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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade, Economic Globalization
and Financing for Development
Eleventh session (Liberalization of foreign trade)
Beirut, 27-28 November 2017

**Information note***1. Background*

When the Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade, Economic Globalization and Financing for Development was established, it comprised only the two components of “Liberalization of Foreign Trade” and “Economic Globalization”, pursuant to Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) resolution 214 (XIX) of 7 May 1997, which was endorsed by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1997/12 of 18 July 1997. The decision to establish the Committee took into account the importance of the participation of member States in the planning, development and monitoring of ESCWA programmes aimed at assisting countries in outlining appropriate national and regional economic development policies that enable them to take greater advantage of the international trends towards liberalization of foreign trade and economic globalization. The Committee was also mandated to participate in the identification of the priorities and concerns of member States with regard to multilateral trade agreements and coordinate member States positions with respect to world trade negotiations. The Committee decided, at its fifth session in 2007, to modify its name by adding the component “Financing for Development”. The Committee held its sessions biannually starting in 1999. In 2012, ESCWA decided, at its twenty-seventh ministerial session, that the Committee hold its sessions annually rather than biannually, one on liberalization of foreign trade and another on financing for development, alternately. The seventh and ninth sessions therefore focused on issues related to financing for development and the eighth and tenth sessions focused on issues related to foreign trade liberalization.

The Committee held its first session in Abu Dhabi in 1999, its second in Manama in 2001, its third in Muscat in 2003, its fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh sessions in Beirut in 2005, 2007, 2009, and 2011, its eighth and ninth sessions in Amman in 2013 and 2015, and its tenth session in Cairo in 2015. The eleventh session, which is held in Beirut on 27 and 28 November 2017, will focus on the liberalization of foreign trade.

2. Objectives

The eleventh session of the Committee aims to provide an intergovernmental forum for member States to discuss challenges and prospects facing the Arab region with respect to liberalization of foreign trade and economic globalization and the achievement of regional priorities in that area.

Discussions will address the role of trade in facilitating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the role of transport in boosting trade and connectivity to global value chains, the main international trade agreements and their implications on Arab States, and the cost of the lack of Arab-African trade integration. A panel discussion will be conducted on the subject of Arab regional integration:

regionalism and multilateralism. The Committee will also review the progress achieved in the implementation of trade facilitation measures in the Arab region and in the process of establishing an Arab customs union.

In addition to the above topics, the Committee will discuss recurrent agenda items on the actions taken by the ESCWA secretariat and member States to implement the recommendations made by the Committee at its tenth session and the work undertaken by the secretariat in the field of foreign trade liberalization under the ESCWA programme of work and technical cooperation programme since the previous session, in addition to the proposed programme of work for the biennium 2018-2019 in the field of foreign trade liberalization.

3. Agenda and organization of work

The provisional agenda and annotations for the eleventh session of the Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade, Economic Globalization and Financing for Development are presented in document E/ESCWA/EDID/2017/IG.3/L.1. The proposed organization of work is presented in document E/ESCWA/EDID/2017/IG.3/L.2.

4. Documentation

All documents related to the session are posted on the session page on the ESCWA website, available from <https://www.unescwa.org/events/foreign-trade-financing-development-11th-session>.

5. Participants

Representatives of trade ministries of ESCWA member States will participate in the meetings of the session. Concerned regional and international organizations and institutions and civil society would also be invited to attend the session as observers. Participating governments (with the exception of one delegate from Mauritania, Palestine, the Sudan and Yemen, each) shall be responsible for the travel and accommodation expenses of their representatives, in accordance with United Nations practice, which also applies to participating organizations.

6. Date and venue

The eleventh session of the Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade, Economic Globalization and Financing for Development, which focuses on the liberalization of foreign trade, will be held at the United Nations House in Beirut on 27 and 28 November 2017. Registration will commence at 9 a.m. on Monday, 27 November 2017, and the opening session will convene at 10 a.m. on the same day. Session meetings will conclude at 1 p.m. on Tuesday, 28 November 2017.

7. Language of the session

Session proceedings will be in Arabic. English may be used to present some papers. Simultaneous interpretation from and to Arabic and English will be provided.

8. Accommodation and transportation

The ESCWA secretariat suggests that participants make reservations in a hotel nearby the ESCWA headquarters. The secretariat has prepared a list of hotels that offer discounted rates to participants in ESCWA meetings. The list is available from https://iseek-beirut.un.org/system/files/document_link/hotels_list_apr2017.pdf. To benefit from the discounted rates, delegates should mention that they are participating in the session of the Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade, Economic Globalization and Financing for Development, which is organized by ESCWA. Airport pick-up and drop-off services may be arranged directly with the hotel.

9. *Entry visas*

Participants may obtain entry visas to Lebanon through the Lebanese Embassy in their respective countries. It is recommended to attach a copy of the invitation letter sent by ESCWA to the visa application. In case of difficulty, the secretariat may assist in obtaining entry visas. Those who need assistance in this matter should send a scanned copy, in colour, of their passport containing all the required information to the secretariat.

10. *Correspondence*

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