Talking points for the intervention by the WCO Secretary General:

1. Thank you for inviting me to this important roundtable.

2. Customs is located at borders to facilitate and secure the cross-border movement of goods and transport conveyances, and thereby providing important soft infrastructure for trade and transport.

3. Indeed, the vision of the WCO is: Borders divide, Customs connects.

4. To ensure connectivity at borders, it is important to have harmonized, paperless, simple, and transparent border procedures.

5. The WCO with its 184 members, provides leadership and guidance in trade facilitation, revenue collection and protection of society by setting global standards for customs procedures, building capacity and promoting international cooperation.

6. The WCO flagship convention is the International Convention on the harmonization and simplification of Customs procedures, as amended, widely known as the Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC).

7. Acknowledging the importance of international standards, Azerbaijan has become a Contracting Party to the RKC since February 2006 when the Convention entered into force, setting a good example.

8. By 2021, all the five Central Asian and other Caucasus countries, the countries that link Asia and Europe, have completed their accession to the RKC.
9. Believing that the benefit of trade facilitation should be maximized for land-locked countries in Africa and Central Asia, the WCO has focused its efforts on transit by developing tools, be it by road or by rail.


11. For efficient transit regimes, what is key is: 1) exchange of information; 2) guarantee schemes; and 3) security measures, based on risk assessment.

12. Two weeks ago, I was invited to the EU - Central Asia Connectivity Conference, held in Samarkand to speak at the Panel session on Transport Connectivity.

13. The EU institutions spoke about the Middle Corridor or Trans Caucasus Transport Corridor to connect Asia and Europe.

14. It is great to see the international railway project as part of supply chain resilience and sustainability, especially after experiencing maritime supply chain disruptions.

15. The panel members agreed on the need for digitalization of data and procedures as ensuring seamless flow of reliable information.

16. As all the concerned Customs administrations have introduced automation, it is important to use the WCO Data Model as standardized dataset to ensure interoperability between their IT systems.

17. However, digitalization in a harmonized manner should involve domestic stakeholders, including railway companies.

18. In fact, all ministers of five Central Asian countries spoke about the need for continued modernization of Customs as the key to connectivity.

19. There has been a proposal to create a Customs forum to digitalize and harmonize border procedures along the Middle Corridor and I saw that the EU side was receptive of this proposal.
20. Of course, the WCO is ready to provide support with its tools and expertise for capacity building when necessary funding is available.

21. In this connection, I think it would be important to involve or consult the South Caucasus countries, including Azerbaijan, and Turkey in this possible forum as the important transit point of corridor.

22. At the beginning of this year, I met President Aliyev of Azerbaijan to review the significant progress in Customs modernization and discuss the corridor concept linking Asia and Europe.

23. The President was very supportive of closer cooperation with Central Asian countries and his neighboring South Caucasus countries in this respect.

24. In the recent years, I have met almost all the Presidents and Prime Ministers of Central Asia and South Caucasus and they are all eager to contribute to this new visions and opportunities for sustainable transport connectivity between Europe and Asia where Customs play a critical role.

25. I believe with the Global Gateway strategy, now is the time for the EU to focus on the potential of the South Caucasus and Central Asia for prosperity and security of the Eurasia continent.

Thank you.