

Brussels, 17 June 2008

40 years of Customs Union: Commissioner Kovács joins with the European Parliament to celebrate custom's role in protecting citizens and facilitating trade

On 1 July 2008, the European Customs Union will celebrate its fortieth anniversary. In light of this milestone, EU Taxation and Customs Commissioner László Kovács was in Strasbourg today to participate in the European Parliament's session on 40 years of Customs Union. Over the past 4 decades, customs have played a crucial role in the development of the European Community: without efficient customs control at the EU's external borders, the Single Market would never have been possible. Customs not only facilitate trade and ensure the protection of European industry but they prevent a flood of unsafe or counterfeit goods, which can endanger citizens' health and safety, from entering the EU. Customs also keep close control of the movement of chemicals which can be misused and transformed into harmful drugs and prevent illegal imports of animals which are internationally protected animals and or could introduce disease.

László Kovács, EU Commissioner for Taxation and Customs said:

"I am very proud of what European Customs achieve – both in terms of protecting people and facilitating trade – and proud of how far it has come in 40 years. Thanks to the effective customs controls at the EU's external borders, the Union's 500 million citizens can rely on the quality and safety of the products that are on the European market. The Commission is continually working to make EU customs work faster and better, and has been totally committed to modernising customs processes so that they are fit to face the challenges of the 21st century. I am very happy that the European Parliament recognises the important role of customs and, with its Resolution today, fully supports our aim to implement a common European Customs Strategy beyond 2013."

Meeting the challenges of the 21st century

In 2007, 183 million customs declarations were processed, equivalent to around 6 customs declarations every second. Over 43,000 cases of fake goods were seized at the EU's external border last year and 43% of all unsafe product notifications which were made to market surveillance authorities are initiated by Customs.

Taking into account such statistics, and the ever increasing challenges posed by the globalised market place, the Commission works hard to ensure that the EU customs processes are fit to face the challenges of the 21st century.

The Modernised Community Customs Code, which was adopted by Council and Parliament in February 2008 (see [MEMO/08/101](#)) will simplify legislation and streamline customs procedures to the benefit of both consumers and traders. It introduces the electronic exchange of declarations, documents and information to allow speedier and more efficient information exchange and promotes the concept of "centralised clearance" amongst other things.

Celebrating a milestone

- To mark the 40th anniversary of European Customs Union, a number of activities have been organised by the Commission: A website has been set up to highlight the important but often invisible role of the Customs Union in protecting citizens and facilitating trade. On this site, it is possible to find clear and detailed information on EU customs today and through the years, a calendar of all activities planned for the anniversary at both EU and national level and interesting images and info-clips related to customs: http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/40customs/index_en.htm
- Commissioner Kovács took part in a Customs Action week from 9-12 June, visiting customs at the port of Rotterdam, Frankfurt airport and at Röszke, which is the land border between Hungary and Serbia. Video footage of each of these trips is available on the Customs Anniversary website (see [MEX 08/0609](#)).
- On 19 June, the European Parliament will adopt a Resolution on Customs Union. Commissioner Kovacs welcomed this in advance today at a press conference, together with Ms Mc Carthy, Chairwoman of the European Parliament's Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee (IMCO).
- On 4 July, the French Presidency will host an event in Bercy (France) to celebrate the anniversary of the Customs Union, at which Commissioner Kovács will speak.
- Across the EU, Member States are organising a series of events to celebrate the anniversary of Customs Union, including Open Days, exhibitions, sporting events, parades and conferences. The full list of activities being carried out at national level can be found in the calendar on the Customs Anniversary website.
- Travellers will be informed about the work of EU customs throughout the summer through a series of leaflets, postcards and posters, which the Commission is disseminating together with the Member States and Commission Representations and Delegations.

Further information on the European Customs Union, see:

http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/index_en.htm