



Report of the Virtual Intersessional Meeting of the WCO Europe Region National Contact Points for Capacity Building

“Situation Update and the Road Ahead”

2 June 2020

With the recent developments caused by the Covid-19 and the need for customs community to stay together and share updated information, the Regional Office for Capacity Building for the World Customs Organization Europe Region (ROCB Europe) organized a Virtual Intersessional Meeting of the WCO Europe Region National Contact Points for Capacity Building under the theme of “Situation Update and the Road Ahead” that was held on 2 June 2020.

25 Member Administrations, WCO Secretariat, the Vice-Chair of the WCO Europe Region as well as the ROCB Europe were represented in the meeting. The WCO Secretariat was represented by the Director of the WCO Capacity Building Directorate, Mr. Taeil Kang. The Vice-Chair of the WCO Europe Region was represented by Deputy Chairman of the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mr. Igbal Babayev.

Opening Session

Mr. Igbal Babayev, the Deputy Chairman of the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, welcomed the participants of the Virtual Intersessional Meeting of the WCO Europe Region National Contact Points for Capacity Building in his opening speech and expressed confidence that this meeting will serve as an excellent platform for the exchange of views and analysis of the work undertaken in such difficult conditions caused by the spread of COVID-19.

He went on to say that the location of the Republic of Azerbaijan at the intersection of important transport routes between connections of Europe with Asia, sets the task of ensuring the smooth and quick movement of goods and vehicles through customs border crossing points in time of the pandemic. Baku International Sea Trade Port and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway have become an integral part of such international transport corridors.



He also mentioned the videoconference carried out with Secretary General of the World Customs Organization Mr. Kunio Mikuriya, for studying alternative mechanisms for the continuation of the work of the WCO, as well as the arrangement of upcoming events.

He also informed the participants with the issue of situation, faced by the Spanish Customs Administration, which implies the need for a possible revision of the Bergen Agreement and making amendments to it. To overcome this situation, the Working Group proposed a number of solutions that were sent to the heads of customs administrations of the Members of the East and West Subgroup of the WCO Europe Region.

Mr. Taeil Kang, WCO Capacity Building Director, stated that the WCO was trying to overcome the difficulty caused by the pandemic with the Members. He mentioned the study of best practices by the Members and said that it created opportunities for effective cooperation between the member states in this challenging time. He mentioned the WCO has been trying to overcome difficulties through cooperation among the all members by collecting best practices from member states.

The Director informed participants that the HS Classification Reference for COVID-19 Medical Supplies was updated, in a more structured and user-friendly format, to reflect more of the products that would be required in the professional opinion and experience of the World Health Organization in public health.

He added that since the face-to-face capacity building delivery missions were out of possibility, Capacity Building Directorate was now planning giving online missions and updating e-learning programs in the wake of the pandemic. He also said that the WCO was making much efforts to enable online missions, trainings and programs in order to provide customs officers with the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies to effectively perform their duties. Member states would be expected to be well-prepared with adequate facilities for benefiting from online missions.

Mr. Eser Çengel, Head of Regional Office for Capacity Building for the World Customs Organization Europe Region underlined that the ROCB Europe had been keen to keeping the communication channels up and running for a long while and that the stakeholders should be in touch more often especially in times like the pandemic era.

He also mentioned ROCB Europe's reaction in terms of putting new tools in service of the Members and new initiatives regarding Covid-19 process. He briefed the participants by a visual presentation about the Coronavirus Bulletin, an all-in-one web platform (*rocb-europe.org/corona*) which had been launched by the ROCB Europe that includes current news with regard to pandemic on customs and trade, guideline documents by international



organizations, a live map of Covid-19 information, live feeds from the World Health Organization, and direct links to Covid-19 dedicated pages of the prominent international organizations, primarily the World Customs Organization. At the same time, Mr. Çengel said that the web site of the ROCB Europe (rocb-europe.org) had been kept updated with emerging news and developments by Members as well as with recent blog articles published. The ROCB Europe was also active on social media through Twitter and LinkedIn.

Mr. Çengel added that with new working mechanism with the WCO Capacity Building Directorate, the ROCB Europe had started organizing capacity building events in close cooperation with the Secretariat, thanks to the ongoing support by the Director of Capacity Building, Mr. Kang. Even though this mechanism had launched very well with an event, the unfortunate occurrence of Covid-19 pandemic made the process paused inevitably. Still, the ROCB Europe involved in the capacity building needs assessment process and provided input with its analyze and possible events that would be organized by the ROCB Europe in close cooperation with the WCO Secretariat. He said that the office was planning to continue its core service by providing capacity building events for the Members in a virtual manner.

Briefings

Representative of Vice-Chair WCO Europe Region, Head of International Relations Department of the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan noted that despite the fact that the face-to-face meetings were currently out of reach, decisions on important issues such as representation of members in the WCO's highest bodies, in particular Policy Commission, Financial Committee and Audit Committee should be made on time. Taking into account the foregoing, as grouped in the Bergen Agreement, the members of each Subgroup were requested to indicate the names of the Member or Members to be represented in the abovementioned bodies of the WCO in accordance with the rotation principles set out in the Bergen Agreement for the next financial year.

The Vice-Chair's office also assisted the WCO Secretariat in identifying three main priority issues in the field of enforcement which then were communicated to the Secretariat in order to be discussed at the 40th session of WCO Enforcement Committee. In addition, the 40th Session of the WCO Enforcement Committee discussed and approved the proposal to review and update the WCO Customs Risk Management Compendium.

