

**REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**

**NATIONAL TRADE FACILITATION BODY**



**ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 2023**

**Belgrade, March 2024**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

National Trade Facilitation Body (hereinafter: NTFB) was established by the Decision of the Government of the Republic of Serbia<sup>1</sup> in November 2017). This body was established to ensure more comprehensive and effective facilitation of foreign trade of the Republic of Serbia and coordinate efforts by competent authorities, organisations, business community and other participants in the foreign trade system.

**The Government of the Republic of Serbia, at the session held on 6 April 2023, adopted the Decision Amending the Decision on Establishment of the National Trade Facilitation Body (*The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 98 of 3 November 2017, 55 of 2 August 2019, 27 of 7 April 2023.** The Decision stated the amendments related to the appointment of the new NTFB chairperson, deputy chairperson, deputy secretary and a certain number of NTFB members. At the same time, it was necessary to state the changes in the name of the ministry presiding over this body. Accordingly, the new chair of NTFB, **Minister of Internal and Foreign Trade, Mr. Tomislav Momirović**, was appointed, while **Ms. Snežana Karanović, assistant to the Minister of Finance**, was appointed as a vice-chair.

Professional and administrative and technical support for the work of the National Trade Facilitation Body **is provided by the Ministry of Internal and Foreign Trade in cooperation with the Customs Administration.**

The National Trade Facilitation Body submits its regular annual report to the Government no later than 31 March of the current year for the previous year and, if necessary, extraordinary reports.

When it comes to the results included in this **Report which refer to the period March 2023 - March 2024**, it can be stated that the previously set goals for 2023 have been fulfilled to a significant extent, despite the fact that foreign trade activity was very difficult, taking into account, above all, the international circumstances, especially the consequences caused by the war in Ukraine.

In this period, two sessions of the NTFB were held, where the most important topics in the field of trade facilitation were analysed, primarily in connection with the obligations stipulated in the Action Plans for 2022 and 2023. Also, in December 2023, new Action Plans of expert groups for 2024-2025 were adopted. All activities contained in this reporting period were carried out in close cooperation with representatives of the private sector, namely the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the American Chamber of Commerce in Serbia, as well as the Foreign Investors Council.

In addition, the activities foreseen in the NTFB Action Plans are also contained in the **Economic Reform Programme (ERP) for the period 2024-2026**. Through the ERP analysis, the European Commission monitors the activities of NTFB within the structural reform "Improving conditions and removing barriers to trade", which aims to intensify, improve, diversify and further grow the foreign trade of the Republic of Serbia, both at the regional and global levels.

Also, the trade facilitation process is part of the **Action Plan for Implementation of the Government Programme 2023-2026**, within the work of Implementation Group 3,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 98/17, 55/19 and 27/23, text available at the following link: <https://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SIGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/odluka/2019/55/7>

subpoint 3.4.5: Removal of barriers to foreign trade exchange.

## **2. THE NATIONAL TRADE FACILITATION BODY SESSIONS**

### **2.1. The ninth session of the National Trade Facilitation Body**

The ninth session of the NTFB was held on 23 June 2023, in the premises of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, and was chaired by the Minister of Internal and Foreign Trade as the new chair of the NTFB. The agenda of the session included reporting on the activities of the Expert Groups in relation to fulfilling the obligations contained in the Action Plans for 2022 and 2023, then the next steps in connection with development of new Action Plans for the period 2024-2025, as well as the revision of the assessment of compliance with the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. In this regard, the chairpersons of the expert groups submitted extensive reports by AP points, after which everyone present, especially representatives of the private sector, could ask questions and make comments.

The NTFB Secretariat took the responsibility of coordinating and organising a meeting between the business community and the Medicines and Medical Devices Agency of Serbia (*ALIMS*) in connection with the improvement of procedures and the elimination of delays in issuing registrations, renewals, variations for medicines.<sup>2</sup>

In view of presentation of the representatives of business associations, it was agreed that the representatives of the private sector would send initiatives, questions and other information in this regard electronically, and the competent departments, in cooperation with the NTFB Secretariat, would contact the competent departments and foreign trade partners in order to solve as efficiently as possible the problems that limit free flow of goods.

### **2.2 The tenth session of the National Trade Facilitation Body**

The tenth session of NTFB was held on 7 and 8 December 2023 in Šabac. The session was divided into two working days, on 7 December, the topics of the report on the work of expert groups related to implementation of activities from the Action Plans 2022-2023 were discussed in detail, and then the proposals of the new Action Plans for the period 2024-2025 were considered.

During the first day, the chairpersons of the expert groups reported in detail what was done in respect of specific activities from the AP for 2022-2023. After that, representatives of the business community had the opportunity to give their views on what was achieved for all activities. After that, there was a discussion regarding which activities would be included in the new two-year cycle of Action Plans for 2024 and 2025. A large number of recommendations from the private sector was taken into account and included in the text of the action plans.

On the second day, the meeting was chaired by the Chair of the NTFB and the Minister of Internal and Foreign Trade, Mr. Tomislav Momirović, who emphasized that the purpose of this Body's work was to implement essential changes and facilitate procedures for foreign trade in a way that our business community could recognize it in its daily work. In this regard, he especially thanked the representatives of the business community, i.e. the

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<sup>2</sup> The first meeting, which was initiated by the Minister of Internal and Foreign Trade and the Chairperson of NTFB and held on 11 August 2023, **completely changed the previous practice**, where there was a huge misunderstanding and the absence of a real dialogue between representatives of the Agency and business associations. After that meeting, three extremely constructive meetings were held at the expert level (two in the premises of the Agency and one in the premises of the American Chamber of Commerce), where a road map for solving this long-standing problem was drawn up and included in AP of the expert group 2.

Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the American Chamber of Commerce in Serbia and the Foreign Investors Council for taking an active part in development of Action Plans, which is another proof that NTFB is an excellent platform for public-private dialogue. After that, the chairpersons of the expert groups had the opportunity to present the most important successes and challenges for their areas.

Then, **representatives of the business community** took the floor and expressed their gratitude for the good cooperation with the state administration and for the successfully completed work concerning new Action Plans. As regards areas in which the most significant progress was made in the previous period, the representative of the American Chamber of Commerce highlighted the enormous progress in communication and joint work with the representatives of the Medicines and Medical Devices Agency concerning deadlines for registration, renewal and variations for medicines, especially after a meeting was held in August 2023 at the initiative of the Minister Momirović. At the same time, together with the representative of the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, they jointly pointed out certain challenges that still existed, especially in respect of the functioning of CEFTA, which existed before the decision-making process was blocked by the provisional institutions of self-government in Priština.

**At the meeting, the NTFB Action Plans for the period 2024-2025 were officially adopted, which can be found in ANNEX 1 to this Report.**

### **3. REPORT ON THE CONDUCTED ACTIVITIES OF THE NTFB EXPERT GROUPS**

In accordance with Article 4 of the Decision on Establishment of the National Trade Facilitation Body, four expert groups have been formed within which NTFB activities are carried out. Expert groups shall consider individual issues and participate in proposing solutions with the aim of facilitating foreign trade, removing trade barriers, speeding up and modernising customs procedures and implementing controls during the export, import and transit of goods, simplifying and reducing formalities, with the active participation and presence of interested members of business communities, chambers and other associations, other holders of public authority, representatives of scientific and educational institutions, as well as other organisations that can influence the facilitation of foreign trade.

#### **3.1. Report on conducted activities of the expert groups regarding fulfilling the obligations contained in the Action Plans for 2022 and 2023**

##### **I – EXPERT GROUP ON AGRICULTURE, SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES**

**Chair: Ms. Milanka Davidović**, Head of Division, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management (MAFWM)

A brief overview of the achieved results by individual activities includes the following:

- 1. Shortening the duration of import procedures for agricultural and food products**

Electronic submission of requests for phytosanitary and veterinary control is actively applied at border crossings, i.e. places of customs clearance or storage points, which shortens data processing time and the inspector no longer wastes time on data entry, but only checks the data and then controls the shipment itself and brings appropriate solution. In this way, retention of shipments at border crossings has been shortened and transport costs reduced.

## **2. Improvement of the system of risk analysis during the control of goods by all inspection services in order to facilitate the international traffic of shipments**

In its work, the Veterinary Directorate uses the *Rulebook on Establishing the Programme for Monitoring the Safety of Food of Animal Origin and Imported Animal Feed* and the *Rulebook on the Types of Shipments Subject to Veterinary-Sanitary Control and the Method of Performing Veterinary-Sanitary Inspection of Shipments at Border Crossings*, while the Plant Protection Directorate, in its work uses the *Rulebook on Establishing the Monitoring Programme for Food Safety of Plant and Mixed Origin*. The aforementioned regulations enable actions to be taken in accordance with the foreseen risk analyses during the control of goods.

