



HARMONIZED SYSTEM  
COMMITTEE

NC0361E1

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27<sup>th</sup> Session  
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O. Eng.

Brussels, 2 April 2001.

RUSSIAN AND SPANISH AS WORKING LANGUAGES FOR HS MATTERS

(Item III.6 on Agenda)

**Russian**

I. BACKGROUND

1. At the Policy Commission's 43<sup>rd</sup> Session (July 2000), the Delegate of the Russian Federation explained his administration's request that the possibility of using Russian for HS matters be examined by the Policy Commission and the Council. His administration recognized that the WCO had only two official languages – English and French – and considered that this should continue to be the case. All other languages should be regarded as being on an equal footing with each other. The Russian Federation wished to have the Russian language used as a working language for Harmonized System matters. The Government of the Russian Federation was prepared to meet all the costs involved.
2. While recognizing the generosity of the Russian Federation in this regard, some delegates questioned whether it would be appropriate for the Policy Commission to recommend the introduction of an additional language for the HS work solely on the grounds that a Member was willing to pay for it. Inevitably there would be many logistical and practical implications which could have an impact on the operations of the Organization as a whole.
3. In this connection, the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation pointed out that following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russian had become a truly international language, used extensively by the business communities in a number of countries in Europe and Asia. Against this background it was extremely important to those countries, and others wishing to trade with them, that there should be a single, authoritative Russian version of the vital HS publications, administered by the WCO. The current situation, in which each Russian-speaking country had its own version of these publications, was a source of confusion and a hindrance to international trade.

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4. In the light of those remarks, the Policy Commission eventually reached agreement on the following recommendations :
  - (a) that the Council should reaffirm the principle that the WCO had just two official languages - English and French;
  - (b) that as Russian was an international language of trade, the Council agree in principle on the use of Russian as a working language for HS matters, bearing in mind the very generous offer made by the Russian Federation with regard to the funding of this initiative;
5. At the Council's 95<sup>th</sup>/96<sup>th</sup> Sessions (July 2000), it was decided to adopt the Policy Commission's recommendations above as to Russian as a working language for HS matters.

## II. ACTIONS BY THE SECRETARIAT AND THE RUSSIAN ADMINISTRATION

6. As a first step, with regard to the practical implementation of the Council's decision, the State Customs Committee of the Russian Federation and the Secretariat have jointly worked out a draft contract/memorandum of understanding which mainly contains details as to :
  - publications, databases, training materials, recommendations, reports and documents to be translated
  - interpretation in meetings (HSC, RSC, SSC, HSC Working Party);
  - secondment of a Russian speaking clerk/co-ordinator and his/her duties;
  - establishment of a Russian reference library at the WCO;
  - funding;
  - time schedule for the introduction of Russian as a working language for the HS.

The agreed contract/memorandum of understanding is expected to be signed during Spring 2001.

7. By the time of preparation of this document, a translation of the Russian 2002 version of the HS Nomenclature has been completed and distributed to the Russian-speaking WCO Members from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) for review. By its letter of 19 September 2000 (00NL0901 – K/MR), the Secretariat invited all Contracting Parties to the HS Convention to participate in the review of the Russian-language version of the HS Nomenclature and the Explanatory Notes. Three countries (Iran, Norway and Mongolia) have responded positively.
8. A Special Working Group consisting of representatives from the CIS and other interested countries was scheduled to meet in Moscow 14 - 15 March 2001 to finalize the agreed Russian version of the HS Nomenclature.

