This concept covers all parts of a project, from engineering and production to maintenance, but includes large EDI and electronic commerce elements. Recognizing the importance of addressing the global transaction chain from production to delivery UN/CEFACT is working together with the CALS community and ISO to make full use of the potential synergy between our organizations in order to make global transactions easier and more transparent.

CEFACT's trade facilitation instruments

CEFACT has three basic areas where it develops trade facilitation instruments, these being: Recommendations, electronic commerce and modelling.

1) Recommendations. UN/ECE has issued 26 Trade Facilitation Recommendations on how to eliminate cumbersome trade procedures and then simplify, harmonize and standardize remaining procedures and data.

These steps not only facilitate traditional, paper-based trade, they are also a prerequisite to computerization and the use of related techniques such as Electronic Data Interchange. Contradictory procedures cannot be computerized; difficult to fulfill procedures are not any easier to fulfill when computerized; and the automation of unharmonized procedures and data leads to incompatible systems that cannot communicate with one another. These problems are eliminated when trade facilitation principles are applied prior to automation.

Today, CEFACT continues to work on new recommendations. For example, priority is currently on the development of a recommendation for audit-based controls and risk management to facilitate good clearance. CEFACT is also integrating new technologies such as data modelling into its analytical work and its new recommendations take into account the effects of electronic commerce on trade procedures.

2) Electronic Commerce. Based on constantly advancing telecommunications and computer technology, electronic trading and electronic commerce are rapidly becoming commonplace. For the majority of these activities, which are business-to-business exchanges, Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) forms the communications backbone.

"Electronic commerce" is often used to refer to consumers communicating with businesses via the Internet World Wide Web, known as the Web, even though this is only one part of the overall picture. The Web provides a human to computer interface for manually entering the data for one transaction at a time. This is suitable for customer to company communications, but when businesses communicate with one another, or with an administration, the data to be exchanged often is of a large volume and already exists in one of their computers. In this case, of business-to-business communications, EDI is the most effective electronic commerce technology.

The UN/ECE has developed, and maintains, the only international standard for EDI which is known as UN Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport or UN/EDIFACT. There are now over 150 UN/EDIFACT messages covering many domains of private and public sector interest.

In addition, UN/ECE is already looking towards new technologies and is working to develop the next generation of EDI standards which it expects to be based upon new approaches to data representation and exchange.

3) Modelling. In order to provide users with practical solutions to trade facilitation problems, CEFAC has recently adopted several new techniques. Among the most important is the development of computer-based business models and scenarios.

The basis of this work is a model of the International Trade Transaction which covers thousands of data flows between trading partners, banks, transporters and national administrations. This International Trade Transaction model is composed of many smaller models at the micro-economic level that allow the structured analysis of procedures and data flows. As work progresses on this model, and related analyses, it is being used to integrate the work on procedures and documentation with the work on Electronic Data Interchange and UN/EDIFACT and, as a result, improve the effectiveness of both.

The private sector makes extensive use of CEFAC's work

Globalization of the market place is taking place rapidly, with companies sourcing components in one part of the world, assembling them in another and selling them in yet another. Indeed, the increased use of telecommunications-based technologies has resulted in the recent emergence of a new concept that is linked to electronic commerce: "virtual" enterprises. These are enterprises that customers and suppliers "see" as being one company; but which may, or may not, exist as a single physical entity. The "virtual" enterprise is based upon an invisible web of communications and relationships between many different computer systems and companies. To function effectively on a global scale, this invisible economic web must be built upon a solid infrastructure of internationally recognized norms in business information and practices. UN/ECE provides much of this foundation with UN/EDIFACT, the UN Layout Key and its other trade facilitation instruments.

How some of these trade facilitation instruments are used, and by whom, is described in more detail below.

1) Recommendations: The UN Layout Key (UNLK) The UN Layout Key is a guideline for designing documents, that allows the use of rationalized methods for preparing documents where information is typed only once for a full set of export documents. Today, as a reflection of the increasing automation of trade data flows, the UN Layout Key is also used by information systems either for converting data records to printed output or in the screen displays used for data entry.

CEFACT has not forgotten that much of the world's trade and data exchange still takes place on paper (even if the data are from, or are eventually stored, on a computer). Therefore, it continues to develop recommendations, based on the UN Layout Key, for the design of key international trade documents such as bills of lading, invoices, purchase orders and dangerous goods transport declarations.

