

MINUTES OF 11th MEETING OF THE REGIONAL STRUCTURES OF THE WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANIZATION EUROPE REGION

12-15 October 2021

11th Meeting of the Regional Structures of the World Customs Organization (WCO) Europe Region was held on 12-15 October 2021. The meeting, organized by the Regional Office for Capacity Building for the World Customs Organization Europe Region (ROCB Europe), was attended by WCO Secretariat, OSCE Programme in Bishkek and Regional Training Centers (RTCs) of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Kyrgyz Republic. The participant list is attached as Annex I. The agenda which is attached as Annex II was adopted without any changes.

Opening Remarks and Updates

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the meeting, Mr. Samad Isabekov, Chairman of the State Customs Service under the Ministry of Economy and Finance of the Kyrgyz Republic, thanked all participants on behalf of the Kyrgyz Customs Service and noted that the RTC Bishkek was accredited by the WCO on December 19, 2018 based on a Memorandum signed between the Kyrgyz State Customs Service and the WCO. It was noted that RTC Bishkek hosts meetings, conferences, events and trainings in various formats. After the opening speech, a video about the Kyrgyz Canine Service was shown, and it was stated that canine trainings lasting up to 90 days are offered not only for customs authorities, but also for other structures.

Mr. Taeil Kang, the Director of the WCO Capacity Building Directorate, thanked the Kyrgyz State Customs Service, ROCB Europe and the OSCE Office in Bishkek for the invitation for the meeting. Noting that online events continue during the pandemic and the WCO has prepared various guidelines to support member countries, Mr. Kang expressed satisfaction with the launch of face-to-face meetings and wished a productive event.

Mr. Fikret Aliyev, staff of the OSCE Office in Bishkek, expressed his support for the activities of the RTC Bishkek and his satisfaction with hosting the meeting. It was noted that the OSCE Office in Bishkek supports the Kyrgyz State Customs Service in the areas of trade facilitation, application of information technologies in the field of customs, and combating smuggling.

Mr. Konstantinos Mourtidis, the WCO Europe Region Vice-Chair, in his opening remarks through a video speech, highlighted exceptional role of RTCs in further developing cooperation among Regional Structures of the World Customs Organization Europe Region. It was also noted that it is important to evaluate the report on the activities of RTCs based on the level of efficiency, current and future opportunities as well as relevant proposals.

Mr. Eser Çengel, Director of ROCB Europe, thanked the participants for participating to the 11th Meeting of the Regional Structures of the World Customs Organization Europe Region. He noted the special role of RTCs in improving the professionalism of customs officers in the region, and one of the main objectives of the meeting was to strengthen the effectiveness and

mutual cooperation of RTCs and the collaboration among Vice-Chair's Office, WCO Secretariat, the ROCB Europe and RTCs. He mentioned that the ROCB Europe had developed a standard and analytical reporting for RTCs over the past year, which included future activities and plans, so that the Office could better support their activities. It was noted that each RTC has its own page on the website of the ROCB Europe, where important news and other information are posted.

After the opening ceremony, a tour was organized to the RTC Bishkek building and its dormitory, as well as to the canine training area. At this time, a short simulation of the training process of dogs was carried out and theoretical information on how to conduct trainings was provided.

BACUDA Project and VR Training

Mr. Taeil Kang, the Director of the WCO Capacity Building Directorate, provided information about the BACUDA project. It was noted that the aim of the BACUDA project is to develop various data analysis methodologies, including algorithms in open-source programming languages, in cooperation with customs officers and researchers. The data required for these algorithms were provided by the customs administrations supporting the project and used anonymously in analytics. Mr. Kang stated that the project has already had initial success, and one of them is the algorithms that can predict the compliance of product nomenclature codes with the Harmonized System with an accuracy of more than 90% during the pilot project in the Nigerian Customs Service.

Mr. Taeil Kang also informed about a five-month training on data analytics, which is scheduled to be announced in November 2021, and initially said that 12 people from around the world will be trained in this field. Speaking about the future plans of the WCO Capacity Building Directorate, he said that initial simulations have been completed to organize cargo inspection trainings with virtual reality (VR) technologies. It was noted that thanks to special software and headings, trainings can be held in various virtual environments, and a video was shown.

