



NEWSLETTER

Regional Office for Capacity Building for the World Customs Organization

2020/Q2

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COVID-19 MAKES ITS MARK ON YEAR 2020

ROCB Europe launched Coronavirus Bulletin for latest updates and information links on Covid-19 outbreak

The coronavirus (Covid-19) disease outbreak has spread around the world in a relatively short time. Governments are taking measures in an effort to curb the spread and harm of the virus. The World Health Organization declared the Covid-19 disease as pandemic.

Up to the present time, many countries have implemented measures such as closing borders, halting flights, stopping cross-border passenger movements, introducing health controls among others. Accordingly, Customs Administrations are moving toward having additional precautions with respect to cross-border movements.

The World Customs Organization has introduced a dedicated page for the coronavirus disease which includes many useful information for Customs Administrations. The page also includes the best practices received from the Members in response to Covid-19 outbreak.

The ROCB Europe launched its [Coronavirus Bulletin](#) which is intended to provide latest updates and information links on Covid-19 outbreak.



Regional Office for Capacity Building for the
World Customs Organization Europe Region

CORONAVIRUS BULLETIN

Latest Updates and Information Links on Covid-19 Outbreak

WCO Europe Region National Contact Points Come Together in Virtual Meeting

With the recent developments caused by the Covid-19 and the need for customs community to stay together and share updated information, the 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 delegation was headed by the Director of the WCO Capacity Building Directorate, Mr. Taeil Kang. The Vice-Chair of the WCO Europe Region was headed by Deputy Chairman of the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mr. Iqbal Babayev.

During the virtual meeting, the participants were informed about how the WCO intends to move forward with regard to capacity building delivery modality. The participants were also briefed about the WCO instruments aiming for Customs administrations to continue facilitating trade to help minimize the overall impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on economies and societies. Information was shared about updates related with the Working Group on the Revision of the Bergen Agreement as well.

The meeting served as a platform for enhancing the communication among the WCO Secretariat, ROCB Europe and participating member administrations. The participants especially underlined the importance of online trainings and use of enhanced e-training platforms on customs.

The Contact Points mentioned their administrations' initiatives on tackling the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic in the virtual meeting. Questions by the participants on a variety of issues related to regional aspects or capacity building domain were answered by the corresponding directors during the meeting.

The arranged virtual meeting was the first-ever online session of the WCO Europe Region contact points. The final report of the meeting has been uploaded to the Meeting Documents segment of the ROCB Europe web site members section.

25

**Number of Member
Administrations
represented in the
meeting**

Lithuania Customs Renews Electronic Customs Portal

The Lithuanian Customs has a new Common User Management Portal (BAP), which replaces the Customs Electronic Services Portal (EPP) and seeks to improve the availability and quality of electronic services provided by the Customs of the Republic of Lithuania.

BAP provides opportunities for:

- users of electronic customs services to use all existing EPP functions;
- persons whose identities cannot be established by automatic means may submit applications for registration of the service recipient's account electronically at <https://bap.lrmuitine.lt>;
- for the recipient to generate and download a digital certificate that can be used to connect to customs information systems providing electronic services.

WCO Capacity Building Directorate and ROCBs Worldwide Assess the Way Forward

On June 3 2020, World Customs Organization (WCO) Capacity Building Directorate and the Regional Offices for Capacity Building (ROCBs) worldwide had an informal meeting through video conferencing.

In the informal virtual meeting, the WCO Capacity Building Directorate and the delegates of the ROCBs of Asia/Pacific, Europe, East and South Africa, Americas and Caribbean, West and Central Africa and Middle East and North Africa exchanged views and information on WCO affairs and future capacity building delivery possibilities.



The video conference gave an opportunity to assess the current situation taking into account the coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) and measures taken by the WCO Secretariat to tackle the Covid-19 outbreak and mitigate the effects of the crisis.

The WCO meeting arrangements, WCO technical assistance and capacity building delivery and role of the WCO Capacity Building regional structures, during and post Covid-19 were among the topics discussed during the video conference.