During the year, employees of both directorates actively attended training sessions organised by BTSF (Better Training for Safer Food) in connection with risk analysis modules and the new IMSOC system (TRACES, ADIS, EUROPHYT, iRASFF).

Employees of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management and the Ministry of Health regularly monitor and act on received RASFF notifications.

## **3. Reduction of the volume of mandatory documentation and formalities in the procedures of international shipment traffic**

The Veterinary Directorate applies a new procedure for issuing a decision on the fulfilment of veterinary-sanitary requirements for the import of shipments subject to veterinary-sanitary control, which was published on the official website. Deviations from deadlines for issuing a decision occur due to the submission of incomplete documentation, after which the parties receive official letters to arrange the submission with a given deadline in which the deficiencies must be removed.

## **4. Implementation of the programme of harmonisation and mutual recognition of documents and other initiatives to facilitate trade for agricultural and food products, provided for in Additional Protocol 5 to the CEFTA 2006, Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation on Facilitating Imports, Exports and Movement of Goods in the Western Balkans concluded between the Republic of Serbia, Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Albania and the Open Balkan Initiative**

Through the SEED+ project, a new IT system called "CEFTA traces" system is used in the part of phytosanitary area. Establishment of the "CEFTA traces" system is also in progress in the part of the veterinary area in which all bilaterally agreed certificates between the members of the CEFTA will be entered (with the Republic of North Macedonia, that is 67 certificates, Bosnia and Herzegovina 51, Montenegro 42, UNMIK/Kosovo and Macedonia 3 and Albania 11). Training sessions for veterinary inspectors and entities were

conducted during October 2023. The Republic of Serbia is ready to start implementing this method of issuing certificates, which was presented at the meeting held on 5 December 2023 within the framework of the CEFTA. It is necessary for other CEFTA parties to declare their readiness to start implementing this system.

In 2020, under CEFTA, the Decision on facilitating trade in fruits and vegetables was adopted. Activities are ongoing through a project dealing with the implementation of this decision with the aim of equating the level of phytosanitary controls, both in accordance with plant health and food safety, of all CEFTA parties.

The border phytosanitary inspection fully implements the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Veterinary, Food and Feed Safety and Phytosanitary in the Western Balkans, which facilitates trade in plants and food of plant and mixed origin between Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia, which are subject to phytosanitary inspections.

## **II – EXPERT GROUP ON TECHNICAL BARRIERS TO TRADE AND EQUIVALENT MEASURES**

**Chair: Mr. Zoran Bakić**, Head of Group, Ministry of Economy, Division of Quality and Product Safety

A brief overview of the achieved results by individual activities includes the following:

- 1. Establishment of an effective system of risk analysis by the Sanitary Inspection in order to reduce barriers and facilitate the importation for companies that have good business practices, goods conforming to prescribed requirements and developed internal safety and quality control**

In the part of AP activities related to establishment of an efficient system of risk analysis by the Sanitary Inspection of the Ministry of Health, there was no great progress in the previous period. Representatives of the competent institution emphasized at earlier meetings that they applied risk analysis in controls and sampling of items of general use. The private sector maintained the position that this activity should be transferred to the next action plans in order to reduce barriers and facilitate the importation for companies that have good business practices, goods conforming to prescribed requirements and developed internal safety and quality control. Also, the representatives of the Ministry of Health emphasized that in the previous period, due to the corona virus pandemic, all capacities were engaged, but that in the following period, they would devote themselves as much as possible to the activities provided for in this action plan.

- 2. Further harmonisation of technical regulations with EU regulations**

The most important result in the field of harmonisation of technical regulations with the EU regulations is the adoption of the Rulebook on Amendments and Supplements to the Rulebook in the Field of Machines and Equipment, Low-Voltage Electrical Equipment and Electromagnetic Compatibility, which, among other things, repeals the provisions related to placing the Serbian mark of conformity on products for two years after accession of the Republic of Serbia to the EU or signing the ACAA Agreement, as well as the obligation to obtain certificates of conformity, with application from 1 January 2022. Also, the Rulebook

on Equipment and Protective Systems intended for use in potentially explosive atmospheres – ATEX (*The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, number 21/20) was amended and supplemented, where the need to obtain a certificate of conformity was also abolished from 1 January 2023.

In the field of construction products, the competent Ministry has published a list of accompanying standards, of which 400 standards have already been in use.

Also, the area of radio equipment, according to the Action Plan for the harmonised area of Chapter 1 of Cluster 2, shall be fully harmonised with the new EU directive by the end of 2024.

In addition, since May 2021, when the new Law on Technical Requirements for Products and Conformity Assessment was adopted and published (*The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, number 49/21), a new concept is current regarding recognition of foreign certificates of conformity, which favours the issuance of a domestic certificate of conformity based on a foreign certificate.

All regulations and information in the field of quality infrastructure are regularly published and updated on the TEHNIS portal (<https://tehnis.privreda.gov.rs/>).

The Product Info project of the Ministry of Economy also plans to digitise all services in the field of quality infrastructure (Institute for Standardisation of Serbia, Accreditation Body of Serbia and Directorate for Measures and Precious Metals).

### **3. Acceptance of foreign documents of conformity**

Additional simplification of the procedures for accepting foreign documents of conformity, namely documents issued by notified (EU NANDO base) conformity assessment bodies and EA MLA signatory countries, led to the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on mutual cooperation and acceptance of documents issued by accredited laboratory for industrial non-food products with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Also, daily activities of the Ministry of Economy, Division of Quality and Product Safety, promote possible relief arising from the signed EA MLA between the national Accreditation Body and European Accreditation, as well as solutions from the Proposal for a Regulation on the method of recognition of foreign documents and signs of conformity, which achieves the objective of the third point of the AP of this expert group (EG). In cooperation with the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Institute for Standardisation of Serbia, a large number of seminars/training/training sessions were held for stakeholders in connection with the aforementioned technical regulations under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Economy.

### **4. Withdrawal of licenses for the activity of trading in hazardous chemicals, as well as licenses for the use of hazardous chemicals for natural persons Amendments and supplements to the Law on Chemicals (*The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 36/ 09, 88/10, 92/11, 93/12 and 25/15)**

The Ministry of Environmental Protection has planned for the next year to prepare the Draft Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Chemicals, which will abolish the licenses for carrying out the activity of traffic or use of particularly hazardous chemicals, and we expect the adoption of this Law in 2025.

### **5. Elimination of delays in issuing registrations for new medicines and renewing registrations and approvals for promotional materials, in accordance with the legal deadline**

Based on the fact that between the 9th and 10th sessions of the NTFB, a series of meetings initiated at the meeting in the Ministry of Internal and Foreign Trade, ALIMS on the one hand, and AmCham and FIC on the other hand were held, during which a whole series of measures were agreed upon and projection for entry of ALIMS into legal deadlines was defined regarding domain of the Human Medicines Centre and concerns the issuance of registrations, renewal of registrations and changes in drug licenses.

Based on the current pace of solving requests for human medicines with available human capacities, with the launch of an electronic platform that fully digitises the submission of documents and processes related to drug licenses, projections of full compliance with legal deadlines for certain administrative procedures is to maximally speed up the processing of cases in the domain of human medicines.

Solving the problem of providing spatial capacities of ALIMS for the performance of regular activities for all employees is in the process of being solved and is defined by the proposal of the conclusion of the Government of the RS of 20 November 2023, which will greatly facilitate the expansion of personnel capacities in ALIMS, and this will be directly reflected in the increase of number of processed cases.

The Agency analysed the situation and, within its capabilities, launched an analysis of internal procedures and the necessary preconditions for acting within the legal deadlines.

The analysis established and communicated with the private sector that it is possible to rationalise the processes regarding a more efficient allocation of the assessor's time, if drugs that were previously authorised by a centralised procedure in the EU are approved on the basis of the EMA assessment report, and if they are formally complete in respect of national regulations, as well as if the Agency determines that the documentation submitted to the Agency is identical to the one approved by the EMA and included in the submitted reports. In the last quarter of 2023, together with the Medicines and Medical Devices Agency, a projection was made for the establishment of full compliance with the deadlines for the registration, renewal and variation procedures for medicines, with an analysis of the necessary preconditions that include the possibility of rationalisation and optimisation of the internal procedures of ALIMS and appropriate distribution and filling of human capacities. Therefore, the proposal of the private sector is to keep this activity in AP for the next period, while fulfilling the conditions for increasing the capacity of ALIMS. For the purposes of the new action plan, detailed guidelines for compliance with legal deadlines have been drawn up, and it is proposed that NTFB institutionally advocates for the fulfilment of these preconditions. Implementation of these guidelines does not require additional budget funds, but only the approval of supplementing the ALIMS systematisation. Bearing in mind the nature of delays, the proposal for additional capacities includes requirements for fixed-term employees who would deal with the reduction of long-term delays, until the strengthening of permanent capacities ensure the continuity of servicing new requests, which grow significantly from year to year. Implementing these guidelines would ensure elimination of the long-term problem of the economy and ALIMS in the processing of requests, with full compliance with legal deadlines.

