

Measuring of the Trade Facilitation Progress in CEFTA 2006*

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Abstract

The measurement of trade facilitation progress has been an important issue both for governments and regulatory agencies as well as researches during last decades. A wide range of different trade facilitation indicators has been developed in the period after signing Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) in order to perceive the implementation level of trade facilitation measures across economies. Commonly used trade facilitation indicators from different sources are presented in the first part of this paper, with their characteristics and limitations. On that basis, the choice of trade facilitation indicators used in the second part of paper is made. The analysis of the progress and benefits of implementing the TFA measures in selected economies is conducted by using OECD Trade Facilitation Indicators (TFIs) database. Furthermore, the relationships between trade facilitation performance and trade costs, as well as trade value are analyzed, with special reference to CEFTA 2006 region. Since CEFTA 2006 members are interested in the European Union (EU) membership, obtained results are compared with the results of the EU countries, but also with other high-income countries, like OECD members.

Keywords: trade facilitation, LPI, ETI, OECD Trade facilitation indicators, trade costs, trade value, CEFTA 2006

1. Introduction

In the context of international trade growth and trade liberalization at all levels (multinational, bilateral, national) in previous years, along with efforts to reduce tariffs many governments have undertaken measures to facilitate trade through their national reforms and international trade negotiations (Kieck, E., 2020). The trade facilitation has become very important issue for the world trading system, since it has implied “simplification, modernization and harmonization of export and import processes” (WTO definition). It refers to “the full spectrum of border procedures, from the electronic exchange of data about a shipment, to the simplification and harmonization of trade documents, to the possibility to appeal administrative decisions by border agencies” (according to OECD). In addition to this, broader trade facilitation definitions (for instance, used by UNCTAD) include areas such as banking and insurance, transit and customs issue, transport (Moisé, E. et al., 2011). In other words, it covers customs and other regulatory trade procedures, trade and transport infrastructure and trade related services.

Implementation of trade facilitation measures by simplifying and streamlining international trade-related procedures, has many benefits for countries, such as enabling easier trade flows across borders, increasing trade value, reducing trade costs, enhancing quality of services and infrastructure and so on (Moisé E. and S. Sorescu, 2013; Sá Porto, P. C. et al., 2015). The empirical literature confirms that trade facilitation reforms have positive effects not only on large firms, but also on internationalization of small and medium enterprises which participate in international trade (e.g. López González, J. and S. Sorescu, 2019; OECD/WTO, 2019).

As a result of international trade negotiations and reforms related to trade facilitation, after ratification of two-third WTO members, multilateral WTO Trade facilitation Agreement (TFA) entered into force in 2017. The implementation of TFA implied application of measures to facilitate trade as well as to promote compliance and customs cooperation (Kieck, E., 2020). Parallel with a growing interest in trade facilitation issue, considerable attention is dedicated to

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define appropriate indicators for monitoring the progress of economies in implementation of TFA measures. Consequently, a wide range of indicators related to trade facilitation measures has been developed by several institutions, which can help to identify areas where further improvement and reforms are necessary. Those indicators are different in scope and nature depending on what trade facilitation definition (broader or narrow) is used in their construction, so that some overlapping can be among them. Some of trade facilitation indicators from different sources, with their characteristics and some limitations are presented in the first part of this paper. In the second part, the state of play of trade facilitation reforms is analyzed starting from the TFA entering into force, with the special focus of on CEFTA 2006 integration. Of all mentioned indicators, available OECD Trade Facilitation Indicators (TFIs) are used to perceive the progress of the reforms, i.e. TFA implementation.²

2. Trade Facilitation Indicators – A Short Overview

Governments as well as researches use trade facilitation indicators from different sources in order to monitor and analyze the level of implementation of trade facilitation measures. Some of the most commonly used indicators are: Trading across borders indicators of Doing Business Survey, Logistics performance index, World Economic Forum Enabling trade index, UN Survey on TF and Paperless Trade Implementation, OECD Trade Facilitation Indicators.

Trading across borders indicators within the World Bank Doing Business Survey are the core of trade facilitation agenda related to customs and other regulatory trade procedures, collected for 190 economies. As one of 12 areas of Doing Business Survey, they cover time for export and import procedures as well as costs for completion of the customs clearance and inspections procedures within three sets of procedures: 1) Documentary compliance, 2) Border compliance and 3) Domestic transport. Export and import tariffs are excluded from the area of Trading across borders, as well as costs of international transports, indicating that these indicators are narrower in scope (World Bank, 2016).³ Furthermore, these indicators are not quite comparable during the longer period, since the Trading across borders structure has been changed, producing also changes in methodology for Trading across borders indicators in order to increase their relevance for policy and research.

