

## **MINUTES OF THE 9<sup>TH</sup> REGIONAL MEETING OF THE WCO EUROPE REGION OF THE ROCB, RTC'S AND VICE-CHAIR OFFICES**

9<sup>th</sup> Regional Meeting of the World Customs Organization (WCO) Europe Region of the Regional Office for Capacity Building for the World Customs Organization Europe Region (ROCB), Regional Training Centers (RTCs) and Vice-Chair Offices was held on 16 to 18 October 2018 at the ROCB Europe Premises in Baku, Azerbaijan. Russian Federation as the WCO Europe Region Vice-Chair, WCO Secretariat, ROCB Europe and RTCs of Azerbaijan, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation and Kyrgyz Republic (which is projected to have a WCO-accredited RTC soon) were present at the meeting. The participant list is attached as Annex I.

The meeting was inaugurated by Mr. Igbal Babayev, Deputy Chairman of the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. In his opening speech, Mr. Babayev touched upon the hard task of Customs in finding the balance between providing trade facilitation and ensuring secure border crossing of goods. In this point, he underlined the efforts of Azerbaijan Customs in enhancing the academic collaboration as well as using latest technologies in the frame of the work of Customs.

### **Agenda Item 1: Adoption of the Agenda**

The agenda which is attached as Annex II was adopted without any changes.

### **Agenda Item 2: Update of the Regional Capacity Building Activities**

Mr. Roger Hermann, the Head of ROCB Europe, made a presentation on ROCB Europe and its activities. The presentation included information about the translation of WCO training materials into Russian language which comprised complete Revenue Package and other documents totalling more than 1086 pages. He reaffirmed his intention to translate all-important WCO and ROCB documents into Russian.

He also mentioned improved and updated ROCB Europe web site in which RTCs would have their own platform through which RTCs would be able to submit their inputs as well. It is also planned that there would be a calendar for events.

Mr. Hermann stated that, in 2018, it was the first time that all WCO Europe Region Heads of Conference documents were published on the ROCB web site members' section. In 2017/2018, ROCB Europe hosted 20 events. Similarly, 14 regional or sub-regional activities were held by Regional Training Centers. He also mentioned the Cargo and Container Training Center located at the ROCB Europe premises which is intended for providing training for front-line customs

officers on cargo and container control matters both theoretically and practically. The Center was opened on 18 October 2016, on the same day of 5th Anniversary of ROCB Europe.

Concerning other communication and outreach initiatives, he stated that there were newly designed and improved flyer, brochure and presentation (also available on the web site) as well as corporate design and Twitter and LinkedIn accounts and that the ROCB Europe web site has Member's Only Section for restricted documents, updated news and events list, new sections as publicity materials and Container and Cargo Training Center, etc.

Mr. Hermann also gave information about 23 events hosted at the ROCB Europe two of which were highlighted. First one was the Seal Manipulation Workshop and the second was the ROCB Europe's event Regional Workshop on Simplification and Acceleration of Customs Procedures.

He went on to brief the participants on the ROCB Europe Strategic Framework which included many dimensions of the ROCB including a SWOT analysis, mission statement, vision statement, values and strategic goals. Mr. Hermann informed that he developed a work plan of the ROCB as an annex to the ROCBs' Strategic Framework. It includes for the time being 29 activities related to the ROCB's strategic goals.

He also underlined the problem of underemployment and limited financial contributions from the member administrations. Stressing the need for cooperative regional activities, he underlined that the ROCB was very interested in having events within the frame of donor contributions and WCO Corporate Plan, but also the other activities out of the scope of Corporate Plan as well as in partnership with the Vice Chair.

Mr. Shcherbakov, the representative of the Federal Customs Service of the Russian Federation as the Vice-Chair of the WCO Europe Region, informed on the priority topics of the WCO Europe Region, which were identified at the region's coordination meeting in June 2018. These topics were trade facilitation, e-Commerce, combating illicit financial flows, performance measurement, customs-tax cooperation, security, review of Revised Kyoto Convention and capacity building.