An illustrative example of the efforts that management and employees make in order to meet deadlines is the fact that as of 31 October 2023, the Agency processed 21,960 amendments and supplements to human medicines, which is an absolute record since the establishment of the Agency in 2004 until today.

In the first eight months of 2023, compared to the same period of the previous year, an increase in solving the cases was achieved in all procedures related to drug licenses: a 34% increase in solving the cases for the registration of new drugs and a 63% increase in solving the cases for renewal of registration. The biggest increase in solving the cases was achieved for amendments and supplements to drug licenses (variations) - 141%. The presented results were achieved by increasing the number of employees in the variation



assessment procedure, overtime work in all procedures and optimisation of documentation assessment.

The Agency notes that the effectiveness of the procedures equally depends on the applicant, which could be proven by numerous examples.

### **III - EXPERT GROUP ON CUSTOMS PROCEDURES**

**Chair: Ms. Snežana Karanović**, Assistant Minister of Finance

A brief overview of the achieved results by individual activities includes the following:

#### **1. Mutual recognition and promotion of the programme of an authorised economic operator – AEO**

The protocol for validation of mutual recognition of AEOs with the Republic of North Macedonia was signed, then the Mutual Recognition Agreement with the People's Republic of China and AEOs Mutual Recognition Agreement with the Republic of Albania and the protocol for validation of mutual recognition of AEOs were signed.

#### **2. Speeding up the flow of goods at the Preševo-Tabanovce border crossing**

Functioning of this joint border crossing has been ensured.

#### **4. IT connection of the Radiation and Nuclear Safety and Security Directorate (hereinafter: the Directorate) and the Customs Administration**

A connection has been established with the Directorate. It is possible for the representatives of the Directorate to post reports on the measured levels of ionizing radiation (a document that is a condition for import for certain goods) directly on the internal CA portal, at the moment when they deliver the same to the importer. In the above-mentioned way, the document is immediately available to the customs authority, who, by inspecting the scanned document, determines its authenticity with a copy of the document submitted by the importer, and then approves the import.

#### **3. and 5. IT connection of the Plant Protection Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management and the Customs Administration and IT connection of the Customs Administration with the Veterinary Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management and the border sanitary inspection of the Ministry of Health**

The needs for these activities still exist, but they are not included in the AP for the period 2024-2025, considering the activity that also aims to connect the systems of the CA, the Veterinary Directorate, the Plant Protection Directorate, the Ministry of Health and other authorities that issue import and export documents, that is, through the National One-Stop-Shop System.

#### **Point 6. Shortening the time required for issuing the binding tariff information (BTI)**

As a result of implementing the software application for binding tariff information, it can be noted that the application that provides electronic submission of requests for BTI has been posted on the portal of the Customs Administration and has been fully in use since 1 February 2022. By developing this application, the Customs Administration provided the business community with completely paperless business operations and automation of the procedure for submitting requests and issuing BTI. Number of companies which use the possibility of paperless business operations in connection with BTI, is constantly increasing, especially in 2023. In 2023, electronically submitted requests for BTI made up 50% of the total number of submitted requests.

**7. Analysis of the current situation and undertaking measures and activities that will in the future enable electronic communication of economic operators with the Collection Department of the Customs Administration regarding the collection of claims on the basis of overdue customs duties, interest for late payment of the same, refund of overpaid customs duties, reversing wrong payments, reminders for settlement of customs debt and communication with the guarantor bank**

During 2022/2023, the Department for Collection of Budgetary Revenues of the Customs Administration performed daily activities according to the submitted requests of economic operators in written and electronic forms. Practical application of the Regulation on Office Operations of State Administration Bodies (e-Mailroom) will establish effective and safe communication in the electronic environment, which will facilitate and simplify procedures for the Customs Administration and economic operators in connection with the collection of due customs debts and interest for late payment of the same, refunds of overpaid duties, reversing wrong payments, sending reminders for settlement of customs debt and other activities related to collection of customs debt.

**8. Activity of establishing a national one-stop shop**

In the previous period, the *Blueprint* was completed and the report was adopted. Also, a proposal for the Functional Specification of the National One-Stop-Shop System was prepared. An expert from the Project Management Unit (PMU) which is located within the Ministry responsible for construction activities as a developer of this project, developed the Draft Law on the National One-Stop-Shop System, which it forwarded for opinion to the Customs Administration and all other authorities of the Republic of Serbia involved in this project.

**IV – EXPERT GROUP ON COORDINATION OF TRADE FACILITATION  
ACTIVITIES UNDER INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL TRADE  
AGREEMENTS**

**Chair: Ms. Tatjana Dinkić**, Secretary of NTFB, Head of the Group, Ministry of Internal and Foreign Trade

**1. Coordination and monitoring of the implementation of obligations in the field of facilitation of trade resulting from free trade agreements and cooperation with international organisations**

In February 2023, the NTFB secretariat responded to the UN questionnaire and coordinated responses from other departments in charge of issues in their fields. In July

2023, the fifth UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation was published, where it was stated that Serbia made significant progress in facilitating trade and removing barriers. Assessment of fulfilment of trade facilitation measures for our country in 2023 was 82.8%, which represents a new shift compared to 2021 when the assessment was 72.04%. As a reminder, the results for 2015 and 2017 were 36.5% and 38.7%, respectively. It is important to note that for the field of Institutional Regulation and Cooperation, our country received a score of 100%, which can be attributed to the excellent structure established within the activities of the NTFB.

**2. Speeding up the flow of goods at border crossings with the EU through integrated management of crossings, harmonisation of working hours of border services and improvement of infrastructure, as well as expansion of the "Green Corridors" mechanism**

Within Subcommittee on Trade, Industry, Taxation and Customs between Serbia and the European Commission, held in March 2023, our side again emphasized the problem of long waiting hours for trucks with goods at the most important border crossings with EU member states. It was pointed out that Serbia was ready to dedicate itself to solving that issue as much as possible, but also that, in addition to bilateral contacts with neighbouring countries, the European Commission was also expected to become more actively involved in solving the issue, bearing in mind that it represents a big challenge for domestic companies.

In June 2023, the Minister of Internal and Foreign Trade sent a letter to the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of the Republic of Croatia regarding the establishment of phytosanitary and veterinary control at the Tovarnik – Šid railway crossing, in accordance with the initiative of the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Internal interdepartmental consultations are still ongoing, so the final answer from the Croatian side is awaited.

**3. Coordination of preparing the programme of mutual recognition of documents that are to be submitted during the import and export of goods provided for in Additional Protocol 5 to the CEFTA 2006 and the Memorandum on Facilitating the Import, Export and Movement of Goods under the Open Balkan Initiative**

Bearing in mind that since the middle of 2021 there has been a blockade of adoption of decisions at the CEFTA Joint Committee by the PIS (Provisional Institutions of Self-Government) in Priština, there is no progress in this area. As regards the Open Balkan Initiative, in 2022 and 2023 there were no adoption of new decisions aimed at the free movement of goods, the focus was on services and other areas. In the meantime, implementation of the previously agreed decisions is ongoing, where our side implemented the agreed most efficiently. Also, construction of a new border crossing at Sremska Rača, which will be located on our side, is underway. A joint border crossing on the Bosnia and Herzegovina side was built in Ljubovija.

#### **4. Establishing cooperation with the Committees on Trade Facilitation at the bilateral and multilateral levels**

Regional conference on improving the capacities of national trade facilitation bodies was held on 16 and 17 May in Belgrade, organised by the World Bank (WB), USAID and the Government of Switzerland. The National Trade Facilitation Body of Serbia was recognized at the conference as a good example, because it has a clear structure, action plans, participation of the business community and transparency in its work, primarily through the Body's website.

On 10 and 11 October 2023, a regional workshop on the topic of National Committees on Trade Facilitation was held at the World Customs Organisation. The goals were to encourage regional cooperation of the Committee on Trade Facilitation in the region in order to effectively and sustainably implement trade facilitation initiatives, as well as to exchange experiences and best practices to identify opportunities for cooperation and mutual exchange of knowledge.

In April 2023, the Conference was held titled "Regional economic cooperation Open Balkan: what can the economy expect?" organised by the American Chamber of Commerce. Research by the American Chambers of Commerce in Serbia, North Macedonia and Albania has shown that the Open Balkan Initiative has so far enabled the export or import of food products among member countries to be shortened by up to 50 percent, direct costs of taxes and fees have been reduced by up to 80 percent, which resulted in an increase in trade in the Open Balkan region by almost 30 percent.