ROCB Europe Strategic Framework & Intersessional Developments

Mr. Eser Çengel, Director of the ROCB Europe made a presentation on the work of the ROCB Europe including initiatives in line with the efforts of the World Customs Organization to implement the Capacity Building Strategy at the regional level. He underlined that the ROCB Europe works closely with the WCO Secretariat, the WCO Europe Region Vice-Chair and the Member Administrations to implement the WCO Capacity Building Strategy. The ROCB Europe is the WCO's capacity building center in the WCO Europe Region and is responsible for coordinating and implementing activities, assisting Member Administrations and liaising with donor organizations. He mentioned that ROCB Europe takes into account regional capacity building requirements and supports the Member Administrations for institutional development, improve coordination between regional structures and stakeholders in the region to make better use of available human resources and implement customs activities. Speaking about the new teaching tools used in the virtual environment, the director spoke

about the impact of rapidly changing digital technologies on people's learning and access to information. Taking into account the requirements of modern times, ROCB Europe has introduced an e-learning platform for the region on its website (<https://rocb-europe.org/e-training>). The platform includes training materials presented in English and Russian for virtual training including WCO tools and recommendations, video trainings on various topics in the field of customs. It was noted that one of the important steps taken by the ROCB Europe was the development and presentation of the "ROCB Europe Analytics" (<https://analytics.rocb-europe.org/>) platform, a database that contains important indices of WCO member states on customs, trade and economy in the European region.

Briefing on the Recent WCO Meetings

Afterwards, the participants were informed about the issues discussed and achievements at the 11th Global Meeting of Regional Structures and 12th Meeting of Capacity Building Committee.

ROCB Europe Activities

Mr. Mirhasan Seyidzade, Executive Officer at the ROCB Europe, made a presentation on ROCB Europe and its activities for 2020/2021. The presentation included information about mission, activities and initiatives of ROCB Europe. It was noted that the Coronavirus Bulletin, which contains the latest news and information on the Covid-19 pandemic, brought to the attention of the region the recommendations of the World Health Organization and the World Customs Organization, as well as best practices and articles prepared by member countries. He noted that in accordance with the ROCB Europe framework strategy and road map, the Office has organized a number of events (trainings, meetings, workshops, etc.), taking into account the requirements, proposals and needs of the customs administrations of the European region. Mr. Seyidzade reported that in the period 2020/2021, the ROCB Europe hosted or coordinated a total of 14 events.

Annual Progress Presentations by the Regional Training Centers

Following, RTCs in the WCO Europe Region reported about their progresses.

Ms. Sevinj Aliyeva, the representative of RTC Baku, presented a report on the work done over the past year. Noting that the RTC building is equipped with modern equipment, a conference hall, classrooms, Ms. Aliyeva spoke about various equipment used in the customs field, including the laboratory of technical means of control with X-ray equipment and library resources. It was noted that access to e-book databases such as EBSCO, J-Store, HeinOnline is provided for all trained customs officers. During the pandemic, the training portfolio was initially researched and prioritized, modules suitable for online learning were selected and simulation trainings were conducted. It was noted that a total of 172 customs officers have completed initial training since January 2021. She mentioned that during the pandemic, customs officials showed special interest in CLiKC, the WCO's online training platform, and

edX and Coursera, two internationally renowned e-learning platforms. He noted that many employees are registered, and the most interesting topics are customs valuation, risk management and data analysis.

The RTC Skopje's video presentation sent beforehand, highlighted the strategic importance of trade facilitation, community protection, modernization, revenue collection and protection of material interests. During the pandemic, trainings continued online through Microsoft Teams, Webex and Zoom platforms. In the period 01.01.-30.9.2021 90 trainings for 1.245 customs officers were conducted. 254 licensed representatives participated in 4 trainings held in 2020, and 34 participants-candidates for licensed representatives participated in 2 trainings held in 2021. It was noted that the future plans of RTC Skopje include, first of all, the establishment of a system of performance evaluation in the field of human resources, the analysis of the need for training and the updating of existing training content.

Ms. Narinkul Tagaynazargizi, the representative of the RTC Bishkek, gave a brief overview of the history of the RTC accredited by the Memorandum signed with the WCO. She noted that the RTC Bishkek is the newest of the regional structures, and in the first stage, experts from the WCO were invited to conduct a needs analysis, trainers and make proposals. Noting that all trainings are currently conducted online, Ms. Narinkul Tagaynazargizi noted that 3 regional trainings on export control and radiation safety have been held, as well as work has been done to gain the status of the WCO Regional Cynology Training Center. It was noted that a bilateral cooperation plan was agreed with the RTC Moscow in late 2020 and early 2021, and as a result, 7 different trainings were organized.