Indicators beyond the narrow (WTO) trade facilitation definition which additionally cover trade and transport infrastructure and services are World Bank *Logistics Performance Index* (LPI) and World Economic Forum *Enabling Trade Index* (ETI). LPI measures the efficiency and quality of the logistics performance of countries in order to trade efficiently (scale from 1-lowest to 5-highest performance). Domestic LPI measures logistics performances within countries, such as border procedures and time, infrastructure, services, while international LPI refers to logistics constraints on borders, ports, gateways (based on qualitative evaluations of a country by its trading partners outside the country). As another trade facilitation indicator, *Enabling Trade Index* measures the progress in enabling and making easier trade and contains four subindexes: (1) Market access subindex, which refers to tariff and non-tariff barriers, (2) Border administration (measures border administration efficiency), (3) Infrastructure subindex (measures the quality of the infrastructure) and (4) Operating environment subindex (covers institutional factors relevant for enabling trade). Data on both LPI and ETI are collected biennial, and the latest LPI data are published for 2018, while ETI data are for 2016. One of limitations of ETI is that the latest existing data are not fully comparable with previous, due to

² Due to unavailability of TFIs for 2021, it was not possible to analyze the consequences of Covid19 pandemic on trade facilitation reforms in this paper.

³ Hence, these indicators do not measure to what extent roads, rails, ports and communications could influence firms costs and competitiveness.

changes in the methodology and unavailability of some indicators (World Economic Forum, 2016).

Indicators more focused on implementation of specific TF measures are collected from another important source of data on trade facilitation - *UN Survey on trade facilitation and Paperless Trade Implementation* - giving also the information on the state of implementation of various paperless trade measures. The survey is conducted every two years covering around 120 countries and 38 trade facilitation and Paperless trade measures within the following four groups: (1) General trade facilitation measures (Transparency, Formalities, Institutional arrangement and cooperation); (2) Paperless trade measures which refer to the level of application of information and communication technologies to trade formalities (for instance, availability of internet connection at border-crossings and customs automation (e.g. Electronic Single Window System)); (3) Cross-border PT measures related to the regulations for electronic transactions, implementation of systems for exchange of electronic trade-related data and documents across borders) and (4) Transit facilitation measures used to reduce formalities associated with traffic in transit (United Nations, 2021).

Trade facilitation indicators created by OECD (TFIs) represent the most precisely instrument for monitoring country trade facilitation performance (OECD, 2018). These indicators measure the extent to which countries have introduced and implemented the WTO TFA measures. OECD TFIs are derived by aggregating 133 variables across the following 11 areas: (A) Information availability; (B) Involvement of the trade community; (C) Advance rulings; (D) Appeal procedures; (E) Fees and charges; Formalities: (F) Documents; (G) Automation; (H) Procedures; (I) Internal border agency cooperation; (J) External border agency co-operation; and (K) Governance and impartiality (Table 1). Each TFI takes values from 0 to 2, where 2 denotes the best performance that can be achieved. Data on TFIs are collected every two years and cover around 163 countries.

Table 1: Description of OECD trade facilitation indicators

Indicator	Description
(A) Information Availability	Enquiry points; publication of trade information, including on Internet; transparency of required documentation; user manuals; available legislation
(B) Involvement of the Trade Community	Structures for consultations; established guidelines for consultations; publications of drafts; existence of notice-and-comment frameworks
(C) Advance Rulings	Prior statements by the administration to requesting traders concerning the classification, origin, valuation method, etc., applied to specific goods at the time of importation; the rules and process applied to such statements
(D) Appeal Procedures	The possibility and modalities to appeal administrative decisions by border agencies
(E) Fees and Charges	Disciplines on the fees and charges imposed on imports and exports; transparency and regular review of fees and charges; disciplines on transparency and implementation of penalties systems
(F) Formalities – Documents	Acceptance of copies, simplification of trade documents; harmonization in accordance with international standards
(G) Formalities – Automation	Electronic exchange of data; use of automated risk management; automated border procedures; electronic payments; automated pre-arrival processing; digital signatures

Indicator	Description
(H) Formalities – Procedures	Streamlining of border controls; single submission points for all required documentation (single windows); post-clearance audits; authorized operators; measures on perishable goods; risk management systems; expedited shipments
(I) Internal border cooperation	Control delegation to Customs authorities; co-operation between various border agencies of the country
(J) External border cooperation	Co-operation with neighboring and third countries
(K) Governance and Impartiality	Customs structures and functions; accountability; ethics policy.

Source: OECD (2018), *Trade Facilitation and the Global Economy*, OECD Publishing, page 17.

Of all TFIs, the only indicator which is beyond the scope of WTO TFA is Governance and impartiality, but it is included to the list of OECDs TFIs in order to measure good governance and impartiality of border administrations. Hence, due to the fact that the most of OECD TFIs follow the structure of the WTO TFA and considering some limitations of other above considered indicators, OECD TFIs are used in the following part of paper to analyze the progress in implementation of TFA measures in CEFTA 2006 region.