#### **5. Coordination of developing responses to inquiries from research in the field of trade facilitation conducted by international organisations**

According to assessment of the World Bank experts who made a report on assessment of the capacity of national committees on trade facilitation, presented at the regional conference in May 2023, our NTFB was assessed extremely well, especially in the area of institutional and regulatory framework.

As already stated, in July 2023, the fifth UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation was published, where it was stated that Serbia made significant progress in facilitating trade and removing barriers. Assessment of fulfilment of trade facilitation measures for our country in 2023 was 82.8%, which represents a new shift compared to 2021 when the assessment was 72.04%. As a reminder, the results for 2015 and 2017 were 36.5% and 38.7%, respectively.

It is important to note that for the field of Institutional Regulation and Cooperation, our country received a score of 100%, which can be attributed to the excellent cooperation established within the activities of the NTFB.

#### **6. Informing the public and business representatives about implementation of unilateral measures to facilitate trade, as well as those resulting from the implementation of international agreements**

In the course of 2023, thanks to support of the Swiss SECO, improvements were made in the appearance and functions of the website. Also, in order to be able to monitor the number of visitors to the site, which parts of the site are most frequently visited, as well as from which geographical destinations the site is most accessed, the *Google Analytics* programme has been installed, with which it is possible to monitor and collect all this data for analysis purposes.

One of the unilateral measures introduced by the RS Government in order to simplify business is the **e-Mailroom**. At the tenth session of the NTBF, which was held in December 2023, it was noted that during that period there were certain delays in the opening of cases, given that the majority of new requests were still submitted in paper form and required prior scanning of documentation and import into the system e-Mailroom. Suggestion and proposal were that potentially in the following step of development of the e-mailroom system, it would be useful to integrate the IT system of the e-mailroom with the e-Government system, which already contains electronic administrative procedures, so that applicants can submit documents electronically and add all the necessary supporting documentation with the automatic issuance of a request number through the e-Mailroom. Impression is that in this way the efficiency of submission and processing of requests would be improved, as well as the process of resolving administrative procedures would be comprehensively accelerated.

#### **4. ISSUES AND INITIATIVES OF THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY**

##### **4.1. Initiative of the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in connection with the establishment of border phytosanitary and veterinary control at the railway border crossing Tovarnik**

On 1 March 2023, the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry sent a letter to the NTFB in which the need of domestic economy for establishment of phytosanitary and veterinary control at the Tovarnik railway border crossing with Croatia was highlighted. In this regard, on 16 March 2023, a meeting was held in the Government of the Republic of Serbia, which was chaired by the cabinet of the Ministry of Internal and Foreign Trade in the role of the new chair of the NTFB. Representatives of the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry presented the steps taken so far to resolve this issue, namely contacts were established with the Croatian Chamber of Economy (CCE) and the two chambers had meetings with representatives of Croatian competent departments. After discussion and addresses of all present representatives of the departments, several conclusions were defined:

- According to the procedure valid in EU legislation, it is possible to establish phytosanitary and veterinary control at a railway border crossing where such controls did not previously exist, if Croatia submits a request to the EC, which has a certain deadline to respond to that request (bearing in mind that it is the external border of the EU);
- Since there were no direct contacts between the competent state authorities of Serbia and Croatia until then, the proposal of the MIFT cabinet is to send a letter from the two ministers of internal and foreign trade and of agriculture, forestry and water management to the competent Croatian departments, which would contain an

explanation of the problem and ways to overcome it; the letter should state that as part of the Green Agenda, it is foreseen that it is necessary, to the greatest extent possible, to transfer transportation of goods to the railways and thus relieve road traffic and reduce the emission of harmful gases and waiting at border crossings;

- Proposal of the representative of the Customs Administration is to check with the Croatian side whether it is possible to establish such a control upon request, that is, when it is announced in advance that the shipment is arriving, so that phytosanitary and veterinary inspectors are present during that time period, because such practice existed before with some other neighbouring countries; this is especially important since the construction of the crossing would require additional funds, time and personnel, and this approach would possibly bridge the current situation.
- Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry shall submit an analysis prepared in terms of how much the Tovarnik crossing would be used, if there were phytosanitary and veterinary control there, and how significant it would be not only for the Serbian economy, but also for Croatian railways and the port of Rijeka.
- Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry shall send an official letter requesting the competent authorities of the Republic of Serbia to extend the working hours of the border services at the Erdut – Bogojevo railway crossing and potentially introduce work on weekends as well, providing that they previously carry out additional checks with representatives of the business community concerning which type of goods is transported through this crossing and what controls are carried out.

**On 26 June 2023, the Minister of Internal and Foreign Trade and the chair of NTFB sent a letter to the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of the Republic of Croatia** regarding the establishment of phytosanitary and veterinary control at the Tovarnik – Šid railway crossing. In September 2023, the Croatian side submitted a notification that the Croatian minister had forwarded a letter to the competent Croatian administrations and sent a request to respond positively to the request of the Serbian side on this matter. Final position of the Croatian administration on this matter is still awaited, but this area is certainly regulated at the level of the EU.

## **5. OTHER SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES IN THE PROCESS OF FACILITATING FOREIGN TRADE**

### **The Open Balkan Initiative**

The initiative for more intensive cooperation in the Western Balkans was launched in 2019 with the aim of establishing the free movement of goods, services, people and capital according to the EU single market functioning model. The Open Balkan is a support for existing regional initiatives, their improvement, operationalisation and response to the increasing demands of the economy in the region. The initiative, first launched under the name Mini Schengen, has been renamed Open Balkan and has an inclusive character, which implies openness to the accession of all economies in the region.

In the period from 2019 until today, a series of meetings, forums and summits were held (Novi Sad, Tirana, Ohrid, Skopje, Belgrade, Niš, Tirana...), during which several declarations and agreements were signed, which gave the initiative a legal framework for action.

Regarding the agreements that have the character of trade facilitation within the Open Balkan, the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Veterinary, Phytosanitary and

Food and Animal Feed Safety in the Western Balkans should be mentioned. This Agreement was signed at a meeting in Tirana, Albania, on 21 December 2021. So far, the Republic of Serbia and Albania ratified the Agreement in accordance with their internal procedures, while ratification by North Macedonia is still awaited.

The most significant trade facilitation activities in this Agreement, *inter alia*, are:

- recognition of test reports issued by authorised/accredited laboratories;
- physical inspection of plants, plant products and other objects and items at the nearest place outside the border crossing, at the customs terminal;
- physical inspection of food of plant origin directly at the place of destination, at the customs terminal;
- physical inspection of food of animal origin, animal feed, live animals, mixed products, directly at the place of destination, at the customs terminal.

As stated in the report on the activities of the expert working group for customs procedures, under the Open Balkan, in December 2019 the Republic of Serbia signed the Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Certificates of Authorised Economic Operators - Security and Safety (AEOS) with North Macedonia, which entered into force at the beginning of 2020. The same agreement was signed with Albania in December 2021 and ratified on 29 December 2021.

An important agreement that will affect the further facilitation of trade, which was agreed as part of the Open Balkan Initiative, is the Trilateral Agreement on Cooperation of Accredited Bodies of the Participating Countries.

In April 2023, the Conference "Regional economic cooperation Open Balkan: what can the economy expect?" was held organised by the American Chamber of Commerce. Research by the American Chambers of Commerce in Serbia, North Macedonia and Albania has shown that the **Open Balkan Initiative has so far enabled the export or import of food products among member countries to be shortened by up to 50 percent, direct costs of taxes and fees have been reduced by up to 80 percent, which resulted in an increase in trade in the Open Balkan region by almost 30 percent.**

### **Establishment of the Customs Round Table**

Within the cooperation programme with the Swiss organisation SECO (State Secretariat for Economic Affairs) and the World Customs Organisation called the Global Trade Facilitation Programme (GTFP), one of the goals was defined as the establishment of the Customs Round Table as a consultation mechanism within the Expert Group on customs procedures of the National Trade Facilitation Body.

At an event jointly organised by the project and NTFB in Belgrade on 15 March 2023, a customs round table was formed and the first meeting was held. Speakers at the meeting were representatives of the Customs Administration, SECO, the World Customs Organisation, the Ministry of Finance and the NTFB secretariat. Afterwards, representatives of the business community had the opportunity to participate in the discussion.

The customs round table will serve as a platform for discussions on operational customs issues specific to a particular business, with an appropriate mechanism for further monitoring. The customs round table is held at least once a year, and can be convened at the request of members.

