

DECISION OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

No. 7/2025

amending Decision No. 1/2015 on the Establishment of CEFTA Bodies

Adopted on 26 August 2025

The Joint Committee,

Having regard to Article 40.2 and 40.4 of Annex 1 to the Agreement on Amendment of and Accession to the Central European Free Trade Agreement (hereinafter “CEFTA 2006”), done in Bucharest on 19 December 2006;

Having regard to Article 41(5) of the CEFTA 2006, which empowers the Joint Committee to establish appropriate organs such as working groups, task forces, subcommittees and other bodies it considers necessary to assist it in accomplishing its tasks;

Having regard to Decision No. 1/2015 on the Establishment of CEFTA Bodies;

With the objective to ensure the continuous and efficient functioning of the CEFTA Bodies, as well as the full implementation of the Agreement and the Additional Protocols to the Agreement;

With the objective to adjust the relevant CEFTA structures to respond to new priorities related to the implementation of the CEFTA 2006;

Having regard to the recent activities relating to Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) programmes and to Customs cooperation on tariff classification and rules of origin;

Has decided as follows:

Article 1

Amendment of Decision No. 1/2015

- (1) In Article 1, paragraph 1, of Decision No. 1/2015 on the Establishment of CEFTA Bodies under “Committee of Trade Facilitation”, a reference to “Authorized Economic Operator Working Group” shall be added.
- (2) In Article 1, paragraph 1, of Decision No. 1/2015 on the Establishment of CEFTA Bodies under “Sub-committee on Customs and Rules of Origin”, a reference to “CEFTA Advisory Body for Customs Cooperation on tariff classification and rules of origin” shall be added.
- (3) In Article 4, the following text shall be added:

“This Decision was amended by Decision No. 7/2025, adopted on 26 August 2025, in the presence of all CEFTA Parties”.

- (4) Annex I to this Decision providing the Terms of Reference for the “Authorized Economic Operator Working Group” shall be added as a new Annex 13 to Decision No. 1/2015.
- (5) Annex II to this Decision providing the Terms of Reference for the “CEFTA Advisory Body for Customs Cooperation on tariff classification and rules of origin” shall be added as a new Annex 14 to Decision No. 1/2015.
- (6) The CEFTA Secretariat shall make available a consolidated version of Decision No. 1/2015 of the CEFTA Joint Committee.

Article 3

Entry into force

This decision shall enter into force on the day of its adoption.

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This decision was adopted in Brussels, on 26 August 2025, in the presence of all CEFTA Parties.

Annex I

Terms of Reference of the Authorized Economic Operator Working Group

1. TITLE

The title of the Working Group shall be “Authorized Economic Operator Working Group” (hereinafter referred to as: “AEO Working Group”).

2. TASKS

The overall task of the AEO Working Group is to contribute to the promotion and facilitation of trade within CEFTA Parties, with the aim to enhance international supply chain security and to facilitate trade. The AEO Working Group also focuses on the implementation of AEO programmes in CEFTA Parties and the recognition of AEOs programmes. The AEO Working Group shall be tasked with supporting the work of the CEFTA Committee of Trade Facilitation.

3. MEMBERSHIP

- (1) Members of the AEO Working Group shall be senior civil servants of the Customs Administrations in charge of AEO programme and trade facilitation matters.
- (2) Experts from other public institutions of the CEFTA Parties, from outside of the CEFTA Parties, or from international organisations may be invited to attend the meetings at the request of the Chair to provide advice or introduce best practices where needed. Their contributions are consultative in nature and aimed at supporting discussions and consensus-building among CEFTA Parties.
- (3) The AEO Working Group shall make recommendations by consensus of all its members. If a member is absent from a meeting, he/she should communicate its position in writing within a period of no longer than 20 working days from the date of a receipt of a request for such position. If no position is communicated within the set period, it shall be deemed that the member concerned has no objection and agrees to proceed further.
- (4) A member of the Authorized Economic Operator Working Group shall cease to be a member if:
 - (a) He/she resigns from a relevant position within the respective CEFTA Party;
 - (b) He/she fails to attend three consecutive meetings without providing reasons to the Chair and securing an appropriate replacement; or
 - (c) On his/her own request.

