Developing a model for dialogue with traders based on good practices collected amongst ASEM members

PERMANENT TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

201st/202nd Sessions
ASEM

- Initiative started 1994
- First meeting Bangkok 1996
- Dialogue forum with 3 pillars:
  - Political pillar
  - Economic pillar (Customs cooperation)
  - Social/cultural/Intellectual pillar
- 51 Members from Europe and Asia
Background

• Close cooperation between customs and trade is crucial in the daily customs work and also in general, to create "win-win" outcomes.

• Therefore, it was agreed at the 8th ASEM DGs/Commissioners Meeting in 2009 that Singapore and Sweden would develop a paper on good practices for setting up a dialogue with traders for consultation and information sharing.
Background

• A survey was sent out to all members covering the following areas:
  • Trade Dialogues and frequency
  • Target Audience
  • Other Forms of Engagement
  • Transparency
  • Service Standards
  • Trade Engagement Culture
RECOMMENDATIONS

• Establishment of consultative committees with trade to have regular meetings on strategic, tactical and operational level;

• Publication of trade and customs-related information such as tariffs, fees, rules & procedures, etc. on the administrations’ website to ensure a high degree of transparency;

• Use of electronic means, such as e-newsletters, emails, etc., to update and disseminate information;

• Establishment of a central unit to handle all public and trade enquiries;
RECOMMENDATIONS

• Conduct of periodic traders’ satisfaction surveys to gather feedback;

• Provision of information in commonly used languages such as English other than the native language;

• Conduct traders’ clinic to raise compliance and one to one meetings with traders to resolve issues or reported difficulties in applying customs regulations; and

• Conduct pilot projects with trade.
Further development done after 9th DG/Commissioners meeting 2011

- Circulate a second survey to track progress of ASEM members in their trade engagement efforts and identify challenges in engaging businesses.

- Develop a workshop package to assist ASEM members to address identified challenges and organise workshops with trade.
PART 1 - FINDINGS ON MEMBERS’ PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

Dialogues and Consultations

- Almost all members have put in place various dialogue programmes at the operational, tactical and strategic levels to engage the trade

- Dialogue programmes could generally take two approaches: conventional or consultation approach
PART 1 - FINDINGS ON MEMBERS’ PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

Transparency and Dissemination of Information

- Members use a wide range of tools such as websites, emails, newsletters (both electronic and paper formats) and news feeds to disseminate information to the trade
- Some members have Facebook, Twitter or YouTube accounts
- A few members have smart phone applications
- Using social media to communicate with the trade and public is more common amongst Asian members
Trade Engagement Culture

• Many members shared that in the context of the global environment, customs officers need to be trained in public speaking, customer service, language, conflict management and client management.

• Most members strive to respond to enquiries promptly.

• 40% of the members have different service standards for different types of enquiries.
PART 1 - FINDINGS ON MEMBERS’ PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

Traders’ Surveys

• 75% of the members have conducted traders’ surveys during the last 2 years

• Frequency of conducting such traders’ surveys depends on the importance of the issue
PART 1 - FINDINGS ON MEMBERS’ PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

Raising Compliance and Resolving Issues

- 95% of the members offer courses to the trade, although 15% have their courses conducted by private organisations such as customs brokers and chambers of industry/commerce.
- Members also provided diverse feedback on the challenges in conducting courses for the trade.
- Although most members do not have a formal process for the trade to initiate consultation with the Customs administrations, the trade could approach the Customs administrations directly or through their trade associations.
PART 1 - FINDINGS ON MEMBERS’ PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

Pilot Projects with the Trade

• More than 75% of the members have carried out pilot projects with the trade in the period 2010-2012 (some intend to initiate pilot projects with the trade in 2013)

• Cover a wide range of topics such as information systems, goods controls system, single window, self-certification, radio-frequency identification (RFID), air cargo security, smart and secure trade lanes etc.
PART 1 - FINDINGS ON MEMBERS’ PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

AWC as the Platform for Sharing Best Practices for Dialogue with Trade

• Several recommendations were made on how good practices in trade engagement could be developed

• Many members also stressed the importance of establishing customs consultative committees to improve the customs-business partnership
PART 2 – FEEDBACK FROM THE TRADE

• Half of the members shared the feedback they had received from the trade
• Suggestions were given on how the trade would like to have a dialogue with customs
• Common challenges: transparency and trade’s awareness of changes in customs policies
• Common feedback: importance of improving user-friendliness, ensuring more prompt updates of information on customs websites
OVERALL ASSESSMENT

• Members have demonstrated creativity and a desire to reach out to the trade

• Some good practices members could explore:
  • having a more structured approach of engaging the trade
  • classifying enquiries
  • having a more consultative approach towards trade engagement
  • training of customs offices in relevant skills of trade engagement
WORKSHOP PACKAGE

• Aims to present to members:
  • *good practices in organising a dialogue with trade; and*
  • *discussion topics and related good practices that could help improve members’ trade engagement efforts*

• Developed based on the assessment of challenges that members face in trade engagement as highlighted in the report
SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS FOR THE DIALOGUE

• Should be tailored according to
  • the level of engagement with the trade i.e. whether it is on the strategic, tactical or operational level
  • the unique operating environments of each member

• Accessibility of Customs Information
• Response to Traders’ Enquiries
• Training for the Trade
• Co-ordination between Trade and Customs
• To practically test the workshop package in an Asian and an European member
  – look for volunteers among Members inter-seasonally and discuss the implementation details for conducting such a workshop thereafter.

• ASEM DG/Commissioners endorsed the report and follow up actions in the meeting in Vienna October 2013