Final event and ceremonial closing of the **Global Trade Facilitation Programme (GTFP)**, whose main beneficiary is the Customs Administration, was held on 22 November 2023 in Belgrade. A representative of the NTFB secretariat participated in a panel dedicated to the most significant challenges in the field of trade facilitation in Serbia, together with representatives of the Customs Administration, the Ministry of Finance and representatives of the private sector.

## **6. ASSESSMENTS OF INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS REGARDING THE WORK OF THE NTFB AND TRADE FACILITATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

As already stated, in July 2023, the fifth UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation was published, where it was stated that **Serbia made significant progress in facilitating trade and removing barriers**. Assessment of fulfilment of trade facilitation measures for our country in 2023 was **82.8%**, which represents a new shift compared to 2021 when the assessment was 72.04%. As a reminder, the results for 2015 and 2017 were 36.5% and 38.7%, respectively.

It is important to note that for the field of **Institutional Regulation and Cooperation, our country received a score of 100%**, which can be attributed to the excellent cooperation within the established NTFB structure of activities.

Progress has also been noted in the **World Bank's Tracking Tool**, which monitors the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement for individual countries on a four-year basis. According to the assessment of the World Bank, degree of fulfilment of obligations of the Republic of Serbia in 2022 was 83%, which means that Serbia recorded new progress in the area of trade facilitation, bearing in mind that this figure for 2018 was 78%, while in 2014 the degree of fulfilment was 65%.

According to assessment of the World Bank experts who made a report on assessment of the capacity of national committees on trade facilitation, presented at the regional conference in May 2023, our NTFB **was assessed extremely well, especially in the area of institutional and regulatory framework**.

In February 2024, at the request of UNCTAD, the NTFB Secretariat completed a specialised survey related to the work of national trade facilitation bodies. The goal of the survey is for UNCTAD to assess which segments of the Body's work can be offered certain assistance.

## **7. PRESENTATION TO THE PUBLIC**

The work of the National Trade Facilitation Body is public. The public is provided with presentation of the work of the National Trade Facilitation Body on the internet portal, statements and announcements to the public, as well as participation in conferences and other public events. **In this regard, the official NTFB website has been available to the interested public since March 2024 at the following internet address, with a new domain: <http://nktot.gov.rs/>.**



All information related to the work of NTFB and expert groups is available on the website which is regularly updated with the latest information on the work of this body. Creation of the website is financially and organisationally supported by USAID.

Structure of the website of NTFB, which is bilingual (Serbian and English), includes: basic information about NTFB, legal framework, documents, sessions, expert groups, proposals and initiatives, regional cooperation, events and news, useful links and contact.

During 2022, thanks to a project supported by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs of the Government of Switzerland, visual identity of the NTFB website was improved and the Body's logo was created.



## 8. PLANNED ACTIVITIES

In the following period, work will be done on fulfilling the obligations established within the Action Plans for 2024 and 2025 for each expert group individually. Special activities will be focused on obligations arising from implementation of CEFTA Additional Protocol 5, as well as trade facilitation measures arising from the Open Balkan Initiative. Also, bearing in mind the new initiative of the European Union, the **Growth Plan for the Western Balkans**, in the coming period it is expected to intensify activities in the area of trade facilitation, which will be part of this Plan. Also, the most important issue is still the situation at the border crossings, especially towards the EU, so in this regard it is important to achieve cooperation with the EU states and the European Commission bilaterally, as well as multilaterally through the CEFTA mechanism. It is important to note that Serbia took over the **presidency of CEFTA** for the year 2024.

Further activities are planned in cooperation with donors and international organisations on implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and on fulfilment of other obligations assumed under regional and bilateral agreements. It is necessary to strengthen capacity within the NTFB, especially bearing in mind that for all members, chairs of working groups and representatives of the Ministry of Internal and Foreign Trade, who perform activities of the Secretariat, this represents additional activity and engagement, in addition to regular duties and tasks.

When it comes to **the most significant challenges**, they are primarily the result of potential negative **external influences** on Serbia's foreign trade. Current crisis between Russia and Ukraine and related sanctions and various restrictions on trade flows are causing interruptions in certain global supply chains, which may also affect the conditions for foreign trade operations of our country.

NTFB will continue to work on facilitating the procedures for conducting foreign trade through planned activities and intensive contacts with the most important trade partners, as well as business organisations and companies.

## ANNEX 1: Action plans of NTFB expert groups for 2024 and 2025

### I – EXPERT GROUP ON AGRICULTURE, SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES

**Chair: Ms. Milanka Davidović**, Head of Division, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management

The expert group on agriculture, sanitary and phytosanitary measures shall consider issues and propose initiatives that contribute to the promotion and facilitation of foreign trade exchange in agricultural and food products. In the issues and initiatives that it considers and proposes, the expert group shall ensure that veterinary, sanitary and phytosanitary measures related to foreign trade in agricultural and food products are adopted and applied in a way that does not burden the economy more than is necessary in order to ensure appropriate protection of life and health of people, plants and animals.

	Planned activity	Measures for implementing activities of	the competent institution	Result indicator
1.	Improvement of electronic submission of requests and supporting documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Improving the functioning of electronic submission of requests for goods control in order to facilitate import and export, and shortening the time of import controls, for shipments under competency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management (MAFWM).</li><li>Preparation of a report on the status and deadlines for introduction of the electronic system for submitting requests, as well as a proposal for next steps in order to introduce the electronic system as quickly as possible, for shipments under competency of the Ministry of Health (MH).</li></ul>	<p>MAFWM (Veterinary Directorate and Plant Protection Directorate)</p> <p>MH (Health Inspection Division)</p>	<p>Shortening the time of keeping shipments at the border crossings.</p> <p>Report was prepared on the current situation necessary for introduction of the electronic system with a proposal for next steps.</p>

	Planned activity	Measures for implementing activities of	the competent institution	Result indicator
2.	Improving the cooperation of line ministries with authorised laboratories, with the aim of improving work and speeding up the provision of services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish, in all cases (regardless of which inspection is in question), the practice of random selection of authorised laboratories that can perform analyses for all required parameters and are geographically closer when sampling goods in the import process.</li> <li>Inspection services that do not have a random selection of laboratories should provide information on the necessary prerequisites for introduction of such system.</li> <li>Preparation of a report on the performed supervision of laboratory operation (in accordance with the signed contracts).</li> <li>Establishment of electronic communication between laboratories and inspection services, in connection with submission of reports on the analyses performed.</li> </ul>	MAFWM (Veterinary Directorate and Plant Protection Directorate)  MH (Health Inspection Division)	<p>Random selection of authorised laboratories was established.</p> <p>Report on prerequisites and deadlines for establishing random selection of laboratories was prepared.</p> <p>Report on the performed supervision of laboratory operation was prepared.</p> <p>Electronic communication between laboratories and inspection services was established.</p>
3.	Continuous improvement of capacity of inspection services and economic operators, in order to standardise and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alignment of the work of inspection services (within individual inspections) in order to speed up the flow of goods.</li> </ul>	MAFWM (Veterinary Directorate and Plant Protection Directorate)	<p>Procedures to align the work of inspection services were prepared.</p> <p>An annual training plan for the inspection services was drawn up.</p>

	<b>Planned activity</b>	<b>Measures for implementing activities of</b>	<b>the competent institution</b>	<b>Result indicator</b>
	speed up the implementation of administrative procedures for control of shipments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raising the awareness of economic operators (importers, exporters, customs agents) regarding new procedures and/or the most common mistakes when preparing documentation for goods control.</li> <li>• Strengthening the administrative capacity of inspection at border crossings and interior.</li> </ul>	MH (Health Inspection Division)	<p>Training of inspectors in individual areas of work was performed.</p> <p>Workshops with economic operators were held with the support of the business community.</p> <p>Recruitment of new employees.</p> <p>Modernisation of equipment necessary for performing inspection controls.</p>
4.	Improvement of the system of risk analysis during the control of goods by all inspection services in order to facilitate the international traffic of shipments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction and further improvement of the model for risk analysis when importing goods.</li> <li>• Development and/or revision of internal procedures for risk management and inspectors' actions</li> </ul>	<p>MAFWM (Veterinary Directorate and Plant Protection Directorate)</p> <p>MH (Health Inspection Division)</p>	<p>Methodological instructions for implementation of risk analysis were prepared in all inspections.</p> <p>Official control and monitoring plans based on risk assessment were adopted.</p>