ROCBs shared their initiatives and practices during the pandemic period as well. The meeting stood for yet another very solid example of close cooperation between the WCO Secretariat and regional structures.



ROCB Europe

Multifaceted Prospects for Post-Pandemic Era

REVIEW ARTICLE

As the Covid-19 is shaping the current conditions in the world, trade and growth prospects for near future take a downturn. This is evident from the forecasts made by international organizations.

The World Trade Organization estimates that the world merchandise trade will decrease in between 13% to 32% for 2020 depending on how bad or good the scenario will be.¹ On the other hand, the World Trade Organization (WTO) considers that the effect of pandemic is harmful for developing countries in economy terms as financing trade has become much difficult these days. This brings additional hardship for these countries in attaining medical goods with limited resources, for instance.²

In the same vein, the International Monetary Fund estimates that the global economy will contract by 3% in 2020. For developed nations, economic growth will drop -6.1% in 2020 as the figure will be -1.1% for emerging market economies. Furthermore, these latter economies would likely see problems concerning health, demand shocks and financial conditions and low commodity prices.³ The list could be prolonged.

However, the effects would not only be negative. As suggested by the UNCTAD, setting aside the downturn effects of the Covid-19, it is possible that it may bring an acceleration to digital solutions, tools and services as the struggle goes on for daily lives and working online. Digital solutions give way for other aspects such as education and shopping as well.⁴ This kind of a situation would necessarily reveal more velocity and high marginal utility.

Nonetheless, the negative effects of the pandemic should be contained as much as possible. One of the vital points that should be taken into consideration in that regard is international trade and its underlying guide trade policies.

The linkage in which the trade policy is centered is vital. Uncertainties with regard to trade policy is correlated with investors' perceived risks. It affects stock returns as the expected risk increases. The negativity caused brings a downward trend for asset prices and stock market behavior.⁵



Evidently, global value chains are also correlated with the trade policy. In the same manner, the trade policy is becoming endogenous and therefore its effect is economically massive to global value chains.⁶ As the decisions are affected by the muddy picture of forward-looking trade policies, not only financial dealings but also the corresponding economic exchanges and international trade become affected without fail.

Still, the multifaceted nature of pandemic effect continues to show itself. Interestingly enough, social connectedness plays a role within the context of trading countries. Removing the negative effect of asymmetrical information and placing trust, a high social connectedness between two trading nations means a higher level of trade flows.⁷ If we couple this relationship with increasing internet and social media usage by individuals, a higher trade volume might be expected between socially connected countries contrary to the downturn effects of the pandemic on trade.

There would be new working relationships and trade linkages in the context of the global economy after the pandemic. As the financial, social and policy aspects change, the shift in global exposure will be more visible. For example, it might be possible that the mode of transportation of goods would also change and give weight for cheaper and large-scale transports. This may mean a shift from the conventional road transports and fast air cargos to railway and sea transports as well.

In any case, the effects of the pandemic most likely push more for the electronic means which has been already on an escalating path. The damage for economies will depend on the level of crossing point of protectionism and the consent for more open international financial and economic dealings. That is to say, the post pandemic era will bring its positive and negative impacts while bearing its own mixed characteristics. ■



Intensified Customs Processes in Uzbekistan

Export-import processes are being intensified at the customs post of Termez in Uzbekistan during the conditions of pandemic. Today, despite the Coronavirus pandemic, the export-import of goods continues unabated in all regions of the country.

During the fight against the spread of coronavirus infection, important tasks are being set to ensure the sustainability of economic sectors, as well as to support some businesses. In particular, the work at the customs post Termez in Surkhandarya region is in full swing.

At the customs post, customs clearance of goods is carried out around the clock, and due to the current quarantine conditions, the customs officers cooperate with sanitary and epidemiological officers in order to ensure the safety of employees and prevent the spread of coronavirus infection.