3. Trade Facilitation Progress in CEFTA 2006

3.1. Trade Facilitation Performance in CEFTA 2006 Integration and Other Country Groups

The analysis of the progress of WTO TFA implementation in CEFTA 2006 integration is conducted for all members, although Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are not WTO members yet, but observers.⁴ According to TFIs, CEFTA 2006 region improved its position in each of 11 areas in 2019 compared to 2017 (Figure 1). The most significant improvement is realized in Documents (+36%, from 1.04 to 1.43) and in Appeal procedures (+18%, from 1.22 to 1.45). The highest values both in 2017 and 2019 were in Advance rulings (prior statements by the administration to traders concerning origin, classification of specific goods; 1.56 and 1.69) and Fees and charges (disciplines on the fees and charges imposed on imports and exports; 1.49 and 1.64 respectively). The areas which have to be improved notably are External and Internal border agency co-operation. TFIs in these areas achieved the lowest values (0.61 and 0.67 respectively in 2019), but also the smallest progress in CEFTA 2006 compared to 2017. These areas are followed by Information availability and Automation, with values in both years also far from the best performance.

⁴ Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Working Party was established in 1999, while Serbia’s Working Party in 2005 to examine their WTO accession application.

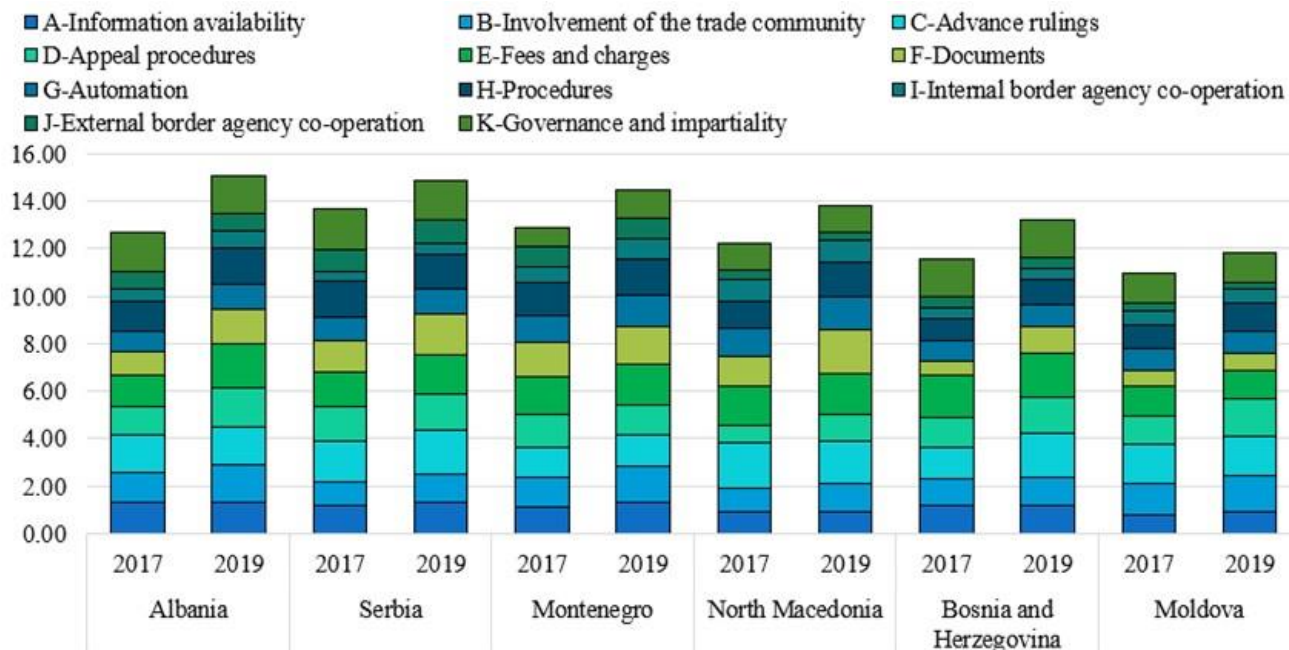


Note: TFI min =0; max=2.
Source: OECD TFIs database.

Figure 1: Trade facilitation progress in CEFTA 2006-comparison with country groups, 2017 and 2019

Comparing with other country groups classified by level of income (lower- and upper-middle income countries, high-income non-OECD and OECD countries), the first what can be seen is that CEFTA 2006 has better position for the most of TFIs than lower-middle income countries, but also than other upper-middle income countries where CEFTA 2006 also belongs. However, regardless the progress in TFA measures implementation, CEFTA 2006 integration is still far from the position of high-income OECD and non-OECD countries (Figure 1).