4. CHAIRPERSON

- (1) The Chair of the AEO Working Group shall be from the Party that chairs the Committee of Trade Facilitation.

- (2) The Chair of the AEO Working Group shall participate in the meetings of the CEFTA Committee of Trade Facilitation.

5. MINUTES

- (1) A representative from the CEFTA Secretariat shall take notes and draft minutes or operational conclusions of the meetings of the AEO Working Group within 10 working days from the day of each meeting.
- (2) Recipients of the minutes or operational conclusions shall have 5 working days from receipt of the drafts to submit comments and, if no comments are submitted, the minutes shall be considered as final and accepted.

6. MEETINGS

- (1) The AEO Working Group shall meet as necessary, but at least once per year and shall report to the CEFTA Committee of Trade Facilitation.
- (2) All members may propose items for inclusion on the draft agenda to the Chair of the AEO Working Group no later than 10 working days in advance of the next meeting.
- (3) The CEFTA Secretariat shall provide the necessary logistical and organizational support for the Working Group under these Terms of References.

7. FUNCTIONS

The specific functions of the AEO Working Group shall be:

- (a) Exchange information on and discuss practical and operational matters related to the implementation of AEO programmes across the CEFTA Parties;
- (b) Identify and agree on appropriate measures to be taken/followed in order to overcome difficulties encountered and ensure a harmonised approach and implementation;
- (c) Discuss and provide support for the development, enhancement, and implementation of any new improvements in the programme in line with evolving trade facilitation priorities and international best practices;
- (d) Discuss and exchange best practices on the implementation and benefits of AEO programmes, with a view to enhancing their effectiveness and progressively extending their scope, particularly in the areas of priority treatment/lanes, and reduced controls;
- (e) Prepare any necessary amendments to the CEFTA AEO Guidelines and other operational tools;
- (f) Discuss and develop guidelines and operational manuals and provide capacity building and technical assistance. The AEO Working Group shall develop training programs, explanatory notes, and technical guidelines to assist customs administrations,

businesses, and trade professionals in improving their understanding and application of the AEO programmes.

8. ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPORTING

- (1) The AEO Working Group shall communicate on a regular basis with the Committee of Trade Facilitation and report on the activities of the Working Group.
- (2) The AEO Working Group shall submit an annual written report to the CEFTA Committee of Trade Facilitation, noting the progress made and the difficulties encountered in the course of the past calendar year.

Annex II

Terms of Reference for the CEFTA Advisory Body for Customs Cooperation on tariff classification and rules of origin

1. TITLE

The title shall be “CEFTA Advisory Body for Customs Cooperation on tariff classification and rules of origin” (hereinafter referred to as: “Advisory Body”).

2. TASK

The task of the Advisory Body is to develop and broaden alignment and cooperation among CEFTA Parties, according to Article 14 paragraph 2 of the CEFTA 2006, particularly to address the issues regarding the implementation of the rules regarding the tariff classification of goods for customs purposes and the determination of their origin so that business operations can be facilitated through creating a predictable environment for trade in goods and enabling companies to plan their costs more effectively and efficiently.

3. MEMBERSHIP

- (1) Members of the Advisory Body are Customs representatives/officers in charge of tariff classification and rules of origin and other respective institutions of the CEFTA Parties involved in the trade of goods. The representatives of each Party shall be nominated according to the agenda items of each meeting of the Advisory Body.
- (2) The representatives from each Party shall actively participate in performing the tasks and functions of this Advisory Body.
- (3) Experts from other public institutions of the CEFTA Parties, from outside of the CEFTA Parties, or international organisations may be invited to attend the meetings at the request of the Chair of the Advisory Body to provide advice or introduce best practices where needed. Their contributions are consultative in nature and aimed at supporting discussions and consensus-building among CEFTA Parties.
- (4) The Advisory Body makes recommendations by consensus of all members. If a member is absent from the meeting he/she should communicate his/her position in writing within a period of no longer than 20 working days from the date of a receipt of a request. If a position is not communicated within the set period, it shall be deemed that the member concerned has no objection and agrees to proceed further.

