Conclusions on the Progress on the Strategy for the Evolution of the Customs Union

3208th COMPETITIVENESS (Internal Market, Industry, Research and Space) Council meeting
Brussels, 10 and 11 December 2012

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"THE COUNCIL,

RECALLING:

- the crucial role played by the Customs Union since 1968 as a foundation of the European Union;

- the objectives set by the Europe 2020 Strategy, as adopted by the European Council of 17 June 2010;

- the objectives set by the Strategy for Internal Security, as adopted by the European Council of 25 - 26 March 2010;

- the contribution of customs to achieving the above EU objectives, and the strategy set for the customs union in 2008 in the Communication from the Commission on a Strategy for the Evolution of the Customs Union¹;

- the on-going efforts to modernise the customs union, notably through adoption of the Modernised Customs Code² and implementation of the e-customs decision³, with a view to meeting the above objectives;

¹ Doc. 8027/08 UD 51

Press Office
- the Council Resolution of 13 December 2011 on the future of customs law enforcement cooperation;  

- the coming into force of the Lisbon Treaty on 1 December 2009;  

- the Council Conclusions on the customs cooperation with Eastern neighbouring countries and other initiatives on international customs cooperation;  

- that the Council, in its meeting of May 14, 2008, endorsed Communication 169(2008), the strategic objectives set therein for the customs union, and asked the Commission to report on progress in implementing the Strategy by 2011;  

NOTES:  

- the evolution of the customs union in terms of volumes of activity, in implementation of information technology and in policy and legislation;  

- the increased role of customs in contributing to safety and security;  

- the progress that has been achieved on priority files such as the fight against counterfeiting and piracy as well as the fight against fraud and on projects aimed at combining international trade facilitation with protection of the EU territory and inhabitants;  

- the challenges that the customs administrations encountered since 2008 in the process of modernisation and IT implementation;  

WELCOMES:  


- the Commission proposal for a Union Customs Code (recast), the Commission proposal for a new Regulation concerning customs enforcement of intellectual property rights and the Commission proposal for the Customs 2020 programme;  

CONSIDERS the strategic objectives as set out in 2008 as still valid and appropriate;  

---

3 OJ L 23/2008, pp. 21-26  
4 OJ C5, 7.1.2012, pp.1-3  
5 Doc. 16881/11 UD 323  
6 Doc. 8608/08 UD 65  
7 Doc. 18932/11 UD 370  
8 Doc. 6784/12 UD 49 ENFOCUSTOM 10 MI 120 COMER 36 TRANS 53 CODEC 450  
9 Doc. 10880/11 UD 134 PI 64 COMER 110  
10 Doc. 13265/12 UD 221 AELE 61
ENDORSES the on-going evolution of the role of customs, with regard to the international trade, financial and fiscal interests of the European Union, as well as responsibilities covering security and safety at the external borders, and the protection of the EU inhabitants, including health and the environment, in a changing external context;

STRESSES that the customs union should continue to evolve thus being able to continue to meet its objectives in supporting the EU’s competitiveness by protecting the business environment, facilitating trade and offering high quality service to stakeholders;

To this end, UNDERLINES THE NEED:

- to ensure that developments and changes to customs services and requirements to the greatest extent feasible positively contribute to protecting the EU, facilitating legitimate trade, supporting the competitiveness of EU businesses and helping to stimulate economic benefits in line with the objectives of the EU growth agenda;

- to streamline and improve the internal governance and performance of the customs union, with a view to ensuring that the customs union achieves its objectives in the most effective and efficient possible way;

- to enhance the customs union's ability to measure its impact, including enhancing the use of measurement of outcome, and improve its performance with regard to serving its main stakeholders, Member States, businesses and society;

- to further promote uniform application of customs legislation and modern and harmonised approaches to customs controls while allowing, where appropriate and bearing in mind the implications for the operators and for Member States, flexibility for national solutions;

- to enhance cooperation with other agencies both at the national and EU level in the areas of security, health, safety and the environment, as well as with international partners whilst respecting the division of competence between the EU and Member States in this area;

- to adopt a more comprehensive approach of the international supply chain with the aim of improving the effectiveness of controls, allowing more trade facilitation and bringing real and tangible benefits to authorised economic operators;

- to step up actions to fight against smuggling of goods, in particular cigarettes and alcohol, along the external EU borders and to strengthening the cooperation with the EU neighbouring countries in this regard;

- to further enhance dialogue and cooperation with economic operators in order to better respond to their expectations and constraints;

- to make the best possible use of available resources at EU level, notably in the area of IT development and human capacity building, taking into account economic and other constraints;

- to foster continuous innovation within the context of the existing and evolving legal framework to enhance the performance and agility of the Customs Union;
- to modernise customs working methods and detection technology and to develop staff competences to meet this need, taking into account specific needs and circumstances;

- to support customs both at the national and EU level in its role as the lead authority in managing the cross-border movement of goods.

INVITES the Commission:

- to take account of these points made by the Council and to reflect them in the work;

- to take measures, together with the Member State administrations, on implementing the strategy, and

- to report on progress to the Council by 2014."