9. This agreed version will be made available for inspection and approval during the 27<sup>th</sup> Session of the HSC as a Russian Working Language Version of the HS. After this version has been approved, the Secretariat will take the necessary steps with regard to the publication of this version as a WCO publication.
10. With regard to the further steps to be taken in order to introduce Russian as a working language for HS matters, the State Customs Committee of the Russian Federation and the Secretariat have agreed on the following tentative schedule.
11. Working documents, starting with the documents for the 28<sup>th</sup> Session of the Harmonized System Committee, will be translated into Russian (in Moscow), starting as soon as they have been finalized by the Secretariat, from Summer 2001 onwards.
12. In October 2001, a Russian-speaking clerk/co-ordinator is scheduled to start working in the Secretariat. At the same time the work on the Russian versions of the Compendium of Classification Opinions and the Alphabetical Index will start. Later in 2001, the translation of the Classification Handbook, the HS 2002 Amendments Booklet, the Laboratory Guide and the Classification Disputes Booklet will be initiated.
13. A Special Working Group consisting of representatives from the CIS and other interested countries will meet in October/November 2001 to finalize an agreed Russian 2002 version of the HS Explanatory Notes. This version can hopefully be approved at the 28<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee (November 2001).
14. Starting at the 28<sup>th</sup> Session of the HS Committee (November 2001), interpretation into (and from) Russian will be provided at all the meetings of the committees (HSC, RSC, SSC + Working Parties).
15. From 1 January 2002, the WCO Website's section devoted to Harmonized System matters will also be available in Russian.

## Spanish

### III. BACKGROUND

16. At its 43<sup>rd</sup> Session, the Policy Commission reached consensus on a series of recommendations concerning the use of Spanish as a working language for HS matters, namely :
  - that the Council reaffirm its decision to use Spanish for Harmonized System matters, and
  - that in the light of the Finance Committee's report the possibilities as regards application of this decision be explored on the basis of the following parameters :
    - (a) that the use of Spanish for Harmonized System matters be introduced progressively, and in compliance with the budgetary principles in force in the WCO;
    - (b) that following discussions between the Secretariat and the Spanish-speaking Members, a timetable for the gradual introduction of Spanish for HS matters would be presented to the Policy Commission in June 2001. The timetable would indicate clearly the point at which WCO funding would be required;

- (c) that the Spanish-speaking Members would then be invited to second two Technical Attachés to the Secretariat to begin work on the project.

- 17. At the Council's 95<sup>th</sup>/96<sup>th</sup> Sessions (July 2000), the Council reaffirmed its decision to use Spanish as a working language for Harmonized System matters. Furthermore, it was decided that the possibilities as regards this decision should be explored on the basis of the above parameters.

#### IV. RECENT ACTIVITIES CONCERNING THE SPANISH VERSION OF THE 2002 HS NOMENCLATURE

- 18. On 15 December 2000, the Secretariat received a Spanish version of the 2002 HS Nomenclature and a letter from the Spanish Customs Administration informing the WCO that a meeting of Spanish-speaking countries was held in Montevideo in October 2000 and those countries had finalized an agreed and approved Spanish version of HS 2002.
- 19. By its letter of 5 February 2001 (01NL0140 – Ko/FI), the Secretariat invited all Contracting Parties to the HS Convention (except the countries which participated in the meeting referred to above) to participate in the review of the Spanish-language version of the HS 2002 Nomenclature. So far, no countries have responded positively.
- 20. The Secretariat is therefore of the opinion that the version referred to in paragraph 18 above can be regarded as an agreed working language version of the 2002 HS Nomenclature. This version will be made available for inspection and approval during the 27<sup>th</sup> Session of HSC as a Spanish Working Language Version of the HS. After this version has been approved, the Council will be informed of that effect at its 97<sup>th</sup>/98<sup>th</sup> Session in June, and the Secretariat will also take the necessary steps with regard to the publication of this version as a WCO publication.
- 21. Furthermore, the Secretariat has been informed that an agreed Spanish version of the 2002 edition of the HS Explanatory Notes will hopefully be finalized by 1 January 2002, meaning that this version can be approved at the HS meeting in May 2002. Finally, the Secretariat has been notified that two Spanish-speaking Technical Attachés are expected to be seconded to the Secretariat no later than 1 January 2003.

#### V. CONCLUSION

- 22. Copies of the Russian and Spanish versions of the HS will be made available for inspection during the meeting. Countries wanting to receive copies earlier should get in touch with the Secretariat immediately.
  - 23. The Committee is invited to approve the Russian and Spanish working language versions of the HS 2002 Nomenclature, taking into account the above-mentioned developments.
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