He also gave information about the way of preparation of the WCO's new three-year strategic plan for 2019-2020 to 2021-2022. The method would include a survey on Region's priorities. The results of these survey was elaborated within the frame of a workshop carried out in September 2018. According to the results, certain topics which were received the most "votes" from the Region within the scope of WCO Strategic Goals. These topics were focused on the further development of SAFE Framework of Standards, e-Commerce, coordination among agencies, Revenue Package, Harmonized System, WTO Agreement on Customs Valuation, Risk Management Compendium, IPR, RILO network, information exchange among all border agencies, performance measurement, integrity, WCO-UPU partnership, Customs Enforcement Network, Coordinated Border Management, Single Window Solutions, WCO experts, ROCBs and RTCs in delivering of CB, implementing Policy Commission and Council decisions.

Mr. Shcherbakov stressed that there has been ongoing work at the WCO on these topics which were seen as the basis of WCO future activities. The question was how to better streamline and link capacity building and educational activities with the priorities of the WCO Europe Region. More training on the priority topics (e-commerce, SAFE 2018, performance measurement, digital customs and coordinated border management), development of strategies of implementation on priority topics, translation of key WCO instruments into the languages of the Region, collecting and disseminating best practices and conducting surveys and benchmarking were underlined as the proposals for consideration in that manner. Those would bring benefits for the Region and regional entities in terms of effectiveness and cooperation.

Mr. Hermann noted that the translation of WCO materials was an ongoing work done by the ROCB Europe and there were much translation carried out up to the present time. He also highlighted the importance of having best practices.

### **Agenda Item 3: Update of the Europe Regional Activities**

Mr. Dashgin Aliyev, the interim Regional Development Manager for the WCO Europe Region, explained the annual capacity building needs assessment process. He said the ROCB Europe should get more actively involved in this process not only in the developing of the annual Corporate Plan but also in the planning of the delivery process.

Mr. Aliyev then presented the regional, sub regional events planned for the current financial year and provided background information and spoke about preparations for these events. He also presented the list of the regional activities from the current Corporate Plan that has no funding yet and proposed that participants consider the funding possibilities.

As for Mr. Shcherbakov's question about the funding of events, Mr. Aliyev responded that in line with the existing practice, for the regional/sub regional events only beneficiary countries' representatives are eligible for the funding (as participants) and about 2-3 invited speakers / facilitators (from any country) are eligible and funded by the donor.

Mr. Gulamov, Chief of Bilateral Customs Cooperation Division of the International Cooperation Department of the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, proposed the idea that regional activities must be carried out at RTC premises as a mandatory method. He also mentioned the necessity of ideal practice of appointing specific persons as the head of RTCs, rather than having additional responsibilities at the Customs Administration. He added that drafting a Terms of reference for contact points might be useful whereas securing enough funding is important which, in turn, resolves many issues by themselves.

Mr. Aliyev responded by saying that if we had a look at the upcoming regional events we could see that these events were planned to be held in countries that were hosting RTCs in our Region. He said that when sub-regional or regional events were organized WCO Secretariat gave priority

to the countries that were hosting the WCO Regional Entities while expecting some logistical support from these entities and hosting country's Customs Administration

#### **Agenda Item 4: RTC Updates**

##### RTC Khmelnitsky

Ms. Galina Potashnikova, deputy head of the department, from the RTC Khmelnitsky in Ukraine involved in the meeting through a video call.

She had a briefing about the Regional Training Center. According to the briefing, since 2016, the RTC Ukraine was operational with a four-floor building and having more than 2000 m<sup>2</sup> space, including computer labs with multimedia and computer equipment. The RTC Ukraine also has a room for trainings for scanning, library, laboratories for moving cultural items, and training platforms for practical training of customs officials.

Within the scope of RTC activities, Strategic Plan and activity plan were developed and used since 2017. As for the events, a Regional Seminar was held in 2017 in Ukraine. There were experts who were being in the process of having an accreditation. The RTC was regularly providing information about activities on the web site of the Customs Administration on a dedicated page. Specialized trainings were given by the RTC.

RTC Khmelnitsky's proposals for enhanced cooperation with other RTCs were having regular meetings to coordinate plans; inviting regional member administrations to the events at the RTC Khmelnitsky; having regional informative databases prepared in two languages, i.e., Russian and English; establishing electronic library accessible through the web site of the ROCB.

She also stressed that RTC Khmelnitsky was open to further cooperation activities.

##### RTC Baku

Mr. Mirhasan Seyidzada, the representative of the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, spoke about the relationship between the WCO and Azerbaijan and the activities of RTC Azerbaijan as well as the Dog Training Center in Baku.