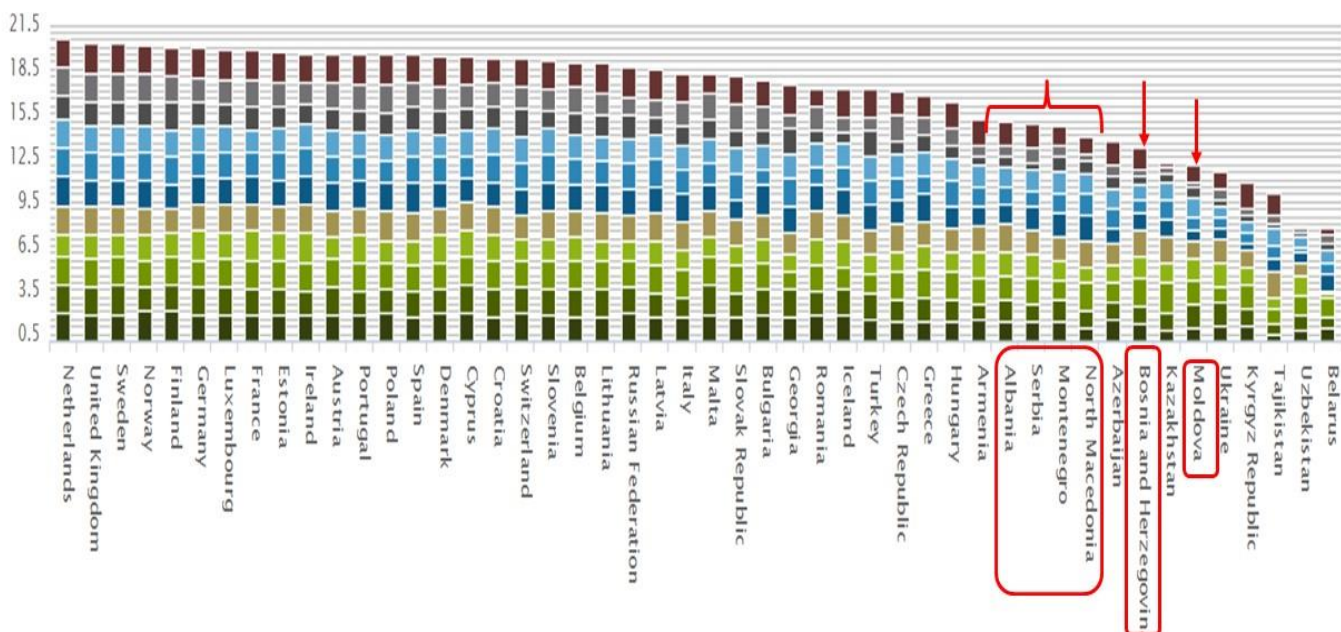
Observing by CEFTA 2006 members, the progress in trade facilitation reforms occurred across all individual countries, expressed in total value of TFIs. The largest improvement in 2019 compared to 2017 was in Albania (19%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (14%) and North Macedonia (13%). According to overall trade facilitation performance in 2019, Albania and Serbia were leaders in CEFTA 2006 region (Figure 2).⁵



Note: Total of 11 TFIs on vertical axis. For each TFI minimum=0 and maximum=2.

Source: OECD TFIs database.

Figure 2: Trade facilitation progress within CEFTA 2006, 2017 and 2019



Note: Total of 11 TFIs on vertical axis. For each TFI minimum=0 and maximum=2.

Source: OECD TFIs database.