	Planned activity	Measures for implementing activities of	the competent institution	Result indicator
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improvement of IT tools for risk analysis and management that are used to carry out control of goods during importation.</li> </ul>		<p>Internal procedures for risk management were developed.</p> <p>Use of IT tools for risk analysis and risk management in all inspections.</p>
5.	Reduction of the volume of mandatory documentation and formalities in the procedures of international shipment traffic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand the list of products for which it is not required to obtain a decision on the fulfilment of veterinary and sanitary conditions for import and transit.</li> <li>Establish electronic submission of requests and supporting documentation, as well as the issuance of decisions.</li> <li>Establish a consultative function of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, related to import or more precisely requirements in terms of product safety and quality, mandatory documentation and its content, especially for mixed products and products whose regulations are not harmonised with EU requirements.</li> </ul>	<p>MAFWM (Veterinary Directorate)</p> <p>MAFWM</p>	<p>Amending relevant regulations. Holding quarterly meetings with representatives of the business community in order to more actively approach the expansion of the list.</p> <p>A complete e-mailroom system was established.</p> <p>A procedure was established for business consultations related to fulfilment of requirements for products whose regulations are not harmonised with EU</p>

	Planned activity	Measures for implementing activities of	the competent institution	Result indicator
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take a joint position of the MIFT and the MAFWM regarding the requirements for food declaration arising from the Law on Trade (MIFT) and the Rulebook on Declaring, Labelling and Advertising of Food (MAFWM).</li> </ul>	MIFT and MAFWM	<p>requirements, and contact point was published on the website of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management.</p> <p>In accordance with the common position, harmonise the requirements for declaring food in the relevant regulations.</p>
6.	Speeding up the procedures for obtaining conditions for placing products on different markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intensive cooperation with competent institutions of other countries of potential importers/exporters with mutual cooperation of chambers of commerce of interested countries.</li> </ul>	<p>MAFWM (Veterinary Directorate and Plant Protection Directorate)</p> <p>MH (Health Inspection Division)</p>	<p>Workshops with economic operators were held with the support of the business community.</p> <p>Procedures necessary for the realisation of import/export of certain agricultural and food products were completed.</p>
7.	Improvement of cooperation within CEFTA, the Open Balkan Initiative and other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Active participation in operations of CEFTA competent bodies in order to reach an agreement regarding the harmonisation and recognition of mutual documents in trade in agricultural and food products.</li> </ul>	MAFWM (Veterinary Directorate and Plant Protection Directorate)	Reports on implementation of activities within CEFTA, the Open Balkan Initiative and

	<b>Planned activity</b>	<b>Measures for implementing activities of</b>	<b>the competent institution</b>	<b>Result indicator</b>
	international agreements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active participation in implementation of activities necessary for implementation of the Decision of the Joint Committee of the Central European Free Trade Agreement 2006, number 1/2020 on Facilitating Trade for Fruits and Vegetables.</li> <li>• Active participation in implementation of activities agreed within the Open Balkan Initiative in order to facilitate the trade in agricultural and food products.</li> </ul>	MH (Health Inspection Division)	other international agreements.

## II – EXPERT GROUP ON TECHNICAL BARRIERS TO TRADE AND EQUIVALENT MEASURES

**Chair: Mr. Zoran Bakić**, Head of the Group, Ministry of Economy, Division of Quality and Product Safety

Expert group on technical barriers to trade and equivalent measures shall consider issues and propose initiatives that contribute to promotion and facilitation of foreign trade exchange in industrial (non-food) products (including, among other things, cosmetic products and other items of general use, medicines, medical devices, chemicals, mechanical and technical products of various kinds, toys, etc.). In the issues and initiatives that it considers and proposes, the expert group ensures that technical regulations, standards and procedures for assessing compliance with them are adopted and applied in such a way as not to introduce unnecessary barriers to trade.

	Planned activity	Measures for implementing activities of	the competent institution	Result indicator
1.	Improvement of the system of risk analysis during the control of goods by all inspection services in order to facilitate the international traffic of shipments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduction and further improvement of the model for risk analysis when importing goods.</li><li>• Development and/or revision of internal procedures for risk management and inspectors' actions</li><li>• Improvement of IT tools for risk analysis and management that are used to carry out control of goods during importation.</li></ul>	MH (Health Inspection Division)	<p>Methodological instructions for implementation of risk analysis were prepared.</p> <p>Official control and monitoring plans based on risk assessment were adopted.</p>



	<b>Planned activity</b>	<b>Measures for implementing activities of</b>	<b>the competent institution</b>	<b>Result indicator</b>
				Internal procedures for risk management were developed.  Use of IT tools for risk analysis and risk management
2.	Further harmonisation of technical regulations with EU regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application of the complete list of Serbian standards (EU list) in the field of construction products, i.e. the list of standards that follows the legal act on construction products</li> </ul>	Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure	Complete application from 1 January 2025.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In domain of general use items – adoption and regular updating of regulations in accordance with changes in EU regulations, and in particular: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Drafting of by-laws for materials and objects in contact with food, in accordance with EU regulations</li> <li>- Drafting of by-laws that regulate the import regime of detergents, biocides, etc. in accordance with EU regulations</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Sanitary Inspection, Ministry of Health	Rulebooks based on the Law on General Use Items were adopted

	<b>Planned activity</b>	<b>Measures for implementing activities of</b>	<b>the competent institution</b>	<b>Result indicator</b>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transposition of the new EU Machinery Regulation.</li> </ul>	Ministry of Economy	The Machinery Regulation was published.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transposition of the new EU Radio Equipment Directive (RED), up-to-date publication of the list of Serbian standards in the field of radio equipment, consideration of the validity period of the certificate of conformity and its withdrawal.</li> </ul>	Ministry of Information and Telecommunications, MIFT - Market Inspection	Regulations amended – publication of the Radio Equipment Rulebook,  A list of Serbian standards in the field of radio equipment was published.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuous cooperation with market inspection authorities regarding the application of new technical regulations and documents of conformity accompanying them when they are placed on the market.</li> </ul>	Ministry of Information and Telecommunications, Ministry of Economy  MIFT - Market Inspection.	Reports and records of the meetings, round tables held, etc.
	Negotiations on signing the Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products between the EU and Serbia (ACAA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiating and starting negotiations for signing of ACAA between the EU and the Republic of Serbia, for selected groups of industrial products, namely electrical/electronic equipment and machinery.</li> <li>• Review and plan with the competent ministries the extension of the ACAA to other product groups from the competent ministries.</li> </ul>	Ministry of Economy  Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure,  Ministry of Energy  Ministry of Health.	Finalisation of the process of signing the Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products between the EU and Serbia

	Planned activity	Measures for implementing activities of	the competent institution	Result indicator
4.	<p>Withdrawal of licenses for the activity of trading in hazardous chemicals as well as licenses for the use of hazardous chemicals for natural persons</p> <p>Amendments and supplements to the Law on Chemicals (<i>The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia</i>, Nos. 36/ 09, 88/10, 92/11, 93/12 and 25/15)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Repealing the provisions of Articles 63 -72.</b>            The provisions stipulate that placing certain hazardous chemicals on the market can only be carried out by legal entities or entrepreneurs who have a license to carry out the activity of placing those chemicals on the market; further, the procedure for submitting an application for obtaining a license and the conditions that must be met in order to obtain the license are prescribed. In addition, the obligation to submit an application for obtaining a license for the use of certain hazardous chemicals for natural persons is prescribed.             These provisions of the Law have been identified as an obstacle to free movement of goods, and will be repealed by adoption of the new Law on Chemicals. Deadline for adoption of the new law is the 4th quarter of 2023.         </li> </ul>	The Ministry of Environmental Protection	adopted the Law on Amendments to the Law on Chemicals
5.	Eliminate delays in the issuance of registration, renewal of registration, approval of variations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduction of an electronic platform for submitting and processing documentation for drugs by mid-2024 (according to all mentioned procedures)</li> </ul>	ALIMS Ministry of Health	Issuance of registration for medicines, renewal of registration, approval of variations and promotional

	<b>Planned activity</b>	<b>Measures for implementing activities of</b>	<b>the competent institution</b>	<b>Result indicator</b>
	and promotional materials for drugs in accordance with the legal deadline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fulfilment of the action plan<sup>3</sup> for establishing the processing of requests for registrations, renewals and variations of drug licenses within the legal deadlines</li> <li>• ALIMS semi-annual progress reports</li> </ul>		<p>materials within legal deadlines from 2025</p> <p>An electronic platform has been established for submission of documentation for medicines</p> <p>Semi-annual progress reports</p>
	Creation of prerequisites for export of dietary products to the People's Republic of China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special conditions for export of food to the territory of the People's Republic of China refer to 18 types of food products, among which are dietary products that belong to food. In order for a food product to be exported to the territory of the People's Republic of China, it must be registered by competent national institutions recognised by</li> </ul>	Ministry of Health	Export of dietary products produced in the Republic of Serbia to China has been enabled

<sup>3</sup> Annex 1 – Analysis of the needs of ALIMS for establishment of regular processing of requests for registrations, renewals and variations of drug licenses within legal deadlines

