



The Third ASEM Customs DG-Commissioners Meeting

Brussels, 23 June 1999

Statement

INTRODUCTION

1. The Third Meeting of the ASEM Directors-General and Commissioners of Customs took place in Brussels, Belgium on 23 June 1999. It was attended by the Directors-General and Commissioners of Customs of 10 Asian partners, 15 Member States of the European Union, and the European Commission. The Meeting was chaired by Mr. Hiroyasu Watanabe, Director General, Customs and Tariff Bureau of the Japanese Ministry of Finance, supported by Mr. Dal-Sup Shim, Director General for Customs and Tariff Affairs, Ministry of Finance and Economy, Republic of Korea, Mr. Michel Vanden Abeele, Director General, Directorate General XXI, Taxation and Customs Union, European Commission, and Mr. Siegmur Kunas, Director General of Customs and Excise, Federal Ministry of Finance, Germany, currently holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union as Vice-Chairmen.
2. This was the third follow-up meeting in the field of customs at the Director-General and Commissioner level of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) between Heads of State and Government held in Bangkok, Thailand in March 1996. Its objectives were to respond to the ASEM Leaders' agreement to deal with illicit drug trafficking and various forms of customs offenses; to undertake facilitation and liberalization measures relating to simplification and harmonization of customs procedures; and to consider the development of closer cooperation in these areas among the customs administrations in Asia and Europe.
3. The Meeting was officially opened by Mr. Watanabe, Director-General, Customs and Tariff Bureau of the Japanese Ministry of Finance, host and Chairman of the Meeting. Opening remarks were delivered by Mr. Dal-Sup Shim, Director General for Customs and Tariff Affairs, Ministry of Finance and Economy, Republic of Korea, Mr. Michel Vanden Abeele, Director General, Directorate General XXI, Taxation and Customs Union, European Commission, and Mr. Siegmur Kunas, Director General of Customs and Excise, Federal Ministry of Finance, Germany, currently holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union.
4. The Meeting discussed, in particular, the reports of the two Working Groups created following the First ASEM Customs Directors-General and Commissioners Meeting in Shenzhen, China, and agreed to the arrangements for the next Directors-General and Commissioners Meeting in Europe in 2001.

ENFORCEMENT WORKING GROUP

5. The Meeting welcomed sound progress in the fight against illicit drug trafficking and other customs offenses as well as in the framework for customs cooperation in the two regions, as reported by the Chairman of the Working Group and other ASEM partners. The reports highlighted the five main areas being actively addressed by the Group, namely, framework of cooperation; joint seminars for the ASEM members; cooperation between the RILOs in Asia and Europe; risk assessment; and the use of modern technology.
6. The Meeting took note, with appreciation, of the outcome of the survey on enforcement jurisdiction in the sense of legal authority among the European Commission, the individual European partners and the individual Asian partners of ASEM for effective establishment of any future Framework of Cooperation in the two regions. The Meeting also took note of the progress report on Mutual Customs Administrative Agreements. The Meeting encouraged the members of ASEM to continue examining ways to establish a Framework of Cooperation, including agreements among the interested parties.
7. The Meeting heard a report that since the last Meeting ASEM members participated in the two seminars: one on risk assessment held in Tokyo in April 1998 and the other on transnational organized crime in Bangkok in April 1999. On the latter occasion, participants from Asia and Europe mentioned that the seminar would contribute to enhancing cooperation in the framework of ASEM. The Meeting found these activities useful as a first step of cooperation in this field. The Meeting, therefore, encouraged the Enforcement Working Group to seek the possibility of organizing training and seminar activities jointly, taking account of Asian interest.
8. The Meeting welcomed the reports on recent developments in regional intelligence liaison offices (RILOs) in the two regions. The newly established European RILO started its operation on 1 March 1998 in Cologne, Germany with some 20 members. In the case of the Asian/Pacific RILO, it was transferred from Hong Kong, China to Tokyo, Japan on 1 January 1999. Concerning possible areas of cooperation between the two RILOs, a number of interesting ideas were suggested by the both sides: they included establishing the direct exchange of relevant information including seizure reports; dispatching of RILO officers to the counterpart on a mutual basis; the regular exchange of information in the area of control techniques; and the setting up of target-oriented projects on the areas of targeting and profiling. The Meeting supported these ideas and looked forward to tangible results. The Meeting also endorsed the Group's Statement that, in addition to cooperation with the WCO, the Enforcement Working Group supports closer cooperation between the two RILOs.
9. Turning to sharing experience of risk assessment and the use of modern technology in the field of enforcement, the Meeting heard that the sharing experience is informative and worthy of further examination as it would have an impact on improving anti-fraud actions to be possibly taken by ASEM Customs Authorities. To this end, the Meeting endorsed the Group's Statement that the Group creates a task force to prepare concrete proposals on risk assessment and promotes the exchange of information on modern enforcement