Figure 3: Trade facilitation performance in 2019 - Europe and Central Asia

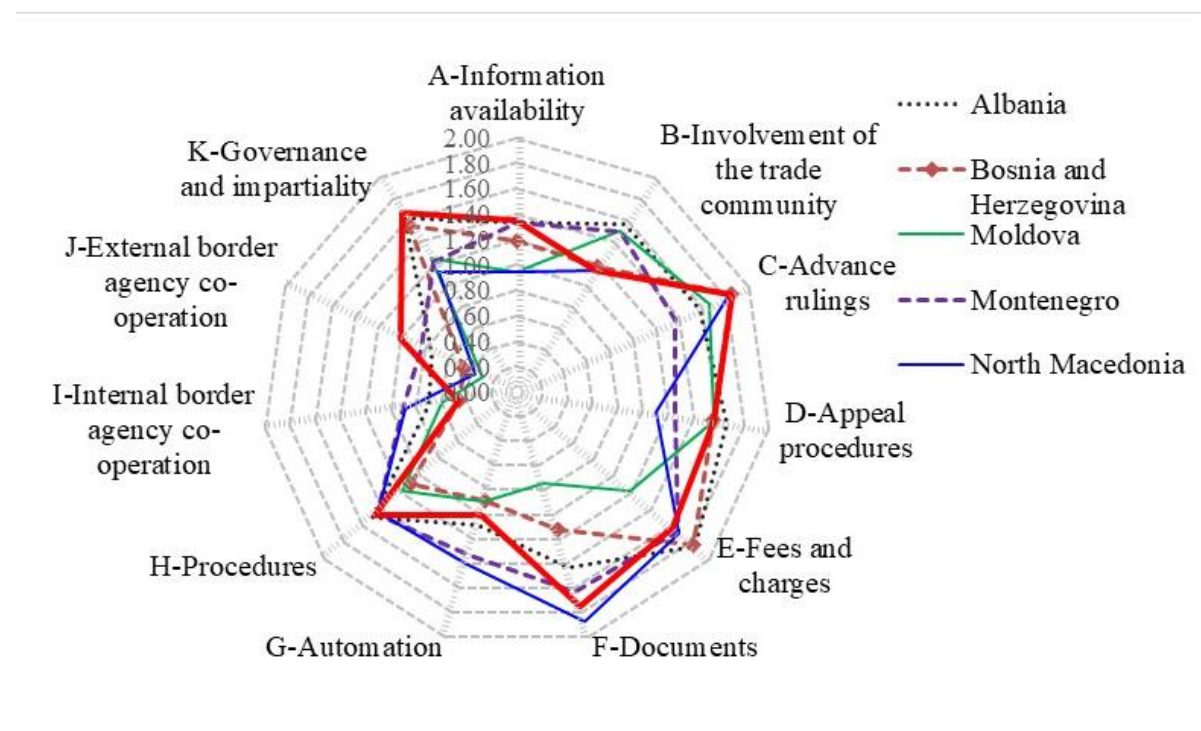
⁵ Overall trade facilitation performance is obtained as the sum of values for each of 11 TFIs.

All previous mentioned results indicate a notable improvement in implementing of TFA measures in CEFTA 2006. However, looking at broader geographical area such as Europe and Central Asian countries, it appears that the position of each CEFTA 2006 member has not been improved so much (Figure 3). Namely, overall trade facilitation performance for each observed member in 2019 was worse than all European OECD/EU countries, but also worse than some upper-middle income countries, such as Armenia, Georgia and Turkey.

3.2. Trade Facilitation Indicators by Individual CEFTA 2006 Members

Observing by individual CEFTA 2006 economies in the period after TFA entered into force, the best trade facilitation performance in 2019 has achieved in Documents (the largest value 1.88 in North Macedonia and 1.78 in Serbia), Advance rulings (the largest value 1.86 in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina), Fees and charges (largest value 1.85 in Albania and 1.83 in Bosnia and Herzegovina).

On the other side, extremely low trade facilitation performance in all CEFTA 2006 members has registered in Internal border agency cooperation (the value of trade facilitation indicator was lower than 1 in all CEFTA 2006; the lowest value 0.46 in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina), followed by External border agency cooperation with the value 1 in Serbia and lower in all others (in Moldova and Macedonia only 0.3 and 0.36, respectively) and Automation (from 0.89 in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Moldova to 1.4 in North Macedonia; Figure 4).



Source: OECD TFIs database.

Figure 4: Trade facilitation indicators by individual economies in CEFTA 2006, 2019

The level of implementation of TFA measures significantly varied in the observed period, both across CEFTA 2006 members and trade facilitation indicators. The smallest variability has registered in Procedures and Information availability (range 0.40), while the largest variability of TFI was in area of Documents (range 1.13).

Table 2: Trade facilitation performance variability in CEFTA 2006, 2019*

Indicators	Min.	Max.
A-Information availability	0.95 (Alb, Mkd)	1.35 (Srb)
B-Involvement of the trade community	1.14 (Srb, Mkd)	1.57 (Alb)
C-Advance rulings	1.36 (Mne)	1.86 (Srb, BiH)
D-Appeal procedures	1.11 (Mkd)	1.67 (Alb)
E-Fees and charges	1.18 (Mda)	1.85 (Alb)
F-Documents	0.75 (Mda)	1.88 (Mkd)
G-Automation	0.89 (Mda, BiH)	1.40 (Mkd)
H-Procedures	1.10 (BiH)	1.50 (Alb, Srb)
I-Internal border agency co-operation	0.46 (BiH Srb)	0.91 (Mkd, Mne)
J-External border agency co-operation	0.3-0.36 (Mda, Mkd)	1.00 (Srb)
K-Governance and impartiality	1.13 (Mkd)	1.67 (Srb)

* Minimal and maximal values of TFIs are presented in the table.

Source: OECD TFIs database.