Among the topics he highlighted were four-month courses for newly recruited customs officers which then be complemented by an exam and the Memorandum of Understanding between the WCO and Azerbaijan on the use of RTC premises for regional training activities. He stated that some of the training events carried out at the RTC were on criminal liability for customs offense, container control and risk management.

He also told that the structure of the Customs Academy will be changed and two faculties on customs will be merged next year under the framework of the Customs Administration.

Mr. Seyidzada informed that the journal of Customs & Economics Review periodical had been published by the RTC and that the Student's Voice was also another periodical from the RTC containing practical information on customs.

He said that the Regional Dog Training Center was recognized as a WCO Center on the basis of the MoU between Azerbaijan and WCO dated 7 September 2015. Mr. Seyidzada also went on to say that there was also an office of INCU Secretariat in Baku, Azerbaijan. In this context, Winter School and International Student Conference had been organized in partnership with the INCU, main purpose of which were exchanging experiences, improving collaboration, scientific research etc. in the field of customs. There was also support and guidance from the top management of SCC AZ in the context of WCO and SCC especially on human resources development.

Mr. Seyidzada emphasized that there was also an ongoing work on transparency and accountability in the performance of customs authorities as well as for improvement in the work of Small and medium size business implemented by Azerbaijan Customs. As a result of the recent efforts of the Customs, the contribution to the state budget increased 37.9% for customs duties and 30.85% for Value Added Tax last year.

#### RTC Budapest

Mr. Gabor Remenyi, the representative of the National Tax and Customs Administration of Hungary (Department for International Relations), stated that the RTC Budapest has the necessary facilities for trainings and events and that another department in Tax and Customs Administration was responsible for the work of organizing activities at the RTC.

As it was established in 2001, the RTC Budapest was the first RTC in the region. The facilities comprised conference room which was renovated in 2015 and equipped with flip-charts, speaker system, interpreters' booth etc. with the capacity up to 70 participants, air conditioning, Wi-Fi & computer room, restaurant, sauna & swimming pool.

Mr. Remenyi also said that international activities were coordinated by the International Relations Department of the Central Management at Tax and Customs Administration. Some of the said activities were:

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Working Group meeting of the Implementation of the Framework Agreement on Cooperation in Facilitating Customs Clearance among the Chinese, Hungarian, Serbian and Macedonian Customs (Budapest, 29 June-1 July 2016),
- Modern Platforms of Interaction – Enhancing Cooperation between Tax and Customs Administrations (Budapest, 23-24 November 2016),
- Innovation, Digitalization, Knowledge Management, International Professional and Academic Conference (22-23 November 2017).

He said that there was ongoing work for organizing traditional international professional and academic conference in cooperation with the National University of Public Service of Hungary titled *"Security, Service and Development - New Directions in the Operation of Revenue Administrations"* (21-22 November 2018); Europe Regional Workshop on the Framework of Standard on Cross-Border E-Commerce according to the WCO Strategic Plan and with the generous support of the CCF Korea; (1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2019) and other bi,- multilateral regional, international related events.

### RTC Astana

Mr. Baidulda Shalbayev, the head of RTC Astana, briefed about the RTC and its activities.

The RTC Astana was established in 2009. In recent years, the Center hosted numerous events. Some of those events were "International experience in customs control of goods and vehicles during the procedure of customs transit" on 26-27 June 2017 with 40 participants; "Trade Facilitation and Border Protection" on 24-25 August 2017 with 34 participants; "Framework standards for risk management system" on 25-29 September 2017 with 40 participants; "Challenges in customs control of goods exported from the territory of Customs Union countries. EU countries experience" on 7-8 November 2017 with 43 participants; "Risk assessment, targeting, profiling and customs control" 29-30 November 2017 with 42 participants; and "Rules for organization of radiation control at inspection posts on customs border of the Eurasian Economic Union" 4-8 December 2017 with 34 participants.

Also, a workshop was held on «Carnet ATA - features of practical application within the territory of the Eurasian Economic Union» with the involvement of experts from customs services of Russian Federation, Republic of Belarus and Republic of Kazakhstan, as well as from Chambers of Commerce of these countries on 4-5 April 2018 in Almaty city in cooperation with OSCE program office in Astana and GIZ - German society for international cooperation. In this workshop, 6 experts and 70 trainees took part.

