



The Fourth ASEM Customs DG-Commissioner Meeting

Stockholm, 2 July 2001

Statement

INTRODUCTION

1. The Fourth Meeting of the ASEM Directors-General and Commissioners of Customs was held in Stockholm, Sweden on 2 July 2001. 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. Kjell Jansson, Director General of the Swedish Customs.
2. This was the fourth 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 offences; to undertake facilitation and liberalisation measures relating to simplification and harmonisation of customs procedures; and to consider the development of closer co-operation in these areas among the customs administrations in Asia and Europe.
3. The meeting was officially opened by Mr. Kjell Jansson, Director General of the Swedish Customs, host and chairman of the meeting. Opening remarks were delivered by Mr. Tasumaro Terazawa, Director General, Bureau of Customs and Tariff of the Japanese Ministry of Finance, Mrs. M. Doulliez, Director General, Administration des Douanes et Accises of the Belgian Ministry of Finance, and Mr A. Komaz, General Affairs, Directorate TAXUD-A, Taxation and Customs Union, European Commission.
4. By way of introduction the Meeting discussed two reports on ASEM activities; report on the third ASEM summit by Korea and report on the third ASEM Finance Ministers' Meeting, presented by Japan. The following discussion was composed by the reports of the two Working Groups created following the First ASEM Customs Directors General and Commissioners Meeting in Shenzhen, China. This was followed by an informal session for policy-oriented discussion on the topic: The impact of the IT revolution on customs. Under its last heading the Meeting agreed to the arrangements for the next Directors-General and Commissioners Meeting in Korea in 2003.

REPORT ON THE ASEM ACTIVITIES

5. Report on the third ASEM summit by Korea

6. The Japanese General Director Mr. Tasumaro Terazawa made a presentation of the report on the Third Asia-Europe Finance Ministers' Meeting that was held in Kobe, Japan on 13-14 January 2001. The Ministers took note of the results, particularly in the fight against illicit drug trafficking and other customs offences, of the third ASEM Customs DG-Commissioners Meeting held on 23 June 1999. They welcomed the holding of the first ASEM Customs Seminar which strengthens the dialogue between Customs and business, as well as the establishment of the ASEM Customs Database which contributed to enhance transparency of Customs procedures. The Ministers also took note of the results of the meetings of the Working Group on Customs Enforcement that took place in February 2000 and of the Working Group on Customs procedures that took place in April 2000. They urged further work on trade facilitation, including harmonisation on Customs data elements, taking into account the outcomes of the G-7 Experts' work, and the further enhancement of the dialogue through the second Seminar to be held, back with the Fifth ASEM Procedures Working Group Meeting, in Bangkok in April 2001, in line with the Deliverables and Goals for 2000- 2002 of the Trade Facilitation Action Plan. The Ministers encouraged Customs Authorities to continue strengthening their cooperation, through instruments such as customs co-operation agreements.
7. The Meeting took note of a short presentation made by the Italian General Director concerning the status of the G7-work of the Technical and IT customs Groups, co-ordinated by a group of Experts. The Meeting welcomed the objective of the initiative to normalise and simplify customs declaration procedures by reducing the number of data required and making a wider use of information technology in order to curb the costs. The Meeting also took note of the letter from the Italian presidency to the WCO concerning a possible transfer of the two working groups' files for future maintenance of these results. Information was provided on the evolution of the work on the so-called "single window for the release of cargoes", an issue that also involves other government bodies e.g. the Ministry for Agriculture and the Ministry for Public Health. Despite difficulties caused by different legislation and tasks of the government bodies in the G7 countries, the required amount of data elements have been reduced from 330 to 280 which is noteworthy progress. The meeting welcomed the fact that the G7 initiative obviously has led to tangible results in the field of simplification of customs procedures.

CO-OPERATION IN THE AREA OF ENFORCEMENT

8. The Meeting took note of a presentation made by Mr Harald Fröhlich of the Joint Project between the two RILO's in Asia and in Europe the head of RILO WE. By way of introduction general remarks as regards the WCO's RILO program were made. The objectives are to fight customs offences, commercial fraud and drug, through information, requests, alerts, analysis and co-operation. Mr Fröhlich then continued to exhibit the co-operation between RILO A/P and WE. The target for this project is to examine the scope of smuggling activities in certain areas. The results of the project are available in detailed reports that were distributed during the meeting. Mr Fröhlich ended his presentation by putting forward how the ASEM Directors General Commissioners can promote this work. He stressed that there is no true reflection of the global "Intelligence picture" and that part of the solution is to find the right balance of effectiveness between RILO's, WCO

members and WCO Secretariat activities, and to make information collection through Customs Enforcement Network.

9. The Meeting took note of the outcome of the summary report of the study by the Japanese Customs with respect to customs competence on the control of proceeds of crime. A questionnaire was sent to all ASEM members, and for reference the United States, by the Japanese Customs following the consensus reached at the Fourth ASEM Customs Enforcement Working Group Meeting in February 2000. The questionnaire focused on the two issues of the cross-border physical trafficking of monetary instruments in general and cross-border physical trafficking of proceeds of crime.

CO-OPERATION IN THE AREA OF PROCEDURES

INFORMAL SESSION FOR POLICY-ORIENTED DISCUSSION

10. A presentation was given by the Swedish Customs Service on how it is currently developing the next generation of Internet services for Customs transactions. This new concept is called The Virtual Customs Office and will cover all the services available at a traditional Customs office. In addition a range of new electronic services will be included, such as the world's first Customs query system (TARIC-on-line, already in production), submission of declarations (WEB-EDI), contact/call-centre services, and a range of new interactive Internet services for e.g. information, subscriptions, news and statistics.

PREPARATIONS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

11. In line with the agreement reached at the Third DG-Commissioner Meeting concerning the rotation of the chairmanship of the Meeting and the two Working Groups, and the frequency and venues of meetings, the following was agreed:
 - The fifth ASEM Customs DG-Commissioner Meeting will take place in the Republic of Korea in 2003. It will be prepared by the incoming Chairman in consultation with the outgoing chairman.
 - The Enforcement Working Group will be chaired by ccc for the next two years.
 - The Procedures Working Group will be chaired by xxx for the next two years.
 - The respective Working Groups meeting will be organised 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 pinot network established by the two groups.