



Brussels, 24 January 2019.

GEODATA FOR CUSTOMS

(Item XIII. on the Agenda)

Background

1. *Geodata (or geolocated data, geospatial data)* refer to data that enable phenomena such as events, and the presence and movements of objects or individuals, to be located. In 2000, the U.S. government decided to end the “selective availability” of the Global Positioning System (G.P.S) that undermined the accuracy of G.P.S receptors. The recent explosion of geodata coincides with, and is linked to, the development of Internet, and the integration of GPS chips in mobile phones. Geodata are now increasingly integrated in many software and social media platforms, and shared as open data, including by spatial and military agencies which are now releasing satellite imagery into the public domain.
2. State agencies employ geodata across many areas: cadastre, land uses, traffic infrastructure planning, environment, agriculture, disaster management, humanitarian aid or development policies.
3. Law enforcement agencies could be described as early adaptors; they began to employ geodata as a means of supporting investigations in areas such as environmental crimes, protection of archaeological sites, prevention of wildlife trafficking, and crime mapping. Some new uses of geodata by law enforcement and intelligence specialized agencies have emerged, coinciding with the rise of “terrorism”: the notion of a geoevent i.e. using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to manage responses to a terrorist attack involving hazardous materials in urban areas; the identification and subsequent evaluation of ‘influential’ villages in the context of counterinsurgency measures; national trends related to terrorism incidents, or the identification of critical infrastructure.
4. Despite the geographical nature of their field of intervention -the border- border agencies such as Customs do not use geodata widely. Some initiatives have been conducted by Customs or logistics agents in the field of transit, for instance with the tracking of cargos. Some Customs administrations are using unmanned vehicles for border surveillance and are employing geodata in these efforts, however, it is still on the fringes and geodata is rarely exploited for intelligence or analysis.

5. At the international level, some organizations that specialize in border management have already integrated geodata into their structure and tools, such as Frontex and the International Organization for Migration.

Progress

6. A collaboration between the Secretariat and some Members on the theme of border security led to an experiment in leveraging the potential of geodata within Customs and resulted in the development of spatial tools and analyses. The first preliminary result of this research appears to show that geodata can be useful in terms of optimizing the deployment of resources on the ground, and is boosting cooperation between Customs and security and defence forces.
7. The Secretariat highlighted the importance of the topic of geodata by featuring it prominently in the Agenda of the PICARD Conferences in 2017 and 2018. In addition, seminars on security, intelligence and data analytics were organized to raise awareness amongst field and intelligence officers on the need to geo-locate the information they collect, the potentialities offered by GIS in the organisation of patrols, and the spatial analysis to optimize the deployment of resources in borderlands. As a fundamental source of data, geodata features on the agenda of data analytics seminars, as presented in item XII.
8. The Secretariat encourages Members to participate in the testing and use of geodata for intelligence, risk analysis and security purposes, and welcomes any proposals for collaboration from Members for future research and case studies.

Action required from the PTC

9. The PTC is invited to:
 - take note of the progress of the Secretariat in the area of geodata;
 - share practical experiences on the use of geodata; and
 - provide guidance for future work on data analytics.
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