Resolution on the fortieth anniversary of the Customs Union

2008/2582(RSP) - 19/06/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 16 June 2008, the European Parliament adopted, by 545 votes to 23 with 8 abstentions, a resolution tabled by the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection on the 40th anniversary of the Customs Union. Parliament considers that 40 years of the Customs Union represents a substantial achievement and provided benefits for EU business and citizens. The measures taken by the customs authorities are aimed at protecting the financial interests of the EU and its Member States, and at protecting the EU against unfair and unlawful commercial practices. The measures are also aimed at guaranteeing the security of the EU and its residents while protecting the environment, and at maintaining a fair balance between the need to conduct customs controls and to facilitate legitimate trade with a view to improving European competitiveness. Parliament congratulates customs officials on their effective work to combat counterfeiting, which led to the seizure of 79 million counterfeit and pirated articles relating to 43 000 cases recorded in 2007.

Closer cooperation: Members consider that cooperation is essential to ensure the effectiveness of EU customs services in the face of the many threats which they have to combat. They call on the Member States to reinforce administrative cooperation between their customs authorities and between customs and other governmental agencies, such as veterinary authorities and bodies responsible for product safety, in order to ensure that the administration of the external borders of the EU is a joint responsibility, and to guarantee the security and safety of EU citizens. The Commission is asked to enhance cooperation with trading partners via customs cooperation programmes in order to facilitate trade for reliable traders and to ensure supply chain security. International cooperation in the framework of international organisations (World Trade Organisation and World Customs Organisation) and with third countries in the area of customs must be reinforced. This is aimed at achieving more effective customs control and promoting EU standards, while allowing trade to benefit the EU and its trading partners. It will enable, in particular, joint operations and pilot projects to be set up to strengthen cooperation on the ground between EU and third-country customs officials.

Security issues: Parliament calls on Member States to strengthen the role of customs in fighting the particular dangers inherent in fake products, in particular fake medicines and toys. The Commission is asked to maintain its opposition to the recent US legislation on 100% scanning of maritime container cargo in foreign ports. It has not been demonstrated that this unilateral decision by the US is needed and is effective in economic and security terms. Members consider that Regulation (EC) No 648/2005 amending Council Regulation (EEC) No 2913/92 establishing the Community Customs Code ('security amendment') already meets the expectations of the US authorities as regards security control in Europe.

Enhancing efficiency in the Internal Market: Parliament welcomes the electronic customs proposal, already approved by Parliament, and the establishment of a European customs laboratories' network with a view to uniform interpretation of new EU technical standards. This modernisation will make it possible to step up the fight against dangerous products and to strengthen consumer protection. Member States are asked to develop new working methods and technology in a harmonised way and to ensure a coordinated implementation of customs legislation. They must also provide customs authorities with sufficient resources and (technological and human) investment to enable them to carry out their tasks, implement new paperless systems and train their staff. In addition, Member States should ensure a high level of cooperation between customs authorities and the business community in order to enhance compliance and

reduce red tape, in particular by using a more risk-management oriented approach and developing 'Single Window/One Stop Shop' services.

Parliament calls on the Commission to pay particular attention to the problems encountered by small and medium-sized enterprises, specifically by facilitating the process of adapting their IT systems to those employed by customs administrations, at the lowest possible cost, and by simplifying the procedures for securing 'authorised economic operator' status. Lastly, the Commission is asked to monitor closely the uniform application of customs legislation in the Member States and to report back to Parliament