



Managing land borders, the innovative Finnish model

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FINLAND IS BORDERED by Sweden in the west, Norway in the north, and Russia to the east, while Estonia lies in the south, across the Gulf of Finland. The Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden – are members of the Schengen Area, an area comprising 26 European countries that abolished passport and other types of controls at their common borders.

As a result of the implementation of the Schengen Agreement in 2001 by the Nordic countries, most of Finland's land border controls are, therefore, focused on the Finnish-Russian border, which is 1,324 km long – 1,269 km runs on dry land, while the rest is covered by lakes and waterways.

The two main agencies managing Finland's border are Customs and the Border Guard, and in some cases, the Finnish Police. They do this under the framework of the

Police, Customs, and Border Guard (PCB) cooperation agreement. PCB agencies are all law enforcement and pre-trial investigation authorities.

The PCB agencies have been cooperating since 1927. Their long history and high degree of cooperation includes established coordination mechanisms and structures at the national and regional level.

This cooperation is based on legislation, with the first decree providing a regulatory basis for such cooperation being promulgated as early as 1949. The current legal basis, the PCB Act 687/2009 was passed by the Finnish Parliament in 2009. Alongside this legislation are the trilateral and bilateral agreements signed by the heads of the PCB agencies.

The national agreement on PCB cooperation was signed on 8 April 2010. Its basic principles focus on deploying resources according to the analysis of the risk, the effectiveness of joint crime prevention

control, and the avoidance of duplicated effort and overlapping functions. This agreement provides for:

- common national orders;
- further regional and local agreements;
- more detailed division of tasks in the area of previously overlapping responsibilities;
- intelligence and information-sharing through common use of databases;
- cooperation in the drafting of new legislation;
- a common approach to international cooperation;
- joint use of technology and equipment.

One of the main starting points for PCB cooperation is that each authority is responsible for its statutory duties, but cooperates in areas of overlapping interest in order to carry out its duties in the best possible way.

The article focuses mainly on land borders, and on the cooperation set-up between

“The committee appreciates the model since the combination of Customs and border checks in one step speeds up the total process, and increases the productivity of available staff. It is also a good practical example of a functional CBM concept at the local level.”

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the two main agencies physically present on the ground, namely Customs and the Border Guard. It first sets out the duties of these agencies, and then explains who does what.

Border Guard

The 2,700 person strong Border Guard is a specialized law enforcement agency under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior. Its most important task is to ensure that cross-border passenger traffic goes through the official border crossings, and that all formalities are adhered to.

The role of the Border Guard includes border surveillance and border checking functions, as well as Customs functions in areas without sufficient Customs staff, maritime search and rescue functions, national military defence functions, and policing functions. Although passport control is usually carried out by the Border Guard, in some locations in Finland it is done by Customs, or even the police, if the Border Guard is not present.

The Border Guard has increased its staff levels in the Eastern region on the basis that the Eastern Finnish/Russian border was assessed as being a higher risk, and therefore a priority compared to the other land borders that Finland shares with Norway and Sweden, which since 2001 have come under the Schengen Acquis.

Customs

The Customs Service is under the auspices of the Ministry of Finance. Customs is responsible for the control of imported and exported goods, including cross-border traffic, and the enforcement and collection of import duties and excise taxes.

As in many countries, Finnish Customs is mandated by law to perform many duties at the border on behalf of other agencies. More specifically, it carries out what is known as first level controls – depending on the seriousness of the issue at hand, the actual agency in charge may take the case over. Second level controls are, most of the time, not handled at the border as such, but at the final destination of the goods or the place of unloading/loading of the goods.

In 2014, Finnish Customs had approximately 2,300 employees. About 700 Customs officers are directly involved in the area of border controls, which includes monitoring commercial vessels, as well as small aircraft at six inland airports. At land-based border crossing points with Norway and Russia, Customs control the movement of goods.

In view of the assessed risk, Customs has focused its efforts and resources in particular along the Russian border, where about 340 officers are based. A further 340 Customs officers are based at the ports along the Gulf of Finland, operating mainly as mobile units.

Enhanced cooperation

If both agencies cooperate on a daily basis with other government departments, Customs and the Border Guard have taken the notion of cooperation one step further. An innovative model between the two authorities has been in use for almost five years now, based on the following principles:

- organization of joint training;
- delegation of tasks;
- sharing of equipment and facilities;
- sharing of information and databases;
- creation of joint teams.

In the field

An overview of the coordination of workflow at a border post gives a good idea of how things work. There are nine border posts between Finland and Russia and, if necessary, 10 additional border crossing points can be opened on a temporary basis to handle specific convoys – for instance, round timber cargo arriving from Russia.

