

# Developing a model for dialogue with traders based on good practices collected amongst ASEM members

PERMANENT TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

201st/202nd Sessions



# ASEM

- Initiative started 1994
- First meeting Bangkok 1996
- Dialogue forum with 3 pillars:
  - Political pillar
  - Economic pillar (Customs cooperation)
  - Social/cultural/Intellectual pillar
- 51 Members from Europe and Asia

# Background

- Close cooperation between customs and trade is crucial in the daily customs work and also in general, to create "win-win" outcomes.
- Therefore, it was agreed at the 8th ASEM DGs/Commissioners Meeting in 2009 that Singapore and Sweden would develop a paper on good practices for setting up a dialogue with traders for consultation and information sharing.

# Background

- A survey was sent out to all members covering the following areas:
  - Trade Dialogues and frequency
  - Target Audience
  - Other Forms of Engagement
  - Transparency
  - Service Standards
  - Trade Engagement Culture



# RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establishment of consultative committees with trade to have regular meetings on strategic, tactical and operational level;
- Publication of trade and customs-related information such as tariffs, fees, rules & procedures, etc. on the administrations' website to ensure a high degree of transparency;
- Use of electronic means, such as e-newsletters, emails, etc., to update and disseminate information;
- Establishment of a central unit to handle all public and trade enquiries;



# RECOMMENDATIONS

- Conduct of periodic traders' satisfaction surveys to gather feedback;
- Provision of information in commonly used languages such as English other than the native language;
- Conduct traders' clinic to raise compliance and one to one meetings with traders to resolve issues or reported difficulties in applying customs regulations; and
- Conduct pilot projects with trade.

# Further development done after 9<sup>th</sup> DG/Commissioners meeting 2011

- Circulate a second survey to track progress of ASEM members in their trade engagement efforts and identify challenges in engaging businesses
- Develop a workshop package to assist ASEM members to address identified challenges and organise workshops with trade

# PART 1 - FINDINGS ON MEMBERS' PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

## *Dialogues and Consultations*

- Almost all members have put in place various dialogue programmes at the operational, tactical and strategic levels to engage the trade
- Dialogue programmes could generally take two approaches: conventional or consultation approach



# PART 1 - FINDINGS ON MEMBERS' PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

## *Transparency and Dissemination of Information*

- Members use a wide range of tools such as websites, emails, newsletters (both electronic and paper formats) and news feeds to disseminate information to the trade
- Some members have Facebook, Twitter or YouTube accounts
- A few members have smart phone applications
- Using social media to communicate with the trade and public is more common amongst Asian members

# PART 1 - FINDINGS ON MEMBERS' PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

## *Trade Engagement Culture*

- Many members shared that in the context of the global environment, customs officers need to be trained in public speaking, customer service, language, conflict management and client management
- Most members strive to respond to enquiries promptly
- 40% of the members have different service standards for different types of enquiries



# PART 1 - FINDINGS ON MEMBERS' PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

## *Traders' Surveys*

- 75 % of the members have conducted traders' surveys during the last 2 years
- Frequency of conducting such traders' surveys depends on the importance of the issue

# PART 1 - FINDINGS ON MEMBERS' PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

## *Raising Compliance and Resolving Issues*

- 95 % of the members offer courses to the trade, although 15 % have their courses conducted by private organisations such as customs brokers and chambers of industry/commerce
- Members also provided diverse feedback on the challenges in conducting courses for the trade
- Although most members do not have a formal process for the trade to initiate consultation with the Customs administrations, the trade could approach the Customs administrations directly or through their trade associations

# PART 1 - FINDINGS ON MEMBERS' PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

## *Pilot Projects with the Trade*

- More than 75 % of the members have carried out pilot projects with the trade in the period 2010-2012 (some intend to initiate pilot projects with the trade in 2013)
- Cover a wide range of topics such as information systems, goods controls system, single window, self-certification, radio-frequency identification (RFID), air cargo security, smart and secure trade lanes etc.

# PART 1 - FINDINGS ON MEMBERS' PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

## *AWC as the Platform for Sharing Best Practices for Dialogue with Trade*

- Several recommendations were made on how good practices in trade engagement could be developed
- Many members also stressed the importance of establishing customs consultative committees to improve the customs-business partnership



## PART 2 – FEEDBACK FROM THE TRADE

- Half of the members shared the feedback they had received from the trade
- Suggestions were given on how the trade would like to have a dialogue with customs
- Common challenges: transparency and trade's awareness of changes in customs policies
- Common feedback: importance of improving user-friendliness, ensuring more prompt updates of information on customs websites

# OVERALL ASSESSMENT

- Members have demonstrated creativity and a desire to reach out to the trade
- Some good practices members could explore:
  - *having a more structured approach of engaging the trade*
  - *classifying enquiries*
  - *having a more consultative approach towards trade engagement*
  - *training of customs offices in relevant skills of trade engagement*



# WORKSHOP PACKAGE

- Aims to present to members:
  - *good practices in organising a dialogue with trade; and*
  - *discussion topics and related good practices that could help improve members' trade engagement efforts*
- Developed based on the assessment of challenges that members face in trade engagement as highlighted in the report

# SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS FOR THE DIALOGUE

- Should be tailored according to
  - the level of engagement with the trade i.e. whether it is on the strategic, tactical or operational level
  - the unique operating environments of each member
- Accessibility of Customs Information
- Response to Traders' Enquiries
- Training for the Trade
- Co-ordination between Trade and Customs



# NEXT STEPS

- To practically test the workshop package in an Asian and an European member
  - look for volunteers among Members inter-seasonally and discuss the implementation details for conducting such a workshop thereafter.
- ASEM DG/Commissioners endorsed the report and follow up actions in the meeting in Vienna October 2013