



“Customs of Ukraine in Conditions of War and Martial Law”

Forum discussion hosted by the University of Customs and Finance,

Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine,

27 May 2022

Honorable members of the University of Customs and Finance of Ukraine,

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. It is a great honour for me to participate in this online discussion which deals with the timely topic of “Customs of Ukraine in Conditions of War and Martial Law”.
2. I see with disbelief that it has already passed more than 90 days after the break of war in Ukraine with the devastating humanitarian crisis and severe effects on the borders.
3. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep sadness and worry on the continuous suffering and loss of life of Ukrainian people and pay tribute to Customs officers working in such difficult conditions to secure the supply chains.
4. We have started to review the WCO tools concerning the humanitarian aid management and also work with other partners such as ICC to ease the trade conditions.
5. More importantly, we have recently come up with the “Secretariat Note on the role of Customs in fragile and conflict-affected situations”, which will be published next week.
6. This Note is the summary of findings and recommendations of our research on fragile borders, conducted in the Middle East and African regions since 2016, as part of the WCO Security Programme and due to be published soon.
7. The research covers: (a) the country facing the presence of State or non-State armed groups in its border areas; (b) the country in a post-conflict situation; and (c) the country in proximity of those two groups of countries. In all cases, normal function of Customs is usually disrupted.
8. The Secretariat Note, based on this research, contains several recommendations and I would like to take up four of them.

9. First, it is necessary to assess the damages caused by the war on Customs infrastructure and identify the needs for reconstruction as the immediate first step. In doing so, it would be important to consider the needs of border areas that are not necessarily the major trade routes. Even though the flow of goods might be limited, this type of small border trade brings relatively big wealth and stability for the border economy. Otherwise, border areas population might risk being radicalized.
10. Second, monitor humanitarian aid to ensure that much needed relief goods can cross the borders smoothly and efficiently, while avoiding any misuse of this supporting mechanism.
11. Third, prepare recovery plan now as it is likely that a considerable sum of funds for post-conflict recovery would arrive. However, your own needs and demands should be at the heart of this recovery rather than any donor's agenda. It is essential that Ukraine Customs adopts an ownership approach.
12. Fourth, Customs should play a role in security and therefore need to get enforcement power. Conflict-affected areas tend to be more porous and attract illicit trade.
13. At the upcoming Policy Commission and the Council sessions next month, this topic of fragile borders will be prominent in the agenda and included in the Strategic Plan as the major research topic for the immediate needs.
14. In this way we expect more support from our Members to those countries with needs in this area, including Ukraine.
15. In line with our technical mandate and hands-on approach, we have already initiated the discussion with Ukraine Customs on how best we can assist them in their endeavours including on the four areas that I just mentioned.
16. This is the pivotal moment to accelerate the reform of Ukraine Customs and get the trust from the policy-makers and the public.
17. I hope that this discussion platform will garner more support and knowledge sharing for Ukraine Customs to play an important role in the service of state and people in this difficult situation.
18. Unfortunately, I have another engagement and could not stay with you, but I wish you all the success.

Thank you.