Based on OECD TFIs minimal and maximal values (Table 2), it seems that both Internal and External border agency cooperation in all CEFTA 2006 economies are problematic areas in implementing TFA measures. Very low values of trade facilitation performance are registered in observed two areas (values lower than 1, except for Serbia in area of External border agency cooperation). Besides, significant reforms are needed in the following areas: Automation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Serbia and Albania (trade facilitation performance lower than 1), Documents in Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania and Availability of trade-related information in all CEFTA 2006, especially in North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova (trade facilitation performance around 1). Regarding Procedures, the result of reforms should be much better in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Moldova, since the value of trade facilitation indicator is slightly above 1. Finally, according to the trade facilitation indicator values, Involvement of the trade community is still a problematic area in North Macedonia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, whereas Appeal procedure in North Macedonia and Montenegro.

Table 3: Implementation level of TF measures by CEFTA 2006 members, 2019

	Least implemented	Most implemented
Albania	I 0.70/2	E 1.85/2
Serbia	I 0.46/2	C 1.86/2
Montenegro	J 0.82/2	E 1.67/2
N. Macedonia	J 0.36/2	F 1.88/2
Bosnia and Herzegovina	I, J 0.46/2	C 1.86/2

	Least implemented	Most implemented
Moldova	J 0.30/2	C 1.67/2

Source: OECD TFIs database.

Previous results are also confirmed by observation of the level of implementation of trade facilitation measures presented in Table 3. Summarizing the above mentioned, CEFTA 2006 members are characterized by rather homogenous structure concerning the least implemented trade facilitation measures in the area of Internal border cooperation (I) and External border cooperation (J). In these areas, stronger and faster reforms than before are necessary. A slightly more heterogeneous structure is noticeable in case of the most implemented trade facilitation measures. Of all trade facilitation measures and all CEFTA 2006 economies, North Macedonia achieved the highest implementation level in the area of Documents (F)⁶, whereas the next most implemented measures are in the area of Advance rulings (C), followed by Fees and charges (E) (Table 3).

4. Some Economic Benefits from Implementing the TFA Measures

There are many considerable potential benefits of implementation of trade facilitation measures, but the most often highlighted in empirical studies are those related to reducing the time, costs and uncertainty involved in importing and exporting processes, the increase in trade volume, improvement of the operation of international value chains. The effects of TFA measures vary across observed areas. Namely, previous researches in case of OECD countries showed that some of those measures had a larger impact on reduction of trade costs than others, such as measures which streamline Procedures (reduction by 5.4%) and Advance rulings (reduction by 3.7%), followed by Automation (reduction by 2.7%) and measures to streamline Fees and charges (reduction by 1.7%; Moisé et. al, 2011).

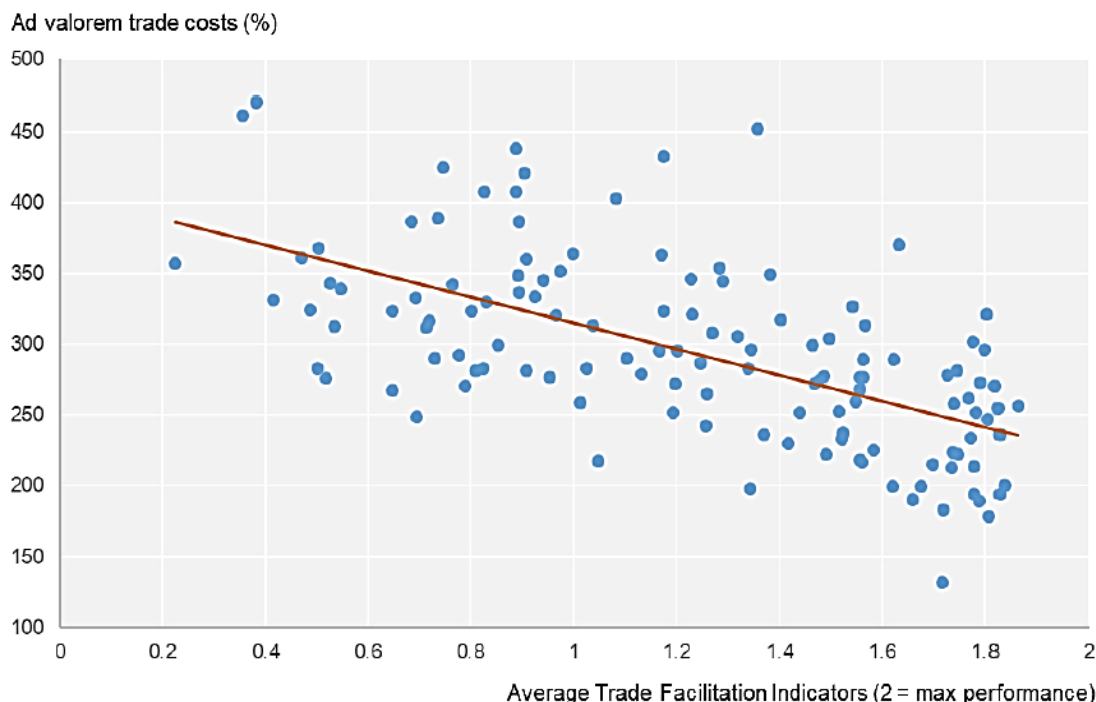
The effects of TFA measures on reduction of trade costs also depend on the level of development of observed countries. Adding all TFIs, it is shown that trade facilitation measures could reduce trade costs in OECD by around 10%, whereas by 13-16% in developing countries (Moisé et. al, 2011). Results of some further studies show that combined effects of implementation of TFA measures were even larger than by adding all TFIs (as the sum of individual TFIs; Moise E. and S. Sorescu, 2013). These effects were larger in case of lower income countries than in higher income countries: potential trade costs reduction influenced by full implementation of TFA measures was 14.5% of total costs in low income countries, 15.5% in lower-middle income countries and 13.2% in upper-middle income countries (Moisé E. and S. Sorescu, 2013).

