

Third CCC Meeting: Trade Facilitation Among CAREC Countries Needed

The members of the Customs Cooperation Committee (CCC) cited the importance of trade facilitation in accelerating economic transition and promoting shared prosperity among the member countries in Central Asia.

At the Third CCC Meeting, held on 1–3 December 2004 in Baku, Azerbaijan, the CCC members stressed that trade facilitation must be advanced through (i) customs cooperation, and (ii) reforms and modernization of customs services by the individual member countries.

The meeting was held to set priorities and future direction of the Regional Trade Facilitation and Customs Cooperation Program (RTFCCP), and review the work programs prepared by the CCC working groups. The CCC meeting brought together the heads/deputy heads of customs administrations of the member countries of the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program—Azerbaijan, People's Republic of China (PRC), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—and Turkmenistan.

The CCC provides overall guidance and supervision to the RTFCCP, launched by ADB in 2002 to support customs reforms and modernization in its developing member countries in East and Central Asia. The

CCC is the decision-making body of the RTFCCP.

Statement of the CCC

Simplification and harmonization of customs procedures is seen as an effective means for trade facilitation. The CCC members agreed that reforming and modernizing customs procedures could be accelerated by leveraging financial and technical assistance from international development institutions.

They expressed satisfaction over the concerted launch of comprehensive customs automation and border-post infrastructure development by the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan, supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). They noted the support provided by Kazakhstan in designing unified automated information systems (UAIS) by sharing information and experiences. The members of the CCC recommended that other countries do likewise to contribute to the openness and compatibility of UAIS among member countries.

Review of progress

The CCC members reviewed the progress achieved since the Second CCC Meeting in October 2003 in Tashkent. They noted accomplishments in promoting bilateral

customs cooperation, and training and knowledge sharing. Bilateral cooperation was achieved in several important areas such as joint customs control, data sharing, transit development, and provision of a legal foundation through entering agreements on mutual administrative assistance in customs services.

The CCC members noted efforts of member countries to leverage the strength of the private sector for customs modernization, and improve consultations with the private sector to enhance “informed-compliance” of the trade community and to promote client orientation of customs services.

Future work plans

The members of the CCC endorsed the work plans proposed by the two working groups under the respective chairpersonships of the PRC and Uzbekistan.

Major initiatives proposed by the Working Group under the PRC Chairperson include (i) mutual recognition of customs documentation; (ii) development of simplified border documentation requirements; (iii) training to promote accession to the revised Kyoto Convention and *Transport Internationaux Routiers* (International Road Transport) Convention; and (iv) a forum on joint customs control, involving all border agencies to resolve outstanding problems and to introduce integrated border management.

The working group under the leadership of Uzbekistan underscored the importance of an information and communication technology system for data exchanges. The following measures were recommended: (i) review legal agreements to cover data exchanges; (ii) develop a standard list of information fields and a uniform format for data exchanges; (iii) develop harmonized information systems; and (iv) set technical measures for the bilateral exchange of the agreed list of data fields.

The members of the CCC welcomed the offer of the Customs General Administration of Mongolia to host the Fourth CCC Meeting, tentatively set for the first week of September 2005. ■



JOINT EFFORT (from left) Azerbaijan delegates A. Aliyev, Chairman of the State Customs Committee; and K. Heydarov, First Deputy Chairman of the State Customs Committee, with ADB representatives A. Siackhachanh, Director of the Governance, Finance and Trade Division, East and Central Asia Department; and J. Liang, Senior Trade Economist, during the Third Customs Cooperation Committee Meeting in Baku in December 2004