

MESSAGE FROM CUSTOMS DIRECTOR GENERAL ON THE OCCASION OF 26th JANUARY – INTERNATIONAL CUSTOMS DAY

On 26th January, which the Customs Union celebrates as International Customs Day, we are recalling on its importance and paying tribute to the customs officers and customs agencies for their role and care for the movement of goods across borders around the world.

In 1953 on this day, the Customs Cooperation Council, the formal name of the World Customs Organization, held its first meeting. It was established in 1952 as an independent intergovernmental body with a specific mission to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of customs administrations.

Today, the World Customs Organization has 183 customs members from all over the world, whose work covers about 98% of world trade. As a global center of world expertise, the World Customs Organization is the only international organization with competencies in customs matters and acts on behalf of the international customs community.

According to its adopted Strategic Plan 2019-2022, there are ten key priorities for joint action: COVID-19 Action Plan, Coordinated Border Management, Security and Safety, Revised Kyoto Convention, e-Commerce, Harmonized System, Capacity Building Strategy performance measurement, integrity, digital Customs and data analytics.

Traditionally, the customs services around the world celebrate the 26th of January, the International Customs Day through special organized activities. This year this day will be marked under the motto “Scaling up Customs Digital Transformation by Embracing a Data Culture and Building a Data Ecosystem”. Although still facing the COVID-19 pandemic, Customs must address the challenges through proper use of human resources and available data.

Digital transformation of society is a global trend based on data management, and in that direction Customs is focused on several topics under its competencies. Customs is part of the existing data ecosystem (defined as the set of infrastructure, analytics, and applications used to record and analyze data) whose actors are citizens, government agencies, and local and transnational companies, among others, all of which produce or collect a huge amount of data.

Data is used to build strategies, improve the quality of anti-fraud and revenue collection, optimize the allocation of field resources and measure the performance of customs organizational units. In order to properly manage and administer customs administrations, as well as make appropriate decisions, it should be taken into account that data should be formally managed to ensure relevance, accuracy and timeliness, while using standards and progressive approaches. It is of particular importance to foster data culture as well as continuous training of staff and building their skills for understanding and analyzing data, using relevant technologies with an ethical approach and management.

Sharing data analysis with other government agencies, the public and academia, international organizations as well as other customs agencies increases the role and transparency of Customs in policy making, obtaining the necessary resources and donor funding. The WCO Secretariat provides support to customs administrations through committees and working groups, awareness-raising seminars, e-learning modules aimed at developing methodologies for analysis and data sharing. In this regard, the Customs Administration of the Republic of North Macedonia pays special attention to the collection and analysis of relevant data, proper management of the information received and decision making.

The Customs Administration has been making particular efforts in the realization of projects which mean digital transformation and exchange of data and information between the services in the country as well as with the other customs services:

- New Single Window (NSW);
- Continuous updates of CDEPS;
- SEED + electronic data exchange system with the CEFTA countries;
- New Computerized Transit System - phase 5, as well as other projects and activities.

Several legal entities made great efforts during this extremely difficult year thus assisting Customs in its daily operation. Hence, the Customs Administration decided to award representatives of external institutions and organizations with Certificates of Merit on behalf of the Secretary General of the World Customs Organization, Kunio Mikuria Under the theme "**Scaling up Customs Digital Transformation by Embracing a Data Culture and Building a Data Ecosystem**" who stood out with their efforts in establishing a sustainable and constructive business environment and finding solutions to deal with the COVID 19 crisis.

The Customs Administration will continue to follow the latest development in innovative technology and will strive to keep up with the modern achievements, without interrupting trade, enabling uninterrupted growth even in difficult circumstances, following the directions of the WCO and applying best practices in their field.

Slavica Kutirov

Director General