



## **Report of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the WCO Europe Region National Contact Points for Capacity Building**

**28-30 January 2019  
Baku, Azerbaijan**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the World Customs Organization (WCO) Europe Region National Contact Points for Capacity Building was held from 28 to 30 January 2019 at the Regional Office for Capacity Building for the World Customs Organization Europe Region (ROCB Europe) in Baku, Azerbaijan. Delegates from 21 Member Administrations in the WCO Europe Region, representatives from the WCO Secretariat and ROCB Europe participated in the meeting. The participant list is attached as Annex I.

### ***Opening Session***

The meeting, which was financially supported by China Customs Cooperation Fund (CCF), was inaugurated by Mr. Iqbal Babayev, Deputy Chairman of the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. In his opening speech, Mr. Babayev drew the attention to the need for international cooperation in the fight against smuggling, intellectual property rights breaches and customs offences. He also mentioned innovative approach taken by Azerbaijan Customs especially on transparency and investments in staff and accreditation. Mr. Babayev also gave information about the Green Corridor which was launched by Azerbaijani Customs in an effort to simplify the export and export processes.

The Deputy Director of WCO Capacity Building Directorate Mrs. Brenda Mundia, in her opening speech, underlined the importance of regional activities and especially the meeting itself. She briefed the participants about WCO's 2019 theme which was SMART Customs as well as about the priorities of the WCO Europe Region. Mrs. Mundia pointed out that the region included developed and developing members, and the WCO was soon to launch a joint project with Switzerland on support for trade facilitation.

CCF China Fund Manager Mr. Peng stated that China would renew the agreement with the WCO and the fund would be channeled to new initiatives for enhancing members for improving their customs capacities by taking advantage of WCO's expertise on the matter.

Mr. Roger Hermann, the head of ROCB Europe highlighted the vitality of capacity building activities in the WCO Europe Region as well as the high attendance to the meeting which showed the importance attached by the members to regional cooperation on capacity building.



## **I. Adoption of the Agenda**

The draft agenda of the meeting was adopted with the addition of presentations by Azerbaijan and Hungary. Also, it was reminded that all presentations would be available on the ROCB Europe web site member section.

## **II. ROCB and its Activities**

Mr. Eser Çengel, Technical Attaché of ROCB Europe, briefed the participants about the ROCB Europe and the activities carried out by the office especially on outreach and communication.

In reply to the question of how the ROCB Europe web site was managed, it was explained that the web site was constructed by a private company which the ROCB Europe had a contract and that ROCB Europe had currently the full control of the web site through an easy-to-use Content Management System.

The delegate of Turkey, Mr. Osman Nuri Beyhan, drew the attention to the fact that however much ROCB Europe was supported by Azerbaijani Customs, the office should be supported by the members in the WCO Europe Region in terms of seconding staff.

## **III. ROCB Initiatives, Challenges and Proposals**

Mr. Hermann, in his presentation, gave information about ROCB Europe's Strategic Framework, initiatives on regional strategy and structured communication which included Terms of Reference of ROCB Europe, challenges of financing and staffing faced by ROCB Europe.

He also said that he did not see e-newsletters as relevant or practical since all the updated information was timely uploaded to the ROCB Europe web site.

Mrs. Mundia stated that emphasizing the matters in the presentation within the frame of the meeting was important considering that the participants were indeed the advisors to the directors-general and the actual address for directing these matters was annual heads of customs conference.

The delegate of Norway, Mr. Per Arvid Nordli, said that the term 'soft mandatory' for member contributions to ROCB Europe had been introduced by Norway which meant that payment of contributions were left to the decision of each member. He went on to say that Norway would bring the matter to the attention during next heads of conference and that possible work by ROCB



Europe as a secretariat of the region depended on the member which held the Vice-Chairmanship.

The delegate of Italy, Mr. Guido Boffi, underlined that it was very difficult for ROCB Europe to operate effectively in the absence of adequate funding and staff.

Mrs. Mundia added that members should also provide input for the way forward and not only funding and staff. Since regional entities were autonomous and not funded by the WCO, it would be up to the members to go further on that matter. In the same vein, she proposed that the draft regional strategy would be presented to the next heads of customs conference.