equipment. The meeting directed the Group to report them at the next DG-Commissioner Meeting.

10. The Meeting welcomed the tangible achievements in the areas of customs procedures, as reported by the Chairman of the Procedures Working Group as well as ASEM members. The reports focused on the following three areas: customs areas of the Trade Facilitation Action Plan (TFAP); ASEM seminar on simplification and harmonization of customs procedures; and results of the 3rd Working Group meeting.
11. The Meeting took note of the substantial contribution made by the Group to the ASEM Economic Ministers process to formulate an ASEM TFAP in its customs areas which was, then, endorsed by the ASEM Summit II in London in April 1998. In line with the TFAP document that the Group is tasked to implement, monitor, and report on, the Meeting urged the Group to fulfill this duty and report the achievements to the next DG-Commissioner Meeting while several areas had been already implemented.
12. The Meeting expressed appreciation to the ASEM Finance Ministers Meeting for fully recognizing the activities of the DG-Commissioners Meeting in addressing ASEM customs cooperation in both customs enforcement and procedures, and for encouraging the Meeting to pursue its on-going work. As many of ASEM Finance Ministers are responsible for customs administration and in order to respond to the call by the Chairman's Statement of the Second Finance Ministers Meeting held in Frankfurt, Germany in January 1999, the Meeting agreed to report on the results of the Third ASEM Customs DG-Commissioners Meeting to the next Finance Ministers Meeting.
13. The Meeting also took note of the reports and conclusion of the ASEM seminar on simplification and harmonization of customs procedures held in Manila, the Philippines in February 1999. Thanks to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) who hosted and financed the seminar, it provided an excellent opportunity for participating representatives not only from customs authorities, but also from various members of the private sector in the two regions to inform the business community of the key customs agenda the customs administrations were striving for on a global level as well as to seek views and opinions from business sector representatives. The Meeting urged the Procedures Working Group to look into the conclusion and recommendations of the seminar including organization of a follow-up workshop to be attended by various business representatives as well.
14. The Meeting likewise took note of the report on the 3rd Procedures Working Group meeting held immediately after the seminar above in Manila, the Philippines in February 1999 where, inter alia, the customs areas of the TFAP were assessed, and various initiatives on trade facilitation being considered at international organizations and fora were reviewed. As the revised Kyoto Convention provides a comprehensive framework for the simplification and harmonization of customs procedures worldwide towards the 21st Century, the Meeting agreed that the top priority be given to the approval of the revised Convention at the 1999 WCO Council Sessions. Therefore, the Meeting appealed to ASEM Customs Authorities as a whole to take every possible step in order to implement it

domestically without delay. The Meeting also agreed that it should examine ways to provide technical assistance in this regard to supplement the WCO's technical assistance efforts.

PREPARATIONS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

15. In line with the agreement reached at the Second DG-Commissioner Meeting concerning the rotation of the chairmanship of the Meeting and the two Working Groups, and the frequency and venues of meetings, it was agreed that:

- The Fourth ASEM Customs DG-Commissioner Meeting would take place in Sweden in 2001. It would be prepared by the incoming Chairman in consultation with the outgoing Chairman;
- The Enforcement Working Group would be chaired by France for the next two years. In Europe, these meetings should take place where possible on the occasion of WCO meetings; and
- The Procedures Working Group would be chaired by the Republic of Korea for the next two years.
- The respective Working Group meetings would be organized and prepared by the incoming Chairs in consultation with the outgoing Chairs as well as the incoming Chair of the next DGCommissioner Meeting using a contact point network established by the two groups.