The same conclusion can be derived based on results of more recent OECD studies (OECD, 2018; Moisé E. and S. Sorescu, 2017). The largest gains in potential trade costs reduction from full implementation of all measures of the TFA were realized in lower income countries: 16.5% of total costs for low income countries, 17.4% for lower-middle income countries, 14.6% for upper-middle income countries and 11.8% for OECD countries.

The latest available TFIs data for 2019 indicate a continuation of the TFA measures impact on trade costs reduction. The following Figure 5 shows clear negative correlation between trade facilitation performance and trade costs within the group of all economies for which data on observed indicators and trade costs are available.⁷

⁶ Compared to the best performance (maximal value =2).

⁷ More about definition and calculation of trade costs in: ESCAP-WB Trade Cost Database: Explanatory Note for Users” (<https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/Trade%20Cost%20Database%20-%20User%20note.pdf>).



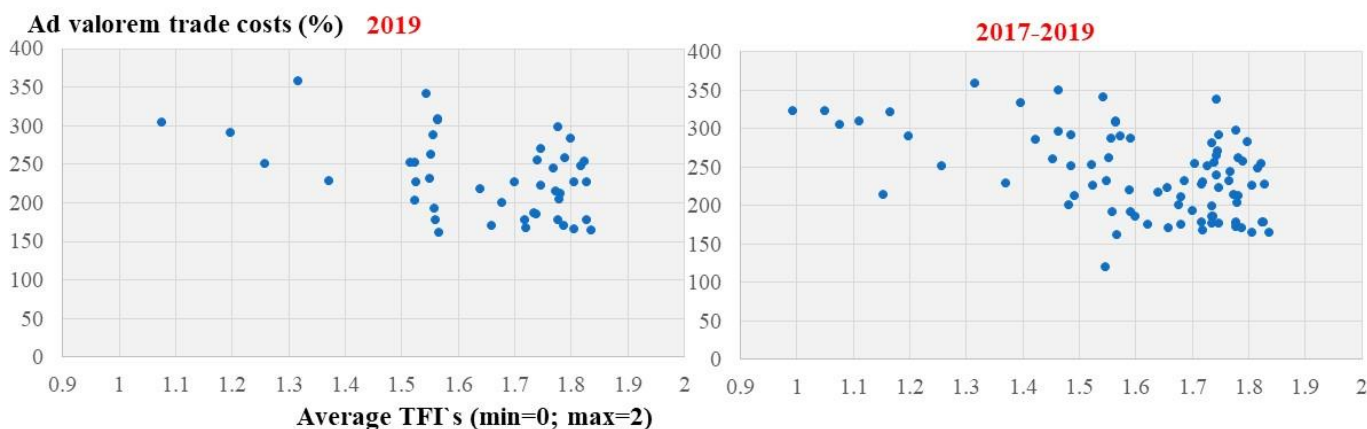
Note: The value of trade costs is provided in ad valorem equivalent form; the average of 11 trade facilitation indicators is used.

Source: Sorescu S. (2022).

Figure 5: Trade facilitation performance and trade costs for all goods, selected economies, 2019

In line with above mentioned results of OECD studies and according to available OECD TFIs data for 2019, it seems that weaker correlation between trade performance and trade costs in upper-middle and high-income countries still exists compared to low income countries (Figure 6). Namely, within the OECD, non-OECD EU and CEFTA 2006, negative correlation between trade facilitation performance and trade costs is not so obvious (correlation coefficient in 2019 is -0.48 ; Figure 6) as it is in the case when lower-middle income and low income countries are included (Figure 5). Along with the increase of income level of country, lower effects on trade costs are expected, having in mind that higher income countries have already achieved high implementation level of the TFA measures.