The RTC Nur-Sultan's presentation highlighted information about activities in 2020. It was stated that RTC Nur-Sultan organized 4 virtual-workshops on the topic: Authorized Economic Operators, categorizing participants in foreign economic activity within the risk management system, time release study (TRS) and national transit coordinator through the Zoom and WebEx Meetings platforms, organized and conducted together with the WCO and international organizations accredited in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020.

Mr. Viacheslav Slavinskyi, the representative of the RTC Khmelnytsky, noted that the RTC Khmelnytsky plays active role in promotion of customs officers' professional development in Ukraine and WCO Europe Region member states according to WCO standards, management of national and accredited experts pool and development of digital and information technologies to improve the advanced learning process, especially achievement on 3-D modelling technology in the process of specialized training. He also stressed that 460 officials of the State Customs Service of Ukraine were registered on the CLiKC! platform for training in Russian and English in 2020-2021. Mr. Slavinskyi also gave information WCO events within the framework of the RTC Khmelnytsky. He stressed that trainings were held in the various area like "Prevention of Illegal Movement of Cultural Property through the border" "Identifying military goods at the border", "WCO Customs Targeting System" and etc. during COVID-19 pandemic for customs officers.

The RTC Budapest's presentation, which was sent beforehand, highlighted information about history and necessary facilities of the RTC. It was noted that RTC Budapest always played an active role in the capacity building activity of the WCO and seminars, workshops, or other

WCO related events are regularly held in this facility to share information and best practices with Members of the WCO European Region.

Assessment of RTCs' Activities

The representatives were invited to share their experience, opinions and suggestions on how to move forward on further development of the RTCs as well as on the possible ways for planning in order to enhance the functionality and monitoring the performances in a structured manner.

Representatives of regional training centers evaluated their activities and exchanged views on the challenges they face. It was also proposed to develop a joint action plan for the upcoming year which reflects the planned activities by the RTCs in coordination with the ROCB Europe. It was noted that through the reports collected by the RTCs by ROCB Europe every year actually include planned events as well. Nevertheless, an action plan could be well made for the next year including planned events by the RTCs with the information on possible stakeholders, funding possibilities and topics as well as intended result of events. It was also stated by Mr. Eser Çengel that the prospective document should also gather information from the RTCs not only needs for support events, but also for possibility of supporting events by providing expertise by the RTCs.

RTC Baku stressed the importance of measuring the long-term effectiveness of customs training, as well as the lack of a systematic approach in this area and the need for exchange of views.

In a related topic and as an initiative taken by the ROCB Europe, Mr. Eser Çengel explored the ways for endorsing RTCs as excellence centers on certain customs topics and said that there could be established criteria for this procedure which might include elements such as presence of an WCO-accredited expert and available relevant equipment and documentation at an RTC. Participants supported the proposal.

Way Forward for Enhanced Cooperation among Regional Structures

RTC Bishkek suggested that the various resources used in the trainings could be gathered in a single database on the website of the Europe Regional Office for Capacity Building. The ROCB Europe welcomed the suggestion and stated that this kind of documents could always be sent to the ROCB Europe to be uploaded on the web site.

It was decided by the participants to have more physical events and trainings deemed necessary for the region. It was also underlined that new technologies, such as using VR, should be practiced more.

The participants also decided to have intersessional meetings to enhance the collaboration and to be kept up-to-date about the recent developments by the stakeholders of the meeting and exchange experience.

In the meantime, Mr. Eser Çengel stated that since the WCO has been including other regional structures (RILOs, RDTCs and RCLs) in the Global Meeting of Regional Structures from 2020,



it should be better to have these structures in the regional meeting as well. At this point, the only issue was to evaluate how to best incorporate these structures into the meeting.

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Mr. Alexander Eliseyev, Head of the Political and Military Affairs of the OSCE Office in Bishkek, noted that he had witnessed very interesting discussions and that the meeting was practical and decisive.

In conclusion, Mr. Taeil Kang noted that the presentations and discussions made during the meeting will be re-discussed in the Brussels office and will be taken into account in future plans of the WCO.

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Annex I: Meeting Agenda

Annex II: List of Participants