

A closer look at customs:

smart laboratories can boost revenues and counter crime

The ability of customs authorities to carry out checks is only as good as their equipment and management skills, and countries aiming to join the EU must meet very high standards in customs control. That is why the EU has helped Croatia to develop its customs laboratory in the run-up to the country's accession in 2013

The project has provided new equipment and training in new analytical methods. And just as important, the assistance also covered management policies, and delivered training programmes and enhanced working methods.

MAXIMISING CUSTOMS REVENUE

If a customs service is to be effective in maximising the collection of customs duties and taxes, it must be able to establish precisely the nature of goods in transit. Without this, customs officials cannot verify the origin or real value of goods, and cannot classify them accurately for tariff charges and excise duties. Similarly, it needs sharp detection skills to stop illegal traffic, prevent customs evasion, and spot attempts at obtaining unjustified export refunds.

So the EU funded a major upgrade to the laboratories infrastructure. It paid for new specialised equipment – sophisticated analytical instruments like gas and liquid chromatography, distillers, spectrometers, ultrasonic cleaners, centrifuges, ovens – and it provided training for laboratory staff in using it.

NEW PROCEDURES

But that is only part of the story. An extensive management upgrade was included in the project, embracing the 3,000 customs service staff at the 175

border crossing posts and nearly 100 other offices across the country.

A quality management system was introduced, with new working methods for extraction of samples, training for customs officers in handling, labelling, storing and despatching samples, and safety precautions for handling hazardous substances such as chemicals and waste. And it ensured close coordination in the central customs laboratory in Zagreb. Cooperation and exchange of information with related institutions at national and EU level also became a routine practice.

Before the EU stepped in with this project, the laboratory service was finding it difficult to keep up with the 6,000 samples a year which had to be identified for tariff classification. Lack of equipment and staff meant that it had to outsource much of the work – on metal, wheat, caffeine or petrol products – to other institutions, which could establish quality and safety, but were not qualified to conduct tariff classification.

RELIABLE SERVICE

Now Croatia is in a position to conduct most of the tests itself, and to deliver results based on refined



Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA)

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methodologies in line with international practice. The customs service can report reliably on imported and exported goods, and provide correctly collected evidence in pursuit of offences. This means increased efficiency, higher revenue collection, more and better analyses, and faster processing – so there is easier passage for legitimate goods, and better detection of customs crime.

Longer term, the investment will bring further benefits, because it has helped to prepare Croatia for the new

administrative tasks that now fall on its customs authorities – including, in particular, enforcing the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, with its strict rules on cross-border trade. For the EU as a whole it is vital that Croatia can meet its customs responsibilities fully, because Croatia's customs service is now in charge of the EU's new – and long – external border with Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro.

PROJECT DETAILS –

Development of Customs Laboratory

Partners:

Croatian Customs Administration at
the Ministry of Finance

Total cost in €:

1,530,723.72

EU Contribution in €:

1,273,042.78

Implementation:

Component “Procurement of Equipment”: June 2008 – June 2011
Component “Development of the Customs Laboratory”: March 2011
– June 2012

Results:

Higher quality and more extensive testing, better sampling, greater coordination throughout the customs service, higher customs revenues, better detection rates

Techniques:

Procurement of equipment, training,
new management and
working methods