4. CHAIRPERSON

- (1) The Party chairing the Subcommittee on Custom and Rules of Origin shall chair the Advisory Body, as the Advisory Body is established under the CEFTA Subcommittee on Customs and Rules of Origin.
- (2) The responsibilities of the Chair include:
 - (a) Scheduling meetings and notifying the members;
 - (b) Inviting guest experts to attend the meetings when requested by members;
 - (c) Guiding the meetings and other activities during chairing;
 - (d) Ensuring that all discussion items end with a conclusion, action, or definite outcome.

5. MINUTES TAKING

A representative of the CEFTA Secretariat shall take notes and draft minutes of the meetings of the Advisory Body within 10 working days from the day of the meeting. Recipients of the meeting minutes/conclusions shall have 5 working days to submit comments. If no comments are submitted, the minutes shall be considered final.

6. MEETINGS

- (1) The Advisory Body shall meet as necessary but at least once per year, preferably before the meeting of Subcommittee on Customs and Rules of Origin.
- (2) All members may propose items for inclusion on the agenda to the Chair of the Advisory Body no later than 21 working days in advance of the next meeting.
- (3) The CEFTA Secretariat shall provide all the necessary logistical and organisational support for the Advisory Body under these Terms of Reference.

7. FUNCTION

The specific functions of the Advisory Body shall be:

- (1) Support discussions and actions in aligning the rules regarding tariff classification of goods for customs purposes and in determining their origin. More specifically:
 - (a) Ensure consistency in tariff classification and origin determination by providing technical guidance on tariff classification under the Harmonized System (HS) and preferential rules of origin. The Advisory Body shall work towards a uniform

interpretation of tariff classification and origin provisions, helping customs administrations and businesses navigate these critical aspects effectively;

- (b) Receive, review, and analyse technical submissions from Customs Administrations on tariff classification or rules of origin;
 - (c) Prepare structured dossiers summarising the background, regulatory basis, key issues, and proposed recommendations;
 - (d) Review the BTI/BOI cases that have caused divergence or concern and issue opinions or recommendations. The Customs Administration that issued the decision may consider to revise it in light of the Advisory Body's recommendation.
 - (e) To enhance alignment with EU and international standards by promoting convergence with the Union Customs Code (UCC) and other international best practices;
 - (f) Facilitate consultation and dispute prevention by acting as a pre-dispute consultation forum. The Advisory Body provides a forum for CEFTA Parties to discuss and resolve tariff classification and origin-related issues before they escalate into formal disputes;
 - (g) Support risk management by enhancing the efficiency, accuracy, and consistency of tariff classification and origin verification processes;
 - (h) Assist in the modernisation of CEFTA's rules of origin by supporting discussions on revisions of the provisions of rules of origin;
 - (i) Provide technical expertise for negotiations and amendments aimed at enhancing the CEFTA origin framework, ensuring that it remains adaptable to changing trade conditions and business needs.
- (2) Discuss and develop guidelines and operational manuals, and provide capacity building and technical assistance. The Advisory Body shall develop training programs, explanatory notes, and technical guidelines to assist customs administrations, businesses, and trade professionals in improving their understanding and application of tariff classification and rules of origin.

8. ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPORTING

- (1) The agreed minutes of the meetings shall be submitted to the Chair of the Subcommittee Customs and Rules of Origin and shall be integrated into the report of the Subcommittee.
- (2) The Chair of the Advisory Body shall report on the discussions and outcomes in the plenary session of the regular meetings of the Subcommittee.

- (3) The Advisory Body shall prepare an annual report, which shall be submitted to the Subcommittee on Customs and Rules of Origin and shall be an integral part of the Annual Report of the Subcommittee on Customs and Rules of Origin, which is to be presented through the Committee of Trade Facilitation at the Joint Committee meeting.