

Customs priorities for the French presidency of the Council of the European Union

(1 July 2008 – 31 December 2008)

“Customs in step with the times”

France assumed the presidency of the Council of the European Union on 1 July 2008, taking over from Slovenia before it, in turn, hands over the presidency to the Czech Republic. The French presidency's programme concerns a number of priorities and specific events on customs-related issues.

Managing the future

The French presidency of the Council of the European Union (FPEU) will continue to improve the workings of the internal market and pursue the modernisation of customs.

It intends to continue the efforts to facilitate trade and to implement the Council's declaration on **centralised customs clearance**, which was adopted during negotiations concerning the modernised customs code. Centralised customs clearance allows previously-approved operators to declare their goods by electronic means and to pay their customs duties wherever they are based, regardless of the Member State through which the goods will enter, leave or cross the European Union, or in which they will be consumed. An agreement will be sought between Member States concerning the distribution of collection and recovery costs with a view to developing this customs clearance method.

Furthermore, the French presidency will continue to promote the implementation of electronics systems for all customs procedures. This will facilitate the exchange of information between the customs authorities of Member States and between customs and trade operators.

Finally, the publicity surrounding the 40th anniversary of the Customs Union should help to improve the general public's understanding of the role of customs and to reaffirm the common values at the European level, hence the proposed slogan: “40 years of unity for your protection”. The 40th birthday celebrations took place on 1 July 2008: the first day of the French presidency.

A symbolic event will be held at Bercy on July 4th 2008 in order to celebrate this anniversary. This will be an opportunity to highlight the future role of customs administrations, discuss key security issues and adopt the “Declaration of Paris”, which emphasizes the strategies that customs authorities will have to employ in order to combat the new challenges facing them.

Fair trade

With regard to customs-related matters, the French presidency intends to prioritise the fight against counterfeiting and copyright infringement. It proposes an action plan for the 2009-2011 period with four main elements: the fight against infringements posing a threat to the health and safety of consumers, the fight against crime associated with counterfeiting and copyright infringement, moves to combat Internet-based infringements and responses to the globalisation of this phenomenon. It will organise a high-level seminar for the Directors-General of Customs in Paris on 25 and 26 November concerning the fight against counterfeiting and infringements.

Furthermore, the French presidency will coordinate the Community's position with regard to developing a protocol on the illicit trade of tobacco products: a policy initiated by the World Health Organisation which is working to adopt a Framework Agreement for the fight against smoking. The Conference for Parties to the WHO Framework Agreement, to be held in Durban from 17 to 21 November 2008, will represent a significant step forward in the negotiations for an ambitious protocol which should be signed between now and 2010.

Finally, the French presidency will initiate a brainstorming process on the harmonisation of control methodologies, in order to ensure the fair treatment of operators during import customs clearance operations, and guarantee equivalent levels of efficiency on the part of European customs authorities, with particular regard to conformity inspections for industrial products.

A secure Europe

The organisation of, or participation in, joint customs operations at the level of all EU Member States or at the regional level in order to combat problems such as serious or organised cross-border crime, shall be one of the main thrusts of the French presidency's customs programme.

The operations carried out in the framework of CARIN (Camden Asset Recovery Interagency Network), which is dedicated to the identification and seizure of illicit assets, will help to develop international cooperation and guarantee the efficiency of asset-based sanctions. The General Assembly and the meetings of two working groups will be organised in France between September and November, in coordination with the police.

In general, France is committed to strengthening cooperation with the police in this area and will actively participate in working groups organised at the European level.