Again, with the support of OSCE Programme Office in Astana city, an international workshop on "Free (special) economic zones of foreign countries and member states of the Eurasian Economic Union" was organized on August 28-29, 2018 in Aktau.

Other events were WCO Mission on the Risk Management System (RMS), consisting of three consecutive and interrelated workshops as follows: "Risk Analysis and Profiling" (17-21 September 2018), "Risk Assessment and Selectivity" (24-26 September 2018) and sub-regional workshop "Trader Segmentation and Transit" (27 -28 September 2018). Upcoming events were Mission on WCO Mercator Programme on 15-19 October 2018 and workshop on WCO Strategic Trade Control Enforcement Programme on 5-8 November 2018.

Mr. Shalbayev also stated that RTC Astana has three classrooms fully equipped with computers. Training-Methodical Center had modern technical equipment and software video conferencing

system called «Polycom», training software «Simfox» (software-simulator on working with X-ray equipment by Rapiscan, Heimann), PRE-M (to select qualified officials to work with X-ray equipment), «TreFox» (basic software course on X-ray equipment), electronic check point and e-learning on Moodle platform in internal network.

Since 2016, he mentioned, trainings for customs officials of check points on «Training on working with scanning equipment and image analyzing of x-ray equipment» had been conducted. The training courses enabled officers to improve skills on working with x-ray television installation; identifying geometrical images; overlay complexity; change of the angle view; difficulty connected with baggage variety.

### Briefing by Kyrgyz Republic

Mr. Dzhamakeev Kanatbek, the Head of Specialized Training Customs of the State Customs Service of Kyrgyz Republic gave an update with regard to ongoing process of having a WCO RTC in Kyrgyzstan. Having a video presentation, he said that the Center would be located near Bishkek on an area of 4 hectares which was currently called as Specialized Training Center of Customs.

He underlined that different drills had been carried out at the center and it was used for both methodological and practical trainings comprising checks on aircraft, road vehicles, etc. The center comprised four classrooms, two of which was equipped with computers, guesthouse with capacity for 38 officers, fitness room, conference room and staff offices. He added that the second field of the Center would be dog training service.

Mr. Kanatbek told that the center had radiation control training having relevant equipment including a radio portal. The Center had been cooperating with different stakeholders on this matter.

Currently, there were 34 employees working at the Center. 450 Afghan customs officials were trained recently. Also, the employees of Kyrgyz Customs had been invited to training sessions abroad.

With respect to having a WCO RTC in Kyrgyzstan, Mr. Kanatbek informed that the official letter to the WCO concerning the recognition of the Center as the WCO Regional Training Center indicated that all necessary requirements had been met and that the initial response from the WCO was positive. In this context, a three year strategy was drafted and the document would be improved in time. He hoped that in the next meeting of the WCO Europe Region of the ROCB, RTC's and Vice-Chair Offices, the Center would be represented as a WCO RTC.

## RTC Moscow

Ms. Anna Lakunina, senior specialist of the International Cooperation Department, briefed on the progress made by the Regional Training Center of the Russian Customs Academy in 2018 complemented by a video presentation.

According to the briefing, Russian Customs Academy together with the WCO Secretariat has been organizing e-learning for Russian customs officers to improve their professional skills. In this context, 47 Russian customs officers went through the training and obtained certificates from the WCO in 2018.

Representatives of the Academy took part in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Technical Experts Group on NII Meeting in Kampala, Uganda on 12-13 March 2018. During the meeting, the representative of the NII Center of Excellence made a presentation on Russia Concept Paper on Exploring the Possibilities of Applying a Unified Approach to NII-related Training. The NII Center of Excellence hold training sessions on 11-14 June 2018 for the customs officers in Baku who operate NII Systems.

Ms. Lakunina stated that the Academy was also participating in WCO capacity building projects. The delegation of the Russian Customs Academy took part in the WCO IT Conference held in Lima, Peru on 6-8 June 2018. The Conference was a beneficial opportunity to get acquainted with the practices of other WCO members on customs technologies, professional improvement. In the same vein, the representatives and students of the Academy participated in the WCO Knowledge Academy. During the event, the Academy, which was already holding Moscow International WCO Model, awarded with Certificate of Recognition for Customs Business Specialty that meets requirements of the PICARD Standards.

## **Agenda Item 5: Way forward to optimize the cooperation between the different bodies of the WCO Europe Region**

Mr. Hermann indicated that more cooperation among regional entities would provide better visibility in the region.

