



Facilitating Trade

The Palestinian Shippers' Council



By Hani Kort

Trade facilitation is a key factor in assuring the competitiveness of goods exported by the Palestinian export sector; it examines how procedures and controls that govern the movement of goods across national borders can be improved in order to reduce associated cost burdens and maximize efficiency while safeguarding legitimate regulatory objectives. Trade facilitation may also engage in bringing about improvements in transport infrastructure and government policies on trade, the modernization of customs administration, and the removal of other non-tariff trade barriers. This is most challenging and limiting because Palestine and Palestinian trade remain under Israeli occupation and control. This is especially relevant in a country where 85 percent of the economy's GDP is generated by trade.

The Palestinian Shippers' Council (PSC) was established as an autonomous, member-based, nonprofit association that was registered with the Palestinian Authority as a trade-facilitating organization in 2006. It represents the interests of the Palestinian shippers and industries that are the end-users of maritime-shipping and air and land transport. Mandated by the Palestinian Private Sector Coordination Council to find, advocate, and follow up on solutions to the most important challenges for Palestinian exporters and importers, it aims to assure the supply chain – and it must do so in a situation where Israel approves procedures and controls all borders, ports, and airports.

The main objective of PSC's pioneering approach is to improve the performance of the targeted beneficiaries in the management of the import and export of goods, with the aim of reducing costs associated with the shipping process. This can be achieved partly by avoiding delays to prevent the associated time penalties, forgone business opportunities, and reduced competitiveness. Furthermore, the council hopes to help increase the quantity of goods that are exported from Palestine.



Above all, the PSC has successfully established itself as a focal point for solving problems reported by its members, with tangible benefits for the shippers' community. The council is involved in ongoing efforts to facilitate Palestinian trade via and with Jordan and Egypt. The Ministry of Transportation has mandated the PSC to represent Palestine in regional and international forums, where the PSC is an associate member of the International Road Union (IRU) and the Arab Union of Land Transport.

Since its establishment in 2006, the PSC has been committed to enhancing shippers' knowledge and training through workshops on issues such as export and import documentation and supply-chain management. PSC furthermore launched a new program that provides a trade-facilitation diploma in partnership with Birzeit University's continuing education program. The diploma was developed over two years in partnership with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), with the involvement of international experts who are knowledgeable of the particularities of the Palestinian case. Built on eight specialized modules, this diploma is certified by the Ministry of Higher Education and, as it brings the public and private sectors and academia together, it is the first of its kind in Palestine. In her speech during the launching of the diploma, the minister of national economy, H.E. Ms. Abeer Odeh, announced that this certificate "is the first important step toward classifying exports and imports and organizing the sector. The first session leading to this certificate will start this month with 20 to 30 candidates who were chosen carefully from a large number of applicants; they will participate in the building of a much-needed logistics and trade facilitation community.

Having noticed that importers and exporters suffer from insufficient knowledge of supply-chain best practices and are in need of practical assistance to manage their supply

In the effort to give more tools to its members, importers, and exporters in Palestine, PSC is working on an interactive portal that will be monitored on a daily basis.

chain efficiently, PSC aims to bridge this knowledge gap. In cooperation with various partners from private-sector institutions, it has carried out studies, published reports, and exercised advocacy to increase the efficiency of the supply chain, highlighting bottlenecks, and recommending solutions. Without a political change and will, however, these restrictions and constraints will remain in place, the time spent in the supply chain will continue to be long, and the cost of exporting and importing products will remain high, possibly even rise. It is well known that landlocked countries spend an extra 30 percent on the supply chain, if these countries are surrounded by friendly neighbors. Since the West Bank is landlocked, and the Gaza Strip is policy locked and besieged, we should not hope for much. Still, the PSC will continue working to reduce cost and time as much as possible, educate our community, and advocate freeing the Palestinian trade sector from Israeli controls and procedures.

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