The Kazbegi Customs crossing point, located on the border with the Russian Federation

Georgia, Europe's first nCEN

By the Georgia Revenue Service

IN A MODERN globalized world, Customs services require efficient and convenient tools to capture seizure data, data which will enable to strengthen its risk management capacities. The Georgia Revenue Service (GRS), which gathers the Tax and Customs Administration and the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Border Control Agency under the same roof, is no exception in this regard, and to do so more effectively, it decided to implement the National Customs Enforcement Network (nCEN) – an application developed by the WCO.

The application gives Customs administrations the ability to collect, store, analyse, and disseminate law enforcement information more efficiently at the national level, in order to establish robust intelligence capabilities, enhance profiling at the strategic, tactical and operational level, and boost information-sharing both regionally and internationally.

The nCEN consists of three independent databases. The principal database of national seizures and offences comprises data required for analysis, as well as means of conveyance, routes, and the possibility to view photos depicting exceptional concealment methods. Two supplementary databases contain information on suspect persons, methods of conveyance, and business entities of interest to Customs, thereby facilitating a structured investigation process.

After some preparatory work and negotiations, the decision to implement the nCEN was officially taken in 2014 and an agreement was signed with the WCO in January 2015, making Georgia the first country in the WCO Europe region to implement the tool. The GRS provided the hardware necessary for the installation and took care of the language adaptation of the application – the translation was undertaken by a special group of Customs analysts and information technology (IT)

experts. The software, training and all other costs were covered by the WCO from donor funding.

A train-the-trainers session was held in March 2015, ahead of the launch of both the training and production servers in December 2015. User accounts were created on the training server for 26 Customs officers working at different types of Customs places of entry (land, air, sea, and rail crossing points), as well as at Customs clearance zones and within the Container Control Units set up under the framework of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)-WCO Container Control Programme (CCP). This enabled the officers to get acquainted with the tool, and to quickly move to the production server.

Once the nCEN became operational on 1 January 2016, the 26 trained officers were tasked with reporting seizure data into the application's databases (seizures, suspects

Georgia Customs

country

and company cases). Once data is entered, it is validated by system administrators located at the GRS. Among other things, these administrators are responsible for:

• ensuring general communication and information flow between nCEN users and Customs' headquarters;

• validating cases (data quality checks);

• managing the application user database (creation of new users, deactivation of users, users' role and functions management, and password resets);

• transmitting non-nominal components of their data to the global WCO Customs Enforcement Network (CEN) database (the transfer is made with a click of a button).

After 10 months of utilization, the GRS is now able to provide some positive feedback

on the nCEN. The application has 42 active users, and has proved to be a powerful platform for capturing data on seizures, suspects and companies. Seizures at each border crossing point, at Customs clearance zones, and as part of the CCP are reported into the system. As of 14 September 2016, 625 seizures and 137 company cases have been reported into the system.

Users deem the application to be user-friendly, and the in-built mail system, known as the Information Communication Interface (Icomm), enables smooth and efficient information flow among users and external "connected" parties, such as the WCO for sending seizure information to the Global CEN database or other countries using the nCEN application.

No data analysis has been made at this stage, but the process is made easy since the captured data can be extracted in different formats. The processing and analysing of

data for risk management purposes will be made at the end of each year, and the GRS hopes to create new risk profiles in order to keep abreast of the practices and modi operandi of criminals and fraudsters.

The GRS will be pleased to share more about its nCEN implementation experience with any countries interested in knowing more about the tool, and what the implementation required. In addition, a GRS officer has enrolled in the nCEN trainer accreditation programme, and is now at the disposal of the WCO to assist other administrations in implementing the application. Indeed, having implemented the nCEN, the GRS is of the firm opinion that the tool has impacted positively on its operations, and has definitely strengthened its risk management capacities.

More information
www.rs.ge
customs@rs.ge