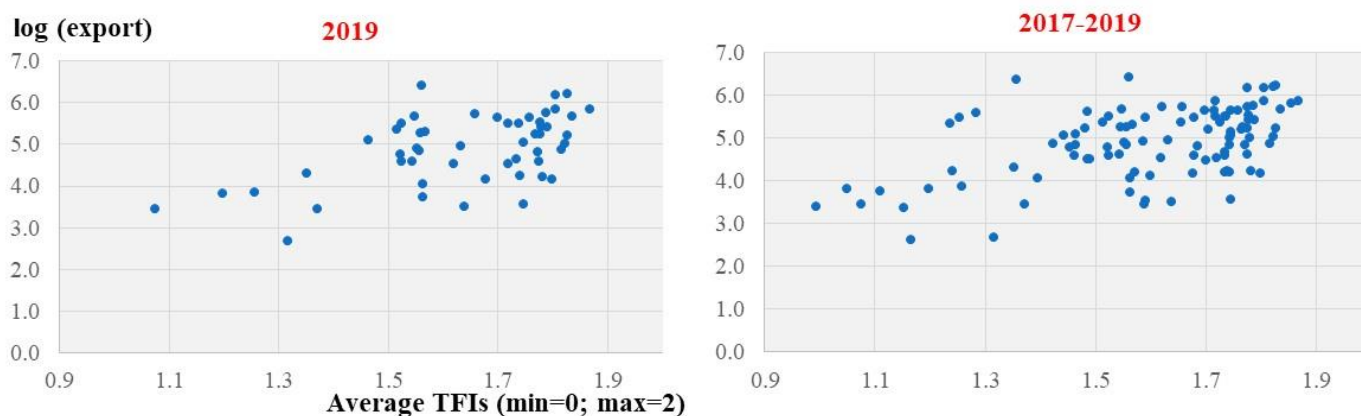
OECD, non-OECD EU and CEFTA 2006



Source: UN ESCAP –World Bank Trade Costs Database and OECD TFIs database.

Figure 6: Trade facilitation performance and trade costs for all goods

Further estimation results of OECD studies indicate that implementation of the TFA measures had impact not only on trade costs, but resulted in export gains, too. Trade facilitation measures with the highest impact on trade volumes were harmonization and simplification of documents for low income countries, streamlining of procedures for lower- and upper-middle income countries, followed by availability of trade related information, automated processes and good governance and impartiality (Moïsé E. and S. Sorescu, 2013). Initial results for OECD, non-OECD EU and CEFTA 2006 members based on TFIs data for 2017 and 2019 also give some indication of further positive effects of implementation of TFA measures on export value (Figure 7).



Source: UNCTADstat Database and OECD TFIs database.

Previous statement is confirmed by correlation analysis implicating that even within the upper-middle income countries such as CEFTA 2006 members and high-income countries (OECD and non-OECD EU), higher implementation level of TFA measures leads to a larger export value (correlation coefficient is 0.54 in 2019 and 0.50 in 2017-2019).

5. Conclusion

Progress in implementation of trade facilitation measures since 2017 in CEFTA 2006 integration is obvious. All members have implemented various measures in order to improve the transparency of trade procedures, but also to reduce formalities associated with them. Notable improvements in CEFTA 2006 after TFA entering into force have been achieved particularly in the area of simplification and harmonization of documents as well as appeal procedures. The most implemented trade facilitation measures (the best performance) in 2019 were in the area of Documents (North Macedonia and Serbia), Advance rulings (Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Fees and charges (Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina). Monitoring trade facilitation progress by TFIs also help to identify where further notable reforms are needed. The biggest challenges for the most of CEFTA 2006 members are in the areas of Internal and External order agency cooperation, where significant reforms are necessary. Other areas to improve are: automation, availability of trade related information, streamlining of procedures and involvement in the trade community.

Despite obvious progress in the period after TFA entering into force, CEFTA 2006 members are still far from high-income countries (OECD and EU), meaning that there is scope for improvement in all areas covered by TFA. Further progress in TFA measures implementation can be expected in the following years. This is indicated by the newest results of OECD study based on TFIs in 2021 (Sorescu S. and C. Bollig, 2022). The biggest progress across all income groups and regions in 2021 continued in information availability, simplifying and harmonizing documents and automating and streamlining procedures. Also, improvement in Border agency cooperation and implementation of digital tools have been forced by COVID-19, particularly in case of streamlining of trade-related documentation requirements. These results are

encouraging that similar tendency can be expected in CEFTA 2006 integration. However, further effects of implementation of TFA measures in CEFTA 2006 on boosting trade flows across borders and reducing trade costs can be analyzed after publishing the newest OECD TFIs database for 2021.

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