

**Final conclusions of the working group  
on procedures and administrative capacity  
16 November 2006, Naples**

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The working group on procedures and administrative capacity was set up during the first Conference on customs and cross-border co-operation between the countries of South-East Europe, which took place on 25 & 26 February 2004 in Thessalonica.

Its conclusions, endorsed by the Directors General, were that:

- The economic development of the region involves an intensification of commercial exchanges.
- Customs administrations have a crucial role to play in this context and must try to co-operate actively among themselves to establish working relations in view of harmonising their legislation, procedures and practices.
- The operators should be granted, at any time, the right to have clear and reliable information on customs procedures, to be consulted on legislative and administrative decisions and to use their right of appeal against any kind of administrative decisions. The dialogue with operators must be reinforced, by means of structured consultation mechanisms, in order to establish relations of trust between the administrations and the representatives of professional associations.
- For these objectives to be met, the administrative capacity of the customs administrations of the region must be improved.

In order to achieve these objectives, it made a series of recommendations, which were all endorsed by the Directors General. It also adopted a roadmap in order to guide each country.

Since the initial Conference in Thessalonica, the group met on a regular basis to assess the progress made in meeting the initial recommendations and to fix regular short term objectives.

At its 4<sup>th</sup> and latest meeting of 16 November 2006, the working group:

- concluded that very positive developments have taken place in several key areas;
- took note with satisfaction that regional cooperation has been strengthened and stressed that this cooperation will become even more instrumental in the context of the development of Free Trade Agreements in the region;
- took note that customs legislation has been further approximated with the EU *acquis*;

- took note that several initiatives have been implemented in order to improve the information and cooperation with trade (seminars, workshops, meetings, websites...);
- took note that progress has been made in adopting IT strategies for customs and that computerisation of customs procedures have made substantial progress;
- took note that major efforts are made in the fight against corruption (by establishing anti corruption strategies and carrying out individual actions such as adopting codes of ethics, establishing open lines, informing the public...);
- took note that progress has been made in adopting national training strategies and that several countries now have training centres;
- took note of the progress made in the area of inter-agency cooperation and in implementation Integrated Border Management strategies;
- took note that border crossing time has in average decreased and that time-measurement tools are being used at some pilot customs border and inland offices.
  
- Recognized the need to pursue this work further and to ensure that the legislative and information technology parts of this work are fully completed and properly implemented in order to comply with all recommendations endorsed in Thessalonica.
  
- Agreed on the usefulness of sharing experience and best practices between all participating countries, and that regional cooperation should continue.
  
- Recognized that further actions should be carried out by each administration before the next conference, which will take place in 2008, and fully committed themselves to carrying out these actions.
  
- As regards non-EU countries, agreed to develop further the following actions before the next conference, with an emphasis on ensuring their full implementation:

1) Continue to align legislation and procedures on the EU *acquis* and fully implement customs procedures in line with EU standards (by further aligning procedures, training the staff, informing trade...). Fully implement all procedures (including in the specific area of valuation). Continuously align the legislation to the latest EU *acquis*.

Report on the activities carried out in 2007 and on plans for the future.

Give recent statistics on the methods that are accepted for the purposes of customs valuation.

2) Carry out a gap analysis with the revised customs blueprints (to be issued early 2007 by the Commission); adopt on this basis a national strategy on the enhancement of the administrative capacity of the customs administration. Identify

key departments where additional human resources are needed. Make sure that the customs administration is equipped with the necessary powers to carry out its tasks and those needed to ensure effective international cooperation (f.ex the capacity to carry out post-clearance audits).

Report on the main gaps identified with these EU standards, on the adopted strategy as well as on future plans in this respect.

3) Where not yet done, adopt and fully implement a national training strategy and devote the necessary resources to it. Devote also necessary resources to set up national customs training centres. Set up, where not already existing, a national training unit and adopt annual training plans. Make use, to complement the national training resources, of all available technical assistance facilities in a coordinated way.

Report on the activities carried out in 2007 and on plans for the future.

4) Strengthen and fully implement the national strategy on the fight against customs related corruption and continue to implement strong anti-corruption measures, including preventive actions.

Report on all actions carried out as well as on the number of detected cases and sanctions taken.

5) Continue to raise trade awareness by means of seminars, trainings, MoU with the business community.... and adopt, where not yet existing, a national strategy. Put in place, in not already existing, systematic consultation mechanisms of the trade before adopting new legislation.

Report on the existing trade consultation mechanism before adopting new legislation.

Report on the activities carried out in 2007 and on plans for the future.

6) Implement the national mid-term customs IT strategy (including areas such as electronic submission of declarations, tariff management, risk analysis...).

Report on the activities carried out in 2007 and on plans for the future.

7) Further enhance cooperation with other agencies acting at the border. From a customs perspective, further progress in the area of Integrated Border Management and try to move forwards implementing the concept of the “single window” at national level.

Report on the situation and on the future plans in this respect.

8) Analyse the results of the “Laufzettel” exercises at pilot sites and address the identified bottlenecks. Implement time-measurement exercises at other pilot sites, preferably using this common methodology. Exchange information between countries on the results of the pilot projects.

Report on the analysis and follow-up at the next conference.

- Agreed that each administration of the non-EU countries should report on its concrete progress and achievements in these fields at least one month before the next conference.