To that aim, he reiterated excerpts from the Capacity Building Regional Structures which is annexed of the WCO Capacity Building Operational Strategy on the responsibility of the ROCB and RTCs, as follows:

“The ROCB, among others, has the following responsibility:

- To co-ordinate the activities of the Regional Training Centres”

“Under the WCO strategy, the RTCs have four main roles:

- The development of regionally relevant training.
- The maintenance of specialist trainer pools.



- The provision of specialist training at a regional level.
- The development and support of the WCO's blended learning programme."

He also said that an updated list of experts, either WCO-accredited or not, who would provide training is much needed.

Mr. Shcherbakov, FCS of Russian Federation, mentioned the possibility that upon the ROCB request, RTCs might start with preparing a list of experts.

Mr. Remenyi, the representative of the National Tax and Customs Administration of Hungary (Department for International Relations), warned about the lack of human resources and the likelihood of reluctance of the administration to release experts to provide trainings. Mr. Shcherbakov stated that the list would be only for information and would not bring any obligation. Agreeing on the previous remark, Mr. Hermann said that the release of an expert would be only realized if the concerned Customs Administration gives consent for it. As a result, it was agreed that upon ROCB's request letter, RTCs will provide the list of experts. It was also agreed to have an update of the RTCs contact point list information.

Mr. Hermann went on to mention the proposals from RTC Astana and RTC Ukraine on the matter. About the possibility of having an Action Plan, as suggested by RTC Astana, Mr. Hermann asked the RTCs to submit their prospective operational activities to the ROCB with a view to having an inclusive operational plan on regional basis. Mr. Shcherbakov said that the action plan might be an annex to a regional strategy, but for that aim, RTCs should contribute.

On the other hand, Mr. Gulamov drew the attention to the fact that the RTCs should know the expectations in order to give feedback, and there was also the issue of funding, that is why, there should be some input provided beforehand.

After discussions on the procedure and starting point with regard to an action plan, it was agreed that first step would be to gather inputs from the RTCs as contributions to the draft action plan prepared by the ROCB. The consolidated version would be sent to Vice-Chair, which then be circulated to the Member Administrations.

It was also agreed to look for the possibility to exercise video calls for trainings. It was the common opinion among the participants that, in order to have this kind of trainings, certain specifics such as topic, time and attendance should be fixed in advance.

The idea of establishing a working group was assessed premature, while there is a need for other issues such as creating lists for contact point list and experts.

### **Agenda Item 6: RTCs' initiatives in the application of the WCO Training Strategy with "a new blended approach"**

Mr. Aliyev made a presentation on WCO Training Strategy with "a new blended approach" the concept of which was presented by the Secretariat at the recent WCO Capacity Building Committee held in February 2018 (refer to Doc. HC0114E1a), and endorsed by the Committee and subsequently approved by the Council.

The new approach aims at offering effective empowerment to Member Customs administrations, enabling them to take charge of their own training and people development agenda. He said that a blended learning approach, based on two pillars (e-learning and Training of Trainers), combined new technologies and modern techniques, so as to create a balance between the available resources and train Customs officers more effectively. A Training of Trainers programme, supported by e-learning tools, would make it possible to build a pool of competent instructors who could then teach the international standards to other people. Instead of having just one instructor who teaches a course for a long time, several instructors will teach the same course at the same time. He stressed that this would ensure that employees get timely training to enable them to complete tasks according to the administration's policies and procedures. Then Mr. Aliyev explained the each phase of the new blended approach. He also invited the regional entities to play an active role as Centers of Excellence in their specific areas of specialization, thus capitalizing on the new blended ToT model.

### **Agenda Item 7: Enhancement of the RTCs functions**

The delegates were asked to share their respective experiences in taking advantage of hosting the WCO training programs with a view to enhancing the competence of their teaching staffs as well as role of RTCs in that regard.

Having no reaction about the matter, Mr. Hermann stated that RTCs' contribution was needed for completing the processes for needs assessment process and updating comprehensive internal country profiles of beneficiary member administrations to be used by the WCO Secretariat.

In the meantime, he referred to the ROCB web site which has dedicated pages for each of the RTCs. These pages would be kept updated by having related information and documents from the RTCs.

As a result, it was agreed that the draft country profiles would be sent to the RTCs with a view to having their response within two weeks with respect to their position on possible contribution to initiate this kind of a process.