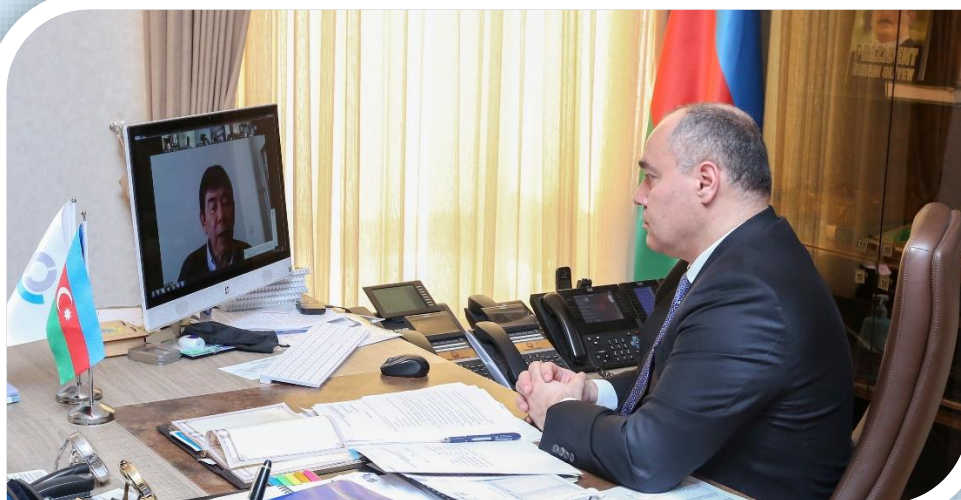
Europe Region Vice-Chair Attends WCO High-Level Meeting

The Vice-Chair of the World Customs Organization (WCO) Europe Region, Mr. Safar Mehdiyev, the Chairman of the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, attended the high-level video conference on 22 April 2020.

The video conference participants included top management of the World Customs Organization headed by the Secretary General Mr. Kunio Mikuriya as well as Council Chairperson and Vice-Chairs of the WCO Regions.

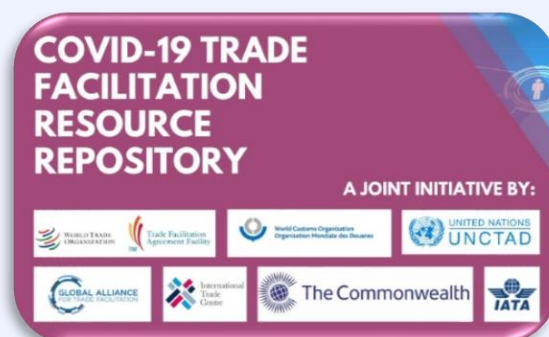
Current situation with respect to the adverse effects of coronavirus and alternative mechanisms aimed at ensuring the continuity of the work of the WCO during the pandemic were among the issues taken into consideration.

Meanwhile, consultations were made regarding suggested methods for the WCO meetings which had been postponed due to coronavirus together with possible topics that would be taken up within the context of those meetings.



COVID-19 Trade Facilitation Repository

The World Customs Organization, the World Trade Organization, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the Commonwealth Small States Office, the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation, the International Air Transport Association and the International Trade Centre came together to build up the COVID19 Trade Facilitation Repository.



It is stated on the web page of the Repository that the COVID19 Trade Facilitation Repository is a joint platform of actions and initiatives adopted by organizations that aims at consolidating this information on trade-facilitation measures adopted by key stakeholders, which aims at facilitating access to this information by making it user-friendly, easily accessible, searchable and unifying in one single database (avoiding multiple searches in different engines and platforms). It contains a useful listing of all such initiatives and is broken down by organization, type of measure, and subject matter. The repository is available at: <https://www.tfafacility.org/covid19-trade-facilitation>

Croatia Customs Warns Against Counterfeit Masks

Croatia Customs warns that the Covid-19 pandemic has led to a greater influx of banned and non-compliant goods, especially face masks, into the European Union. In many cases, these are also infringements of intellectual property rights in relation to face masks.

Counterfeit respirators are products that are falsely labeled and marketed as NIOSH approved products and as such do not provide the necessary respiratory protection for users. The warning also includes information on how to identify these products in line with the Center for Diseases and Preventive Control instructions.



