

‘Customs-for-business’ – a new level of ambition for Poland’s Customs Service



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Poland, like other Members of the WCO, has been applying the ‘Customs-to-business (C2B)’ concept in its relations with the trade community for many years. Since successfully concluding the process of integration into the European Union (EU) and joining the European Customs Union, Poland’s client-oriented approach has gone from strength to strength. But now, the challenge of the Polish Customs Service goes far beyond that, with the focus falling on ‘Customs-for-business (C4B)’ – a new level of ambition for Customs.

THE WORD ‘SERVICE’ in the official name of the Customs Service of Poland reflects precisely its responsibility towards other international trade stakeholders. This year a new business strategy called Polish Customs 2020 was adopted at govern-

ment level. A source of inspiration for the strategy was, among others, the needs of trade operators – needs which were also identified during the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference in Bali.

It is worth mentioning that, alongside the strategy, a new vision has been declared by Polish Customs: ‘The Customs Service – using knowledge innovatively to provide better service in the digital lifestyle era’. We are convinced that Customs has to do

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its best to achieve the same level of modernity as economic operators, otherwise Customs procedures might be associated with potential bottlenecks in international trade. Conclusions of this kind may have led the Ministers in Bali to conclude the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA).

The TFA is an important legal and political instrument designed to meet the expectations of both the Customs and trade communities. The provisions of just 13 TFA Articles, in a relatively short text, cover the full scope of Customs' core business and should be read as a 'to-do' list for Customs administrations; trade facilitation should be seen as the 'Customs facilitation' that Customs should be offering to business.

It is true that some administrations have a long way to go, but Section II of the TFA offers “Special and Differential Treatment for Developing and Least-Developed Countries”. The other perspective is the role of the WCO and the EU who are expected to play an active part in the TFA implementation process. Sections I and II of the TFA demonstrate a well-balanced approach to Customs facilitation.

Having regard to Article 12 of the TFA, namely 'encouraging the sharing of information on best practices', before the WTO Committee on Trade Facilitation starts to become the platform for daily cooperation, please allow me to present a few trade-facilitating practices from the Polish Customs Service's perspective, which may be of some interest to other Customs administrations. The practices follow the order of the TFA:

- **Information (TFA, Article 1)**

The availability of Website information is currently standard for most Customs administrations. But what about webcams at border crossing points? What about the virtual crossing of a border? In Poland we offer a virtual trip using a virtual 'Customs assistant' to show passengers what needs to be done when crossing the border between Poland and Ukraine, and what documents are necessary.

- **Consultation (TFA, Article 2)**

The consultation of draft regulations via

the Internet or via the Trade Contact Group is functioning very well in the EU. At the national level, Poland has the Customs Board – an independent body – to comment not only on legal provisions but also on the daily work of Customs. The Board is composed of trade, academic and former Customs experts, and its status has been confirmed by Poland's Customs Law, an Act of Parliament.

Moreover, the new business strategy – Polish Customs 2020 – provides for the implementation of a new programme. Known as 'Customer Relations Management', it is a tool well-known in the trade community, but quite unique in the public administration domain.

- **Pre-arrival processing (TFA, Article 7)**

Traditional Customs procedure demands that the goods to be cleared, including all required documents, should be presented at the same time. With international trade now moving much faster and the number of individual cases on the increase, a new approach is a must. But submission of the import documents and other information before the goods arrive is just a first step. Customs also needs to have sufficient capacity to process them prior to the arrival of the goods.

In Poland, since January this year, we have been offering pre-arrival processing of maritime transport at all seaports. The goods to be cleared can not only be declared on the day they arrive, but even a day before!

- **Average release time (TFA, Article 7)**

Processing time is one of the key performance indicators for Polish Customs. The measurement of entry declaration processing time, border crossing time and authorization release time are just a few indicators worth mentioning.

Poland also has a dedicated Website offering information on crossing times at each border point. The new concept offers 'zero waiting time' thanks to a dedicated

booking system – the 'e-booking bus' – that offers operators the possibility of using the Internet to book their preferred time to have their goods checked at the border.

- **AEO facilitation (TFA, Article 7)**

At the EU level, the Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) concept and the list of benefits is well-known. However, at the practical level some additional simplifications and facilitations are offered in Poland, such as a dedicated learning and Customs consultant for each operator, regular meetings at the Customs senior management level, direct newsletters, and a dedicated parking place at clearing depots. This is compliance in practice.

- **Cooperation between border agencies (TFA, Article 8 and 10)**

A broad system of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), signed by Polish Customs and other agencies who play a trade stakeholder role, is well-advanced and long-lasting. However, this year MoUs have started to take on an international dimension!

Poland's Customs Service and Border Guards have signed an agreement with their relevant partners in Ukraine. This 'four party agreement' covers such issues as control, facilitation, and exchange of information. During the UEFA EURO 2012 football championships, the four agencies agreed to organize 'one-stop shop' controls at the border, instead of a cascade of four consecutive checks. We hope to improve this cross-border cooperation with Ukraine in the very near future.

These few examples illustrate in brief the broad concept of the Polish Customs Service's move from C2B to C4B. We are convinced that Poland's new, client-oriented business strategy provides the appropriate and right response to the successful implementation of the TFA.

More information

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