WCO history in brief
1952-2023
Over 70 years of dedication to the Customs community

August 2023
The WCO celebrates its 70th Anniversary

The Convention establishing a Customs Co-operation Council entered into force on 4 November 1952. Accordingly, the World Customs Organization (WCO), as the Customs Co-operation Council is now known, celebrated its 70th Anniversary in 2022.

Given that Belgium is the host country of the WCO, representatives participating in the Organization’s June 2022 Council Sessions were graced by the presence, on Friday 24 June 2022, of her Royal Highness Princess Astrid of Belgium; Mr. Vincent Van Peteghem, Belgium’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance; and Mr. Hans D’Hondt, President of the Federal Public Service of Finances.

Mr. Van Peteghem addressed the assembled guests, highlighting the importance of international trade for his country, one of Europe’s major logistics hubs, as well as the crucial need for a Customs service that operated smoothly and efficiently.

Later in the day, a tree offered to the WCO by Belgian Customs was planted in the WCO Secretariat gardens to symbolize the strong bonds that have been forged between the Organization and Belgium over the years.

Participants in the Council Sessions were also invited to a guided tour of one of the collections of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, which was followed by a gala dinner.
The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was signed in Geneva in October 1947 (and entered into force in January 1948) to help expand international trade, based on the notion of free trade, by lowering Customs tariffs. Building on this international rule, the governments of 13 countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Turkey and the United Kingdom) decided to set up a Customs Union Study Group to examine the possibility of creating a Customs Union in Europe, and to develop a Customs tariff common to the participating countries as well as a common nomenclature for goods1.

The Study Group met for the first time in Brussels, Belgium, in September 1948. Whilst it was unable to fulfill its mission of creating an inter-European Customs Union, its work in the technical field of harmonizing Customs regulations resulted in two Conventions: one on a common tariff nomenclature, and another on Customs valuation. This work served as the basis for future Customs unions, including the European Union Customs Union established in 1968. Moreover, the Study Group decided to create an international body charged with providing advice on the application of the two Conventions and continuing the efforts to secure uniformity and harmony in Customs legislation and procedures, so as to prevent the latter from becoming barriers to international trade.

This was the origin of the World Customs Organization (WCO). On 15 December 1950, the Convention establishing a Customs Co-operation Council (CCC) – the official name of the WCO – was opened for ratification.

MEMBERSHIP

An Organization with global reach

While the Organization was originally focused on Europe, it gradually became international with global objectives and influence, due in part to the recognition by governments of the importance of Customs to national economies.

The WCO’s membership has grown exponentially over time, from 17 founding Members to the current total of 185 Members, drawn from the various continents.

**HISTORICAL MILESTONES BY YEAR**

### A. Formative years as the CCC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>17 MEMBERS *Entry into force of the Convention establishing a CCC on 4 November 1952, when 17 countries acceded to it</td>
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<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>17 MEMBERS First Council Session, on 26 January, with 17 founding Members</td>
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<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>24 MEMBERS *Entry into force of the Convention on Nomenclature</td>
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<td>1963</td>
<td>24 MEMBERS First meeting of the Permanent Technical Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>73 MEMBERS *Entry into force of the Kyoto Convention</td>
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<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>73 MEMBERS *Entry into force of the Convention on Customs Valuation – “Brussels Definition of Value”</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>94 MEMBERS First edition of the Fellowship Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>87 MEMBERS *Entry into force of the Nairobi Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>94 MEMBERS First meeting of the Harmonized System Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>102 MEMBERS *Entry into force of the Harmonized System Convention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>100 MEMBERS The 1st Regional Intelligence Liaison Office (RILO) was established in Hong Kong, China.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>135 MEMBERS <strong>Adoption of the Arusha Declaration concerning Integrity in Customs</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* * refers to legal instruments / ** refers to standards and key documents adopted by the Council and the Policy Commission.
B. Adaptation to the evolution of the global trading system, as the WCO

137 MEMBERS
Adoption of World Customs Organization as the working name

146 MEMBERS
Establishment of the Tariff and Trade Affairs Directorate (merger of the Nomenclature Directorate and the Valuation Directorate)

159 MEMBERS
First WCO-recognized Regional Training Centre (RTC) in Budapest, Hungary

162 MEMBERS
**Adoption of the Revised Arusha Declaration


139 MEMBERS
First meeting of the Technical Committee on Rules of Origin, following the entry into force of the WTO Agreement on Rules of Origin. Its 40th Session was held in 2022.