The delegate of Turkey, Mr. Osman Nuri Beyhan, drew attention to two points in the draft Terms of Reference. He explained that there should not be a restriction on the number of terms of head of ROCB Europe (point 6.2) considering consecutive terms following a possible successful term would be quite possible. He also said that it was virtually impossible to isolate technical attaches seconded at ROCB Europe from their home administration (point 6.6) considering that it was impossible to second staff due to the necessities in the national legislation for appointing staff abroad.

#### **IV. WCO Strategic Plan and its Connection with the Regional Priorities**

Mrs. Mundia briefed the participants on WCO's Strategic Plan and the connection between the Strategic Plan and regional priorities which were Coordinated Border Management, Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC), e-Commerce, Harmonized System, Capacity Building Strategy, Performance Measurement and Digital Customs and Data Analytics.

Welcoming the priorities, the delegate of Italy mentioned the importance of linkages between the priorities and a possible decrease in the number of priorities by combining similar ones whereas the delegate of Norway questioned the meaning of term 'impactful actions'.

Mrs. Mundia, responding to the remarks by Italy, explained that matching priorities would be difficult since many of them were in parallel to each other and that there was still the opportunity to evaluate the priorities during the next heads of customs conference. Mrs. Mundia, responding to the question raised by Norway also stated that the word result would correspond to short term gains while the word impact would correspond to long term gains.

#### **V. Organizational Development and Capacity Building**

Mrs. Mundia gave information about WCO's instruments and tools on organizational development, e-learning and development programs. She added that currently 18,000 users were registered in the CLIKC platform.



The delegate of Turkey asked whether there was a mechanism for following up with respect to future career of participants in their home administration after attending WCO's development programs.

Mrs. Mundia said that the WCO had a special follow-up mechanism for professional associates program since the participants had to specify a challenge in their home administration in their applications which would be then followed up by the WCO 6-12 months after the end of the program. She added that the WCO would also ask the supervisor about the performance of the participants afterwards.

Mr. Hermann questioned the possibility of obtaining the information about regional experts' information due to the fact that only the numbers of regional experts were published on the WCO web site. Mrs. Mundia responded by saying that the members specifically asked the WCO not to disclose information about the experts.

## **VI. Planning and Delivery of WCO Capacity Building Support**

- **Annual Needs Assessment process**
- **WCO Mercator Program**

In the context of planning and delivery of WCO capacity building support, Mr. Dashgin Aliyev and Mr. Patrick Gyan from the WCO Secretariat delivered presentations on annual needs assessment process and WCO Mercator Program respectively. It was also stated that Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Armenia were among the regional members included in the Mercator Program as per their requests.

The delegate of Italy asked about the role of ROCBs in multiannual programs as well as the role of customs administrations in the Mercator Program with regard to implementing Trade Facilitation Agreement in member countries.

Mr. Aliyev explained that the WCO approaches to the customs administrations only since the most provisions of the Trade Facilitation Agreement were about customs and that the issue was sensitive since there were other national institutions dealing with trade facilitation issues such as trade ministries.

Mr. Gyan responded by stating that ROCBs were included in the needs assessment process but not in the Mercator Program or ad-hoc and project-based approaches while they could have a place in regional activities and tracking members' progress in terms of Mercator Program.

The delegate of Serbia, by emphasizing that her remarks to be included in the minutes of the meeting, said that there were in fact 182 members of the WCO rather than 183.



The delegate of Albania, said that the number of members of the WCO was published on the WCO documents and web site, and that the current platform was not to discuss that kind of an issue.

## **VII. WCO Mercator Program “Tailor-Made Track”: Country Experience**

With the presentation made by the delegate of Kazakhstan, general information was given about Kazakhstan as well as the process of implementing the Mercator Program and related activities.

## **VIII. The Role and Tasks of the National Contact Points for Capacity Building: WCO ESA Region Experience**

Mr. Gyan from the WCO Secretariat, through his presentation, informed the participants about regional structures and the connections among them and shared the experience of national contact points in the WCO East and South Africa Region.

## **IX. Role of Capacity Building Contact Points in the WCO Europe Region**

Mr. Hermann, after briefing the participants on the situation of the role of contact points, asked if they saw a need for a document specifying the role of contact points in the WCO Europe Region as well as for a mechanism for enhanced communication.

