



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Skopje, 19 September 2013

**Visibility Conference for the IPA 2009
Projects on Integrated Tariff Environment in the Customs
Administration
Hotel Continental, 11.00 am**

Speaking points
Aivo ORAV
Head of EU Delegation

**Dear Director Kargov,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is my pleasure to be here today with you to promote two interlinked technical assistance projects financed under the Instrument for Pre-accession supporting the Customs Administration. European Union's assistance to the Customs Administration, including the forthcoming supply project, amounts to 2.5 million EUR.

The Customs Union, which celebrated its 45th anniversary this year, is one of the founding stones of the European Union. Since its creation, the Customs Union has expanded both quantitatively, from 6 to the present 28 members, and qualitatively, by becoming a single market. The free movement of goods within the single market can only function properly if there is a rigorous application of common rules at its external borders. This implies that the customs authorities of all EU member states must act as if they were one.

Today, customs agencies are facing new challenges: they must ensure smooth flow of trade whilst applying necessary controls and, at the same time, protecting the health and safety of the citizens. To achieve the correct balance between these demands, customs procedures and

control methods must be modernised and co-operation between different agencies must be reinforced. The main objective is to maintain the pivotal position of customs as modern, responsive partner to trade, protecting fiscal, safety and security interests of the country.

The Information Technology (IT) systems are becoming an increasingly important feature of the customs operations. Indeed, for the national economy to be able to compete in a global context, it is essential that customs IT systems are able to exchange electronic information. The different IT systems now in place lay down the grounds for creating a paperless environment for customs and trade, the key rationale behind the Union Customs Code, which was adopted by the European Parliament only last week. Let me quote Commissioner Šemeta's statement on this occasion:

The Customs Union is the quiet success story of the EU. For over 40 years, it has protected our citizens, safeguarded our businesses and facilitated the ever increasing trade flows in and out of the Union. The Union Customs Code will ensure that customs continues its vital work, but in an even more efficient, cost-effective way; one which best meets the challenges of our modern economy.

The Union Customs Code will serve as the new framework on rules and procedures for customs. As such, it will offer greater legal certainty to businesses, and increased clarity for customs officials throughout the EU. The new Code streamlines and simplifies customs rules and procedures, and facilitates more efficient customs transactions. Among the improvements that are introduced with the new Code are measures to complete the shift to a paperless, fully electronic environment, and provisions to reinforce swifter customs procedures for reliable traders.

For the EU's economy to continue to compete in a global context, it is essential that customs IT systems are able to exchange electronic information based on internationally agreed standards and technology. These systems need to be implemented in candidate countries prior to joining the Union in order for the country to be fully ready to interoperate with the IT Systems of the Commission's services and the Member States from the date of accession. In the interim period, it will also provide more efficient systems and generate an overall improvement in the operation of Customs.

One such system is the Integrated Tariff Environment that we are promoting today. The projects' overall objective is to harmonize the national customs system with the related tariff systems of the Union.

The benefits of the projects will be felt even before the accession, as the national economic operators will be able to access on-line information, which will reduce the necessity to consult the legislation and will enable calculating the duty payables and identify the required documents. This will mean easier, faster and more transparent access to information will have a positive impact on their daily work.

We have witnessed the progress achieved by the Customs Administration in the past few years in a number of areas: combating cross-border crime and trade in counterfeit goods; increased capacities for investigation and intelligence; and rigorous implementation of the anti-corruption strategy.

One of the biggest challenges ahead is full application of the different IT systems developed in the past few years, a process that we have been continuously supporting. We will remain committed to a partnership with the Customs Administration and will continue to support strengthening its capacity to ensure that it meets the priorities set to support the country's integration into the European Union.

I wish you a good work in the coming period and I look forward to seeing you again in one year from now to promote the projects' final results. Thank you very much for your attention.