Mr. Mirhasan Seyidzade, Executive Officer of ROCB Europe, briefed the participants about the ROCB Europe and the activities carried out by the Office especially on new projects, important documents and an article which describes the measures for Customs Administrations provided



by International Monetary Fund solely prepared for customs administrations and serves as a guide in the efforts to take urgent measures to sustain international supply chains and implement policies to handle the COVID-19 crisis.

He gave information about ongoing project which the ROCB Europe has initiated the work on member profiles in order to provide some economic indicators that create benchmarks. He also mentioned that ROCB Europe has already finalized all processes related with Revised Terms of Reference and Revised Role of Capacity Building Contact Points which would be circulated among Member Administrations and become ready for endorsement at the next Heads of Customs Conference of the WCO Europe Region.

Contributions from the Members

The representative of Serbia took the floor and thanked for the organization of the meeting which is seen important in the challenging times and she also appreciated the collaborative work of the WCO Capacity Building Directorate. She pointed out the participation of representatives of so-called Kosovo at the meeting and recalled that Kosovo is an autonomous province and integral part of the Republic of Serbia, administered by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, that is UNMIK, in accordance with the legally binding UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999), which was adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. It stems that so-called Kosovo is not in fact a state and as such it does not meet membership requirements of the article XVIII of the Convention establishing the Customs Cooperation Council.

The representative of the Russian Federation stated that the Russian Federation supported Serbia's position regarding Kosovo in accordance with Security Council Resolution 1244 and participation in the meeting by the Russian Federation would not mean recognition of so-called Kosovo.

The representative of Kosovo said that Kosovo was a Member of the WCO and had acceded to the Convention establishing a Customs Co-operation Council on 25th January 2017 with full accordance. She stated that this kind of a discussion was considered as ineffective in that regard.

The representative of Ukraine updated the participants on the best practices by Ukraine Customs as well as by the Specialized Training and Canine Services in Khmel'nitsky in order to prevent spread of coronavirus infection at the national level. In that regard, new approaches had been identified for training customs officers. Virtual online trainings in the form mostly seminars and video lectures were being carried out including canine training, leadership and train the trains for X-Ray images operators through a special platform. Since the beginning of April, 333



customs officers had been trained. WCO CLICKC! Platform was also promoted and more than 360 customs officers were already registered to the platform.

The representative of Moldova stressed the importance of e-learning modules and CLIKC! Platform in the period during the Covid-19 pandemic. She mentioned some technical problems in using the CLIKC! Platform that faced during the training and kindly requested technical support in that regard. She also underlined the importance of adding information in Russian language to the modules to expand the scope of trainings. It was noted that the use of additional languages will increase participation to the program and make it more effective. She also noted that it would be an additional advantage for country coordinators to have access rights to see certificates obtained by customs officers when using the e-learning program. She concluded that Moldova was now focusing on online trainings.

Mr. Kang responded by first appreciating the attention to the online programs of the WCO and said that technical problems would be looked into by the technical staff whereas Russian language availability would be possible if the budgetary situation enables it. He also suggested that certification matter raised by the representative of Moldova could be communicated to the Regional Development Manager for the WCO Europe Region.

The representative of Ireland mentioned an increase in the number of staff looking for access to CLIKC! Platform which offered an entry point for WCO training activities and a collaborative portal to share and foster Customs knowledge as Ireland Customs was already moving forward in that direction. In that respect, he said that it would be beneficial to hear more about upcoming developments on WCO's online training programs.

The representative of Tajikistan also inquired about Russian language availability on the CLIKC! Platform in order for customs officers to raise awareness. He also requested information about the current status of Spain with regard to joining one of the sub-groups in the frame of Bergen Agreement.

Mr. Çengel said the ROCB Europe would also try to contribute on Russian language training materials as most Russian-speaking Members fall into WCO Europe Region. He added that the most recent information about Spain's status in terms of sub-group membership would be communicated when available.

The representative of Hungary stated that the work on review and update of Integrity Development Guide had been started in the pandemic period by the Virtual Working Group which Hungary was also a member and hoped that the result would be useful for the Members as well as for the WCO. On the other hand, he reiterated that Hungary was the host country for the Workshop on Performance Measurement which was planned to be held in the beginning of



the following year. As Hungary would welcome the participations from the Members for the said Workshop, he went on to say that updated information was expected from the WCO in the face of postponement of the 2nd Meeting of the Performance Measurement Working Group to the end of the year as well as with respect to the exact date of the Workshop.

Mr. Çengel mentioned the new meeting arrangements made by the WCO which included a combination of virtual and document based sessions as some of the meetings postponed and some other were carried out through electronic means. In that respect, he said that update of documents such as Integrity Development Guide could be finalized using this method. He added that hopefully the situation would become better and a fixed schedule could be made for future events.

Any Other Business

No other issue was raised by the participants.

Closing

In the case of no other remarks by the participants, Mr. Çengel called upon the participants and stated that the ROCB Europe was always ready to hear feedbacks for future work or whether the participants found the meeting beneficial and would like to continue having meetings in the future such as this one. He said that suggestions for other topics or areas of collaboration would be surely welcome as well.

The meeting was adjourned upon the closing remarks by Mr. Igbal Babayev and Mr. Kang.

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Annex I: Meeting Agenda
Annex II: List of Participants