

Annex

Declaration of the Directors General following the Conference on customs and cross border co-operation between the countries of South-East Europe

Naples, Italy, 17 November 2006

On the 17th November 2006, the Directors General of Customs of Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Hungary, the Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Italy, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey, UNMIK and of the Directorate for Taxation and Customs Union of the European Commission met for the second Conference on customs and cross border co-operation between the countries of South-East Europe.

This Conference was a follow-up to the Conference organised on the 25th and 26th February 2004 in Thessaloniki, where the Directors General endorsed a declaration as well as two roadmaps setting the way forward for all countries of the region. They also mandated two ad hoc working groups (one on administrative capacity and one on the means to reconcile safety and security, trade facilitation and the fight against fraud) to follow-up the implementation of these roadmaps.

The two groups met again three times after the Thessaloniki Conference, once in Athens on 9-10 December 2004, once in Ljubljana on 20-21 October 2005 and a last time in the beginning of the present Conference in Naples. They carried out a comprehensive follow-up of the reforms undertaken in all areas in order to meet the recommendations contained in the roadmaps which were endorsed by the Directors General in Thessaloniki.

At the present Conference, the Directors General assessed the progress made since the first Conference and made the following declaration:

Conscious that customs administrations of the countries of South-East Europe have a special role to play in the process of stabilisation and economic development of the region;

Recognising that the role of customs must evolve to take into account the changes which have occurred during recent years, including new needs in the area of securing the international trade supply chain;

Recognising that an efficient customs administration must promote the simplification of procedures in favour of international licit trade in order to strengthen the competitiveness

of States and encourage investments as well as industrial development, including for small and medium-size businesses;

Conscious that it is necessary to ensure a correct balance between trade facilitation and fight against fraud;

Conscious that the countries of the Western Balkans, which have a European perspective, are committed towards aligning their customs legislation and procedures on EU standards as well as to fully implementing these procedures;

Conscious that these countries should effectively participate as soon as possible in the EU customs activities within the umbrella of the Customs 2007 programme (as well as its successor Customs 2013);

Wishing to fully participate in the Stabilisation and Association Process between the European Union and the countries of the Western Balkans;

- **Endorse:**

the final conclusions of the groups on procedures and administrative capacity and on the means to reconcile safety and security, trade facilitation and the fight against fraud.

- **Recognize that:**

- Important progress has been achieved by the countries of the region in enhancing the administrative capacity of the customs administrations as well as in the area of safety and security, trade facilitation and fight against fraud;

- The work which has been carried out since 2004 by the two ad hoc working groups has made a major contribution in achieving this positive result;

- There is now a clear need for all customs administrations in the region to fully participate in Customs 2007 activities in order to achieve further progress in all relevant areas.

- **Agreed that:**

- The full alignment of customs legislation and procedures on the EU *acquis* should be further completed and that a consistent implementation of all rules and practices should be achieved throughout the territory of each State;

- Full account should be taken of the latest version of the EU Customs Code, relating to security.
 - Mutual administrative assistance between the countries of the region should be used in the most effective way and that obstacles to its effective use should as far as possible be lifted;
 - Risk management systems should be fully implemented in order to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of customs controls and at the same time to contribute to trade facilitation;
 - Integrated Border Management strategies, designed to enhance cooperation between the different agencies active at the border, should be fully implemented;
 - National strategies on trade awareness should be fully implemented;
 - National training strategies should be further developed and fully implemented;
 - National IT strategies should be further developed and fully implemented in order for customs to enhance its effectiveness by using the most modern technologies;
 - Administrative capacity should be further strengthened on the basis of the updated version of the EU customs blueprints;
 - The fight against customs related corruption should be pursued;
 - Customs control for the protection of intellectual property rights should be further strengthened.
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- This work will be carried out by each country and will continue to be assessed on a regular basis by the European Commission through the existing bilateral dialogue within the specialised subcommittees or equivalent bodies that have been established in the framework of the Stabilisation and Association process,
 - The assistance granted under the Cards programme, including TAIEX, the Integrated Border Management project and the CAFAO programme, will support this reform process.
 - The countries of the Western Balkans should make the necessary steps in order to ensure their effective participation in Customs 2007 programme (and its successor Customs 2013); negotiations on Memoranda of Understanding with the European Commission should therefore start as soon as possible.

- As a follow-up to the present Conference and working group meetings, another Conference will be organised in 2008 in Slovenia in order to assess the progress made by the countries of the region in fulfilling the adopted recommendations.

The Directors General thanked Italy for taking the initiative of organising this conference and for its warm hospitality, and the European Commission for its financial support.