Some well-known documents based upon the UN Layout Key include: the European Union's Single Administrative Document, the General System of Preferences Certificate, the IATA air waybill and the International Bill of Lading. In addition, many countries have based some or all of their national administrative documents on the UN Layout Key including: Canada, China, France, Japan, India, the Philippines, Singapore and Tanzania.

The growing use of the UN Layout Key for electronic forms on the Web shows that this is a valid approach, regardless of the technology in which it is implemented. CEFACT's current work programme includes ensuring the development of electronic equivalents for all aligned paper documents.

2) Recommendations: the UN Location Code (UN/LOCODE) The UN location code includes codes for over seven thousand specific locations around the world where international trade takes place. These codes are widely used by companies in the banking, tourism and transport industries as well as by statistical agencies. Users include Calberson, Hapag-Lloyd, P&O Containers, S.W.I.F.T., the United States Bureau of Transportation Statistics, and most of the major shipping lines in Asia and Europe.

3) Other Recommendations Some other CEFACT recommendations are those for the country code, which has been adopted by ISO, shipping marks which are used almost universally within the shipping industry, units of measure, and guidelines for the agreements between organizations that wish to exchange information using EDI.

4) UN Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport (UN/EDIFACT) A really powerful combination exists when the Internet WWW and EDI are combined and integrated. One example of this is WEB EDI where electronic forms are created for entering data on the WWW and then the data entered into the form is automatically translated into a UN/EDIFACT message for sending. The two technologies complement one another, giving consumers an interface which is easy to access and use, while providing data to companies in the same communications 'backbone' format that they use with their business customers and suppliers.

To achieve effective information flows covering international markets a company must use standard procedures and techniques together with efficient procedures and best practices. In this context, UN/EDIFACT is the only international standard for Electronic Data Interchange and is widely used in international trade.

UN/EDIFACT has been adopted by the European Union as well as by many individual countries such as Brazil, the Republic of Korea and Singapore, which was a very early implementor. It is also the preferred EDI standard within the US government as outlined in Federal Information Processing Standard FIPS 161-2 for EDI.

Other major users of UN/EDIFACT include:

- Banks who are members of the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications (S.W.I.F.T.) who use it for communication between themselves and customers;
- The International Article Numbering Association and over 13,000 retail and wholesale companies belonging to their national member associations;
- The international electronics industry; for example, IBM, HP and DEC;
- The International Air Transport Association (IATA);
- Customs administrations, as the agreed upon EDI standard for the over 100 countries belonging to the World Customs Organization. Examples of some countries who have already implemented UN/EDIFACT for Customs include: Australia, Korea, Malaysia, the United Kingdom and the United States. In addition, Germany and Japan are currently in the process of implementing UN/EDIFACT based systems.
- National statistical administrations and central banks for the exchange of statistical data among themselves and with organizations like Eurostat, the International Monetary Fund and the Bank for International Settlements; and

- A variety of national administrations who use UN/EDIFACT in areas including transport, health care and taxation;

As more and more industries and administrations implement UN/EDIFACT new opportunities open up for improving world trading processes. For example, many ports in the North Sea now exchange advance information about cargos that take less than a day to move from one port to another and a number of countries in East Asia are discussing the possibility of aligning their customs data so that source country's export declaration can be used as the import declaration in the receiving country. **Conclusion** CEFACT is both a powerful and a productive partnership between the private and public sector. Its work has resulted in the international implementation of better business practices, improved administrative processes and modernized legal procedures related to trade. By reducing procedural barriers it has also facilitated the opening of markets for new operators in international trade such as small- and medium-sized enterprises.

However, there is still much to be done, both in encouraging the use of already developed recommendations and tools as well as in new development based upon the changing technological and business environment of today.

CEFACT is ready to face these challenges. We also believe that both CEFACT and the WTO would benefit from working together to promote the simplification, harmonization and standardization of trading procedures so that all traders have access to modern, facilitated trading processes. In other words, access to information, efficient procedures, and adequate support services.

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EDI, UN/EDIFACT: ACTIVITIES RELATED WITH THEIR DEVELOPMENT IN LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES

With the purpose of disseminating in future issues of the Bulletin the progress achieved regarding EDI and the

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