There was a consensus among the participants that a mechanism for better and smooth communication is needed through a mechanism such as forum or a virtual group on ROCB Europe web site. The participants also agreed that a document such as a letter of intention specifying the role of contact points should be drafted.

The delegates underlined the need for a closer and enhanced cooperation especially on regional capacity building initiatives. It was also highlighted that the ROCB Europe would play an important role in coordinating these initiatives in collaboration with the WCO Secretariat. In this context, the question of how to strengthen ROCB Europe was also taken under consideration.

Also agreeing on the document for the role of contact points, the delegate of Turkey underlined that it would be better if the attention from developed countries in the region was raised, considering that even the vice-chair was not represented during the meeting. He went on to say that while increasing the attention of developed countries must be taken into consideration, ROCB Europe, which had proper and spacious facilities, should also be strengthened in terms of staff as well.

## **X. National Contact Points for Capacity Building: Country Experiences**

The delegates of Albania and Norway made presentations on the experiences of their customs administrations with regard to capacity building.

The delegate of Norway suggested that the WCO tools and instruments might be combined with the intention of including provisions for both developed and developing countries. At the same time, he questioned whether ROCB Europe was relevant and updated.

Mrs. Mundia responded by stating that ROCBs' role was to coordinate the capacity building activities in coordination with the Secretariat in their regions. It included having experts for those activities from developed members as well. Also, regional structures were indeed very relevant as they observe the WCO for priority areas which was in turn beneficial for members as well as in the global scale.

The delegate of Norway said that his essential intention was to touch upon whether ROCB could take on these matters within a structured approach. Since all countries were interested in what others were doing, the ROCB could play the role of connecting competencies between the members.

## **XI. The WCO Expert Mobilization: Accreditation and Deployment Process**

Mr. Aliyev explained the process of the WCO with respect to expert mobilization which included information about the WCO Accredited Experts and Three-phased approach for WCO Accreditation Process as well.

## **XII. Customs Training: A Blended Learning Approach Using WCO e-Learning Modules**

Mr. Charan Dabeesing, WCO Accredited Expert, informed about e-learning and blended training approach, development of the training strategy plan, training policy, customs competency-based framework, WCO e-learning modules, development of the blended training program, TFA related training, tangible results of new training approach and challenges on the matter.

## **XII. Any Other Business**

The delegate of Turkey drew the attention to the hard work on capacity building that should be carried out by ROCB Europe in the face of challenges encountered. He went on to say that there would be positive impacts on capacity building initiatives if those challenges were addressed and



solved especially in terms of staff. He also underlined the importance of capacity building studies in the frame of the WCO which were beneficial to member administrations.

He highlighted that Turkey had been contributing to the work of ROCB Europe by seconding staff for a long period of time, a strategy which his administration would continue to implement. In this context, he announced that Mr. Eser Çengel had been nominated by Turkey for position of head of ROCB Europe. He underlined that the support to ROCB Europe from Turkey would be kept constant and urged other member administrations to second staff at the ROCB Europe to enhance the capacity of the office.

The delegate of Norway expressed the support for Turkey's nomination and emphasized the effectiveness of national contact points meeting. He also stated that the issue of financing of ROCB Europe should be once again evaluated at the next heads of customs conference.

The delegate of Hungary underscored the willingness of her administration to be further involved cooperative activities on capacity building reiterating that Regional Training Center in Hungary had been continuing its work on capacity building. She also expressed her administration's support for Turkey's nomination for the next head of ROCB Europe.

The delegate of Albania raised the concern about the diverse nature of the region which should be taken into consideration while supporting the Turkey's nomination.

Also confirming the support for Turkey's nomination, the delegate of Uzbekistan inquired the possibility of having contact points meeting on a yearly basis which would bring effectiveness and closer cooperation among the member administrations.

There was a wide and strong support from the participants for holding the meetings of national contact points annually.

The delegate of Turkey pointed out that this process would be supported with inter-sessional meetings when needed as well as a virtual group as agreed.

WCO Secretariat reminded that other regions also had been organizing annual meetings and underlined the need for a sustainable and structured approach in the region while the question of funding becomes important since it would affect the attendance to a great extent.

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In closing, the participants expressed their high level of satisfaction with respect to the constructive and cooperative nature of the meeting and stated their intention for further continuation of the collaborative approach and close communication. ■