The new portal is available at www.trade.gov.md

Moldova Introduces Trade Information Portal

On 5 May 2020, the Customs Service of the Republic of Moldova and the Ministry of Economy and Infrastructure of the Republic of Moldova launched, with the support of the USAID Structural Reforms Program in Moldova, the Commercial Information Portal for national and international business community.

The Trade Information Portal of the Republic of Moldova (www.trade.gov.md) is the main source of official specialized information on related procedures and documents required for activities on import, export and transit of goods.

How to Cope with Adverse Effects of Covid-19 on Trade

REVIEW ARTICLE



It is absolutely no secret that the current Coronavirus (Covid-19) spread has also affected the global trade. Even though there is no halt, international trade carries on its way within the frame of certain precautions and measures in the face of the disease.

Academic researchers find that even though exports and imports are affected principally by intrinsic characteristics, uncertainties driving from global, regional and country-specific spheres affect these elements by a considerable figure, as much as 40%. Moreover, the imprints of these factors rise in the event of a crisis.¹ Therefore it would be only natural to expect that international trade would take a beat.

As the Coronavirus deflects the course of global value chains, the continuity and rearranging it rests with policymaking.² Initial prospect for the global growth for the year 2020 was 3.3% by the International Monetary Fund. That is, there had been no critical factors on the way as for risks before the Coronavirus. Still, enhanced cross-border cooperation in the context of multilateral cooperation was among the highlighted recommendations.³ After all, international collaboration has always been a case in point. Now it appears that there is a need for reinforcement on the matter.

As for estimates, initial ones pre-Coronavirus does not seem to be making their cases anymore. Estimates are being reassessed which brought about downturn signals.

The World Bank forecasts a -3% decrease in global economy for 2020 as the pandemic poses severe impacts. On the bright side, the estimate is 5.8% for 2021. The World Bank also underlines the importance of political support and multilateral cooperation for tackling down the effects of Covid-19.⁴

As countries move toward taking precautions in cross-border movements, there have been various practices with regard to international trade processes.

The World Customs Organization asked its Members to submit their implementation experience on facilitating the movement of goods while applying appropriate risk management; enhancing communication, collaboration and cooperation with the partners, the government agencies and the private sector; and measures taken to protect Customs officers. The Organization also published useful information for facilitating the movement of relief goods.⁵ Subsequent to the short-term vortex faced due to Covid-19, trade paths and customs procedures have found their new normal.

The Coronavirus seems to be lagging for some period of time. However, lessening the adverse impacts of the pandemic seems to be possible with a robust policy backed by a strengthened multilateral cooperation. Delicately designed schemes and immediate and thorough connection channels matter even more now. ■

WCO Supports Ukraine Customs in Human Resources Management with Online Workshop

The use of competency based Human Resources Management (HRM) including a training system produces significant benefits to Customs Administrations and their employees. Employee commitment, together with a competent workforce, seems to be of decisive importance for an organization to be able to compete in quality and to go along with changes.

From 9 to 12 June 2020, the WCO delivered a stimulating and interactive virtual workshop on competency-based HRM under the Executive and Professional Competency Based HRM Programme (EPCA-HRMP).

A total of 14 participants from the HRM Department and Customs in Kyiv, Odesa and Volyn, as well as the Department for Specialized Training and Canine Services of the SCSU (the WCO Regional Training Centre, Ukraine) took part in this workshop for the State Customs Service of Ukraine (SCSU).

The e-workshop aimed at equipping and empowering SCSU's HRM department and HRM modernization working group with the competencies and tools to strategically manage human resources and promote the use of competency-based HRM within the administration. At the end of the workshop, participants committed to develop a realistic and measurable HRM modernization work plan and design competency-based HRM tools.



Regional Office for Capacity Building for the World Customs Organization Europe Region

This newsletter is a product of the ROCB Europe. It is intended for the Member Administrations of the World Customs Organization Europe Region as well as the related audience.

The newsletter is also available on the ROCB Europe web site. For additional information and recent updates, please visit rocb-europe.org.

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