As a large proportion of the trade between north-western Russia and the rest of the world goes through Finnish ports, the traffic of lorries carrying goods can be intense. Travellers are also numerous – Russian tourists undertake shopping trips to Finland and spend time at Finnish ski resorts, while Finns undertake shopping trips and cultural visits to Vyborg and St. Petersburg.

At the border post, passenger and commercial traffic is processed using a one-stop method. A single Customs officer processes the import declaration and the transport driver's passport. To support these checks, the officer has access to both the Customs and Border Guard Risk Management Database.

Customs officers have been trained by the Border Guard to inspect identification documents and visas, among other procedures. Border guards have, in turn, received basic Customs training, which includes the search of vehicles and the recognition of prohibited and restricted goods, such as drugs, alcohol, and counterfeit items.

The approximate time at export for Customs procedures and passport control is about five to eight minutes. At import it varies between three and 25 minutes depending on whether it is an empty truck or whether the goods at the border are cleared for free circulation. There is an additional second level control where detailed inspections are undertaken when needed. Depending on the nature of the control, it will either be handled by Customs or the Border Guard.

Regarding outgoing passenger traffic, the Border Guard performs passport controls, and checks invoices, tax-free cheques, and vehicle insurances, as well as the cats, dogs and pets that passengers have with them. Approximately 85% of the people who cross the border are Russians, and almost all of them have something to declare on their way home – usually some groceries, for which they present an invoice or a tax-free cheque. If the goods need to be controlled more thoroughly or some other irregularities occur then the case is handed over to Customs.

Sharing equipment

Customs and the Border Guard share common premises and equipment. Each authority has a designated role in the servicing and maintenance of the equipment. X-ray machines are largely the responsibility of Customs. Road-testing equipment, such as lorry brake-testing pads, are also maintained by Customs.

All equipment can be shared and operated by each agency upon request. Thus, although the equipment belongs to one agency, it can be easily relocated to the other agency, which enables smoother processing of the workflow without unnecessary and lengthy administrative procedures, thereby reducing costs.

Sharing information

Common databases are linked to the different agencies' operational and risk management databases, leading to a common approach when a 'signal' is

recorded. Some control and enforcement officers have access to each other's systems on a need-to-know basis, with levels of restricted access determined by rank and functional responsibility.

An example of a 'best practice' is the Joint Crime Intelligence and Crime Analysis Centre, formed as part of the national PCB agreement. The National Bureau of Investigation in Helsinki, one of the main units of the Finnish Police, is responsible for the operation of the centre which in turn is linked to regional analysis groups. There are also five PCB Provincial Crime Intelligence and Analysis Groups. These units are staffed by officers from all three enforcement agencies.

Joint teams

Joint agency enforcement units have been established, which include officers from the three main agencies forming part of the PCB agreement. This initiative provides a reliable and regular channel for information exchange, more efficient border management, and for targeting organized crime.

Political will

Strong political will was needed to achieve a deeper level of cooperation between Customs and the Border Guard. Many obstacles, especially related to the sharing of information versus privacy, data protection and confidentiality of trade information, can only be overcome with political will.



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Agencies involved in managing border flows should not cooperate only because the law or their top management says so, but also because cooperation and division of work is actually the optimal solution for them and for their business environment.

In Finland, cooperation is seen as the way to overcome the challenges of managing an increasing level of traffic with limited – and sometimes reduced – financial and human resources.

More information

<http://www.tulli.fi/en>



List of control functions performed by Customs on behalf of other government agencies

Ministry	Government agencies	Control functions performed by Customs
Finance	Tax administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Export control • Corporate audits • Fight against the grey economy
Interior	Police Border Guard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crime prevention • Vehicle licence plate recognition system (LIPRE) • Passport controls • Fight against the smuggling of weapons and cash
Transport and Communications	Transport Safety Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control of heavy traffic • Safety measures at ports
Agriculture and Forestry	Food Safety Authority Agency for Rural Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of the European Guidance and Guarantee Fund, which finances the European Union's common agricultural policy (CAP) • Control of compliance with regulations related to food products, plants and animals
Foreign Affairs	Department for External Economic Relations, Political Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of regulations related to dual use goods and to weapons of mass destruction • Implementation of international trade regulations, e.g. Customs value and provenance
Social Affairs and Health	Medicines Agency Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medicine controls • Alcohol and tobacco products controls • Radioactive material controls
Education	Copyright organizations Board of Antiquities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fight against copyright infringements • Fight against the smuggling of objects of cultural value
Environment	Environment Institute Oil Pollution Compensation Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fight against the smuggling of waste, chemicals and goods governed by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) • Enforcement of the oil damage duty
Employment and the Economy	Safety and Chemicals Authority Board of Patents and Registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control of the technical safety and conformity of goods • Enforcement of intellectual property rights
Defence	Ministry of Defence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Controls related to defence material