153 MEMBERS
The Customs Enforcement Network (CEN) becomes operational.

161 MEMBERS
**The first version of the WCO Customs Data Model is issued

164 MEMBERS
Establishment of the 1st Regional Office for Capacity Building (ROCB) in Bangkok, Thailand

First WCO-recognized Regional Dog Training Centre (RDTC) in Almaty, Kazakhstan

* refers to legal instruments / ** refers to standards and key documents adopted by the Council and the Policy Commission.
C. Adaptation to the heightened focus on trade facilitation, security and capacity building

169 MEMBERS
**Adoption of the first version of the SAFE Framework of Standards

176 MEMBERS
Launch of the Career Development Programme
**Launch of the "Revenue Package"

177 MEMBERS
**Council Resolution on the Role of Customs in Natural Disaster Relief

179 MEMBERS
**Launch of the "Compliance and Enforcement Package"
and the "Organizational Development Package"

180 MEMBERS
**Punta Cana Resolution on the Role of Customs in the Security Context


170 MEMBERS
Establishment of the Capacity Building Directorate
Launch of the PICARD Programme (WCO Partnership in Customs Academic Research and Development)
Entry into force of the Revised Kyoto Convention, following its adoption in 1999
First meeting of the Private Sector Consultative Group (PSCG)

177 MEMBERS
First meeting of the Capacity Building Committee

179 MEMBERS
**Launch of the "Economic Competitiveness Package"

179 MEMBERS
Launch of the Merchador Programme to support the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement

180 MEMBERS
**Council Resolution on the Role of Customs in Preventing Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Objects

* refers to legal instruments / ** refers to standards and key documents adopted by the Council and the Policy Commission.
D. Adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic and digital transformation

**Adoption of the Framework of Standards on Cross-Border E-Commerce**

**Council Resolution on the Role of Customs in Facilitating the Cross-Border Movement of Situational Critical Medicines and Vaccines**

**Council Declaration on Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs**

183 MEMBERS

183 MEMBERS

184 MEMBERS

185 MEMBERS

185 MEMBERS

184 MEMBERS

183 MEMBERS

2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023

**Adoption of the WCO Data Strategy**

SECRETARIES GENERAL AND DEPUTY SECRETARIES GENERAL

The Organization has been headed by eight Secretaries General and seven Deputy Secretaries General from different backgrounds and of different nationalities, as follows:

**Secretaries General**

1. From 2 February 1953 to 1 August 1953
   Baron François de Séllys Longchamps, Belgium

2. From 2 August 1953 to 31 August 1978
   Chevalier Georges Annez de Taboada, Belgium

3. From 1 September 1978 to 31 December 1983
   Sir Ronald Radford, United Kingdom

4. From 1 January 1984 to 31 December 1988
   Mr. Glenn R. Dickerson, United States

5. From 1 January 1989 to 31 December 2008
   Mr. Michel Danet, France

6. From 1 January 2009 up to 31 December 2023
   Dr. Kunio Mikuriya, Japan

**Deputy Secretaries General**

1. From 1972 to 1976
   Mr. Edward Floyd Kilpatrick, United States

2. From 1982 to 1991
   Mr. Michel Auge, France

3. From 1992 to 1996
   Mr. Pierre Benet, France

4. From 1997 to 2001
   Mr. Leonid Lozbenko, Russian Federation

5. From 2002 to 2008
   Dr. Kunio Mikuriya, Japan

6. 2010 to 2017
   Mr. Sergio Mujica Montes, Chile

7. 2018 to present
   Mr. Ricardo Treviño Chapa, Mexico

* refers to legal instruments / ** refers to standards and key documents adopted by the Council and the Policy Commission.
HEADQUARTERS OF THE WCO SECRETARIAT

Over its 70-year existence, the WCO has had its Headquarters at four different locations in Brussels, as detailed below:

1. From 1953 to 1964
   Avenue Louise, 183

2. From 1964 to 1980
   Rue Washington, 40

3. From 1980 to 1998
   Rue de l’Industrie, 26-38

4. From 1998 to date
   Rue du Marché, 30