

**Declaration of the Directors General following the Conference on Customs Cooperation in  
South-East Europe  
Brdo, Slovenia, 12-14 March 2008**

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On 14 March 2008, the Directors General of Customs administrations of the Member States of the European Union, candidate countries (Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey) and other customs administrations from the region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and UNMIK Kosovo) and of the Directorate for Taxation and Customs Union of the European Commission met for the Conference on **Customs Cooperation in South-East Europe**.

The Conference was held in the footsteps of the Conferences organised on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> February 2004 in Thessaloniki and on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> November 2006 in Naples, where the Directors General carried out a comprehensive follow-up of the reforms undertaken in all areas in order to meet the recommendations contained in the roadmaps which were endorsed by the Directors General in Thessaloniki. Between the two meetings, experts working groups meetings were organised in Athens on 9-10 December 2004 and in Ljubljana on 20-21 November 2005.

The Directors General held discussions on capacity building and fight against counterfeit and made the following declaration:

**Recognising** the crucial role of customs in fostering regional integration and co-operation across the region, as well as with the European Union;

**Aware** of the new challenges faced by customs resulting from the increase in global trade and growing concerns about safety and security;

**Drawing** attention to the growing trade in counterfeit goods that pose specific economic and revenue risks, as well as to the health and safety of citizens;

**Recognising** that these challenges require the Customs Administration to combine the need to ensure trade facilitation and the need to fight against illegal trade;

**Conscious** that the candidate and pre-accession countries are fully committed towards aligning their customs legislation and procedures on EU standards as well as to fully implementing these procedures;

**Recognising** that significant progress has been achieved in the region in enhancing the administrative capacity of their customs administrations in fight against fraud;

**Recognising** that continuous alignment of customs legislation to the EU requirements is needed by candidate and pre-accession countries, and that continuous modernisation efforts are required by the Customs administrations to ensure the necessary capacity to implement and enforce it;

**Conscious** that the Customs Blueprints do constitute a useful tool to support the modernisation efforts of the Customs Administrations for candidate and pre-accession countries;

- **Endorse:**

the final conclusions of the working groups on capacity building and on IPR enforcement and fight against counterfeit.

- **Agree that:**

- The full alignment of customs legislation and procedures on the EU *acquis* requires a continuous and sustained effort;
- The Customs Blueprints constitute an effective tool to assess the operational capacity of the Customs Administrations; Customs Administrations should use the Blueprints to assess the level of the operational capacity and identify areas of improvement, which can be supported where necessary by EU, Member States and other bodies' technical and financial assistance;
- Modernisation efforts will be carried out by each candidate and pre-accession country and will continue to be assessed on a regular basis by the European Commission through the existing bilateral dialogue within the specialised subcommittees or equivalent bodies that have been established in the different frameworks;
- The European Commission and the Customs Administrations of Member States will continue to provide expertise and technical assistance to the administrations of the region using all available instruments (such as Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and TAIEX);
- Customs administrations should ensure the implementation of adequate border enforcement provisions to tackle the increase trade in goods that pose security, health and safety dangers;
- Customs Administrations will deepen cooperation with right holders in the area of exchange of information in order to effectively and efficiently enforce IPR;
- National administration and right holders should together organise awareness raising initiatives, to promote the role of customs in combating counterfeit and piracy;
- As a follow-up to this Conference and working group meetings, assessments of the operational capacities of the customs administrations of candidate and pre-accession countries on the basis of the Blueprints are recommended;

The Directors General would like to thank Slovenia for taking the initiative of organising this conference and for its warm hospitality, and the European Commission for all its support.