	Planned activity	Measures for implementing activities of	the competent institution	Result indicator
		<p>the General Administration of Customs of China (GACC).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia should submit a request to open an account on the CIFER portal, where Serbian economic operators wishing to export their dietary products to the People's Republic of China could then be registered</li> </ul>		
	<p>Creation of prerequisites for export of dietary products to the Arab Republic of Egypt</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The prerequisite for placing this group of products on the market of the Arab Republic of Egypt is product registration according to the requirements prescribed by the National Food Safety Authority of Egypt (hereinafter: NFSA). One of the certificates that shall be attached during the registration process is the Free Sale Certificate (FSC) for a specific product from the exporter's country. For an FSC to be recognised by the NFSA, it must be issued by a country on the NFSA reference country list. Currently, 36 countries are on the NFSA reference country list, but the Republic of Serbia is not among them</li> </ul>	<p>Ministry of Health</p>	<p>Placement of dietary products produced in the Republic of Serbia on the market of the Arab Republic of Egypt</p>

### III – EXPERT GROUP ON CUSTOMS PROCEDURES

**Chair: Ms. Snežana Karanović**, Assistant Minister of Finance

The expert group on customs procedures shall consider issues and propose initiatives that contribute to improvement and facilitation of implementation of the customs procedure, wider application of simplification of customs procedures during the import, export and transit of goods, alignment and increase of predictability in the actions of customs authorities.

	Planned activity	Measures for implementing activities of	the competent institution	Result indicator
1.	Mutual recognition and promotion of the programme of an authorised economic operator (AEO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensure that the benefits of using the status of authorised economic operator (AEOS) are applied in accordance with the signed agreements on the mutual recognition of AEOS in the signatory countries</li><li>• At border crossings where there are such infrastructural and technical possibilities, designate special lanes for priority passage for holders of AEO status, TIR and T1 trucks and trucks transporting perishable goods</li><li>• Launch an initiative to sign an agreement on mutual recognition of AEOS within the region, with the EU, in accordance with the EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, as well as with other foreign trade partners</li></ul>	Customs Administration, Ministry of Finance	Flow of goods has been accelerated and retention time of freight vehicles at border crossings has been reduced with countries or customs territories with which AEOS mutual recognition agreements have been signed

	Planned activity	Measures for implementing activities of	the competent institution	Result indicator
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a system for electronic submission of requests and supporting documentation for obtaining AEO status</li> <li>• Work on the establishment of IT systems that would enable the electronic exchange of data between the MRA signatory parties</li> </ul>		<p>A progress report on negotiations and/or a mutual recognition agreement of the AEO programme signed</p> <p>A progress report and/or an electronic system for AEO established</p>
2.	Speeding up the flow of goods at border crossings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of a plan for establishing joint controls with other countries or customs territories, with a special emphasis on border crossings with the EU</li> </ul>	Customs Administration, Ministry of Finance, NTFB member institutions, Coordination Body for Border Crossings	Flow of goods at border crossings has been accelerated and retention time of freight vehicles at border crossings has been shortened

	<b>Planned activity</b>	<b>Measures for implementing activities of</b>	<b>the competent institution</b>	<b>Result indicator</b>
<b>3.</b>	IT connection of the Radiation and Nuclear Safety and Security Directorate and the Customs Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defining a set of data that will be submitted to the Customs Administration by the Radiation and Nuclear Safety and Security Directorate;</li> <li>• Establishment of a system for online connection of the Radiation and Nuclear Safety and Security Directorate and the Customs Administration;</li> <li>• Training of employees of the Customs Administration and Radiation and Nuclear Safety and Security Directorate on new electronic tools</li> </ul>	<p>Customs Administration, Ministry of Finance</p> <p>Radiation and Nuclear Safety and Security Directorate</p>	<p>Data set to be shared has been defined</p> <p>Available online system for electronic submission of data</p> <p>Shortening of the average time required for the document of the Radiation and Nuclear Safety and Security Directorate to be available to participants in foreign trade, as well as the customs procedure for those goods</p>
<b>4.</b>	Analysis of the current situation and undertaking measures and activities that will enable electronic communication of economic operators with the Collection Department of the Customs Administration regarding the collection of claims on the basis of overdue customs duties, interest for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of electronic mailroom</li> <li>• Introduction of the so-called "traffic light", i.e. notifications about the due date of the customs debt assessment charge</li> <li>• Introduction of electronic submission of requests for depositing collateral</li> </ul>	<p>Office for e-Government</p> <p>Customs Administration, Ministry of Finance</p>	<p>Accelerated communication of economic operators with the Department for Collection of Budgetary Revenues of the Customs Administration</p>



	<b>Planned activity</b>	<b>Measures for implementing activities of</b>	<b>the competent institution</b>	<b>Result indicator</b>
	late payment of the same, refund of overpaid customs duties, reversing wrong payments, reminders for settlement of customs debt and communication with the guarantor bank			
<b>5.</b>	Activity of establishing a national one-stop-shop system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adoption of the Law on the National One-Stop-Shop after consultation with the private sector</li> <li>• Publication of technical specifications for procurement of software and hardware necessary for the establishment of a national one-stop-shop</li> <li>• Creation and testing of a national one-stop-shop which will enable the electronic provision of all necessary decisions</li> <li>• Informing and/or training of the system users, including the private sector, on the establishment and/or use of the national one-stop-shop</li> </ul>	<p>Customs Administration, Ministry of Finance,</p> <p>Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure (Project Implementation Unit) and</p> <p>NTFB member institutions</p>	<p>The Law on the National One-Stop Shop adopted</p> <p>Specifications for procurement of software and hardware for the implementation of a national one-stop-shop have been published</p> <p>Progress report and/or implementation of a national one-stop-shop</p>
<b>6.</b>	Work on introduction of automated systems of import, export and customs decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amendment to national customs regulations in order to implement new automated system</li> <li>• Development of functional and technical specifications</li> </ul>	<p>Ministry of Finance – Contracting and Financing of European Union Funded Programmes Department,</p>	<p>Amended customs regulations that enable implementation of</p>

	<b>Planned activity</b>	<b>Measures for implementing activities of</b>	<b>the competent institution</b>	<b>Result indicator</b>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of business process modelling (BPM)</li> <li>• Development and testing of software for automated procedures for import, export and customs decision systems</li> <li>• Informing and training the private sector to use the new automated systems</li> </ul>	<p>International Cooperation and European Integrations Department, Customs System and Policy Department</p> <p>Customs Administration - Ministry of Finance</p>	<p>automated systems have been adopted</p> <p>Technical and functional specifications for procurement have been published</p> <p>New business process modelling (BPM) has been developed</p> <p>A progress report and/or implementation of automated systems for import, export and customs decisions</p>
7.	Acceleration and simplification of the procedure for issuing certificates of origin of goods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digitisation of the procedure for issuing certificates of origin of goods in a uniform way (from the perspective of the economy, that is, applicants), which will be applied to all free trade agreements (modules for the economy and customs officers)</li> <li>• Creation of an online module for checking the authenticity and validity of issued certificates</li> </ul>	Customs Administration - Ministry of Finance	Establishment of a system for electronic submission and issuance of certificates of origin of goods (e.g. EUR 1) and checking of authenticity and validity

	<b>Planned activity</b>	<b>Measures for implementing activities of</b>	<b>the competent institution</b>	<b>Result indicator</b>
<b>8.</b>	Digitisation of the data processing procedure for digital ATA carnet (eATA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperation with the TIR and ATA Service of Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry</li> <li>• Cooperation with the International Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>• Cooperation with the World Customs Organisation (WCO)</li> <li>• Selection of the way of integration of the customs system into the ICC ATA Carnet System (a centralised platform for customs has been created free of charge)</li> <li>• Starting the pilot project eATA selection of customs offices for the pilot project (proposal: "Nikola Tesla" Airport and possibly one road border crossing after that, if the conditions are met)</li> </ul>	Ministry of Finance - Customs Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• complete digitalisation of the ATA carnet and transition from a paper to a digital document, which leads to significant time savings for both customs and ATA carnet holders</li> <li>• all data are in "real-time" time frame</li> <li>• the claim process is significantly accelerated</li> <li>• there is no possibility of losing the carnet</li> <li>• number of issued and processed ATA carnets</li> </ul>

#### IV – EXPERT GROUP ON COORDINATION OF TRADE FACILITATION ACTIVITIES UNDER INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL TRADE AGREEMENTS

**Chair: Ms. Tatjana Dinkić**, Head of the Group, Ministry of Internal and Foreign Trade

The expert group on coordination of trade facilitation activities under international and regional trade agreements provides support to the structures provided for in these agreements in coordination and prioritisation of activities at the national level related to trade facilitation issues, with the aim of faster harmonisation with good international and regional practices and reducing costs for the private sector due to insufficiently efficient procedures.

	Planned activity	Measures for implementing activities of	the competent institution	Result indicator
1.	<p>Coordination and monitoring of the implementation of obligations in the field of trade facilitation resulting from free trade agreements and cooperation with international organisations</p> <p>Coordination of developing responses to inquiries from research in the field of trade facilitation conducted by international organisations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring the implementation of free trade agreements in the context of trade facilitation within SAA, CEFTA, EFTA, EAEU, the UK, Turkey and the Open Balkan.</li> <li>Coordination of implementation of measures of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and preparation of notifications according to the dynamics of Serbia's accession to this organisation</li> </ul>	NTFB Secretariat - MIFT/NTFB member institutions	Assessment of Serbia's achieved progress based on reports by the European Commission and other relevant international organisations, including independent research on compliance with the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement - the UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation and/or the World Bank's Tracking Tool

	<b>Planned activity</b>	<b>Measures for implementing activities of</b>	<b>the competent institution</b>	<b>Result indicator</b>
<b>2.</b>	Speeding up the flow of goods at border crossings with the EU through integrated management of crossings, harmonisation of working hours of border services and improvement of infrastructure, as well as expansion of the "Green Corridors" mechanism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperation with the Coordination Body for Border Crossings in order to solve the problem of long retention time of freight vehicles at border crossings towards Hungary, Croatia and Bulgaria.</li> <li>• Activities directed towards the competent directorates of the European Commission and the Transport Community</li> <li>• Bilateral cooperation with the competent institutions of the EU member states in order to increase the infrastructural and other capacities of road and railway border crossings.</li> <li>• Improvement of infrastructure on the Serbian side and increase in the number of officials at the railway and road border crossing BC Šid - Tovarnik (establishment of separate lanes in both directions for freight traffic).</li> <li>• At the bilateral level, initiate the establishment of integrated border crossings with the EU at the most frequent points.</li> </ul>	<p>Coordination Body for Border Crossings, MCTI.</p> <p>Republic Directorate for Property of the Republic of Serbia</p>	<p>Flow of goods at border crossings has been accelerated and retention time of freight vehicles at border crossings with the EU has been shortened (progress verification mechanism based on the Time Release Study, as well as verification through the EC's Annual Progress Report)</p> <p>Infrastructure at border crossings has been improved</p>

	Planned activity	Measures for implementing activities of	the competent institution	Result indicator
3.	Speeding up the flow of goods at border crossings within WB6 region through integrated management of crossings, harmonisation of working hours of border services and improvement of infrastructure,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On a bilateral level, continue work on the establishment of integrated border crossings with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro (Sremska Rača - Bosnia and Herzegovina, Gostun - Montenegro), and improvement of the establishment of joint control at the BC with North Macedonia - Preševo - Tabanovce (introduction of one document scan).</li> <li>Establishment of joint railway stations within the region in order to conduct joint control: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Implementation of the Law on Ratification of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia on determining border crossing procedures for the Preševo - Tabanovce railway border crossing (Agreement as of 2015); Implementation of the Law on Ratification of the Agreement between the Government of the</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	MCTI, CEFTA Trade Facilitation Committee, Republic Directorate for Property of the Republic of Serbia, Customs Administration, Inspection Services, Border Police, Serbian Railways,	Flow of goods at border crossings has been accelerated and retention time of freight vehicles at border crossings with the region has been shortened (progress verification mechanism based on the Time Release Study) Infrastructure at border crossings has been improved Joint border control of passenger and freight vehicles, which would be carried out by the competent republican authorities of Montenegro, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Serbia.

	Planned activity	Measures for implementing activities of	the competent institution	Result indicator
		<p>Republic of Serbia and the Government of the Republic of Montenegro on determining border crossing procedures for the Bijelo Polje railway border crossing</p> <p>b) Signing of the same agreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina (negotiations in progress, joint station Brasina)</p>		
4.	Harmonisation of requirements and facilitation of trade in goods within CEFTA/Berlin Process/ EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiation of the following activities under CEFTA:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Development of the Action Plan regarding harmonisation of requirements for safety, quality and labelling of products with EU requirements</li> <li>2. Report on the snapshot of the situation and development of an action plan for harmonisation of fees and charges related to trade in goods within CEFTA</li> </ol> </li> </ul>	NTFB member institutions	<p>The Action Plan at CEFTA level has been developed regarding harmonisation of requirements for safety, quality and labelling of products with EU requirements</p> <p>Proposal for simplification, consolidation and elimination of certain fees and charges has been prepared</p> <p>Reduction of operating expenses for the economy</p>

	<b>Planned activity</b>	<b>Measures for implementing activities of</b>	<b>the competent institution</b>	<b>Result indicator</b>
	*Note: EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans did not come into force until adoption of the Action Plan			
5.	Removal of obstacles to the improvement of foreign trade exchange between Serbia and the United Kingdom in connection with the rules of origin of goods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within the framework of the Council for Partnership, Trade and Cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Government of the UK, continue work on the amendment to the Origin Protocol, in such a way as to enable the cumulation of origin with the EU.</li> </ul>	MF, Customs Administration of the RS, MIFT, SCCI/UK side	<p>Amendments to the Origin Protocol have been agreed</p> <p>Increase in total trade between the United Kingdom and Serbia and the European Union</p>
	Application of digitisation and operational utilisation of announcement data obtained	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drafting and implementation of binding operational instructions for data processing before the arrival of goods</li> <li>• Mutual recognition and introduction of electronic</li> </ul>		<p>Functionality of the SEED+ system</p> <p>Recognition of export certificates with qualified digital signatures and seals.</p> <p>Elimination of physical documentation (printed version) and transition to fully</p>



	<b>Planned activity</b>	<b>Measures for implementing activities of</b>	<b>the competent institution</b>	<b>Result indicator</b>
<b>6.</b>	through SEED and SEED+ with the EU and the region	<p>signatures in trade in the region in phyto and veterinary fields.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full implementation of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia on mutual recognition of qualified trust services provided in the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of North Macedonia</li> <li>• Full implementation of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Government of the Republic of Montenegro on mutual recognition of qualified trust services provided in the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Montenegro</li> <li>• Sign such agreements with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania.</li> </ul>	MAFWM, Customs Administration, Veterinary Directorate, Plant Protection Directorate, Ministry of Information and Telecommunications, e-Government	<p>electronic documents of export documents accompanying the UPU shipment.</p> <p>Digital signing of issued certificates.</p> <p>Improving the quality and structure of data from the phytosanitary certificate.</p> <p>Agreements signed between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania regarding mutual recognition of qualified trust services</p>

	<b>Planned activity</b>	<b>Measures for implementing activities of</b>	<b>the competent institution</b>	<b>Result indicator</b>
7.	Abolition of the Green Card insurance requirement for motor vehicles for entering the territory of North Macedonia and Albania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Signing of the Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Compulsory Insurance Policies with North Macedonia and Albania.</li> </ul>	Association of Serbian Insurers	Reduction of operating expenses for the economy
8.	SCCI initiative to enable veterinary inspection of goods on both sides at the railway border crossing "Šid - Tovarnik"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In accordance with the SCCI initiative, in June 2023 the Minister of Internal and Foreign Trade and the Chair of NCBTF sent a letter to the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of the Republic of Croatia with the request to approach the solution of the mentioned problem and to establish veterinary control and inspection at the railway BC Šid-Tovarnik. Final answer from the Croatian side is awaited</li> </ul>	NTFB/Ministry of Internal and Foreign Trade  Permanent Secretariat of the Transport Community	<p>Facilitating the transportation of goods by rail that are subject to phytosanitary and veterinary inspection at the Tovarnik border crossing</p> <p>Border inspection point at the railway border crossing Tovarnik - BIP (Border Inspection Point) has been defined</p> <p>Relief of road border crossings</p> <p>Transport costs have been reduced</p>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organisation of seminars, round tables and conferences for representatives of the business community and administration</li> </ul>		Number of activities held and number of participants present at seminars and workshops

	<b>Planned activity</b>	<b>Measures for implementing activities of</b>	<b>the competent institution</b>	<b>Result indicator</b>
<b>9.</b>	Informing the public and business representatives about the implementation of trade facilitation measures,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in workshops organised by international organisations</li> <li>• Regular updating of the NTFB website in order to provide timely and accurate information to the interested and professional public in accordance with the principle of transparency and accessibility</li> <li>• Ensuring donor support for the implementation of these activities</li> </ul>	NTFB Secretariat – MIFT/NTFB member institutions	Number of new posts on the NTFB website and the growth in the number of visitors to the NTFB website