Customs 2002: action programme 1996-2002 in the Community

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PURPOSE : to present the report from the Commission on the implementation of the Customs 2002 programme (1998-2002). CONTENT : Customs 2002 covers two types of project: "joint" actions and computer applications. I) The first part of the report concerns joint actions, i.e. those aspects of cooperation that are not directly related to information technology: exchanges of officials, project groups, seminars, benchmarking and training. It looks at the joint actions carried out over the last three years of Customs 2002 (2000, 2001, 2002) for a total cost of EUR 6.75 million, since those carried out earlier are covered in the 2001 interim report. Exchanges of officials (EUR 2.55 Million, 38% of the total) provided opportunities for contacts to be established between Community and national administrations. During 2000 to 2002 inclusive, approximately 1400 exchanges were organised, with some major events such as the exchange fairs held in Brussels, Vienna and Larnaca. The exchanges have generally been found to be quite useful; improvements could be made in terms of monitoring and the selection of subjects and candidates. The applicant countries have recently been included under this instrument. Participants in the 38 project groups (EUR 2.02 million, 30% of the total) found them highly satisfactory. The improvements proposed concern the preparation of meetings, the choice of subjects and more pooling of information. The 29 seminars (EUR 1.52 million, 23% of the total) organised during the period under consideration were generally well appreciated. Possible improvements here, too, would concern the selection of participants, preparation and follow-up. The 18 benchmarking operations, introduced relatively recently, were organised by the Member States for a cost of EUR 0.375 million, or 5.4% of the total. The participants were generally fairly satisfied with the results, but suggested certain improvements, particularly as regards preparation. Most of the participants in the training measures (EUR 0.251 million, 3.7% of the total) found them useful. Some participants felt that a specific institutional context could enhance the result of future training measures. The different aspects of the programme interested the national administrations, who were, by and large, satisfied with the course and results of the operations. In the participants' opinion, the improvements to be made relate above all to an even more finely tuned selection of subjects and participants. The dissemination of the results could be improved. II) The second part presents the results and impact of the different computer applications and the organisational and management tools of the IT projects. A total of EUR 84 million was committed to the IT side of Customs 2002. Since the computerised systems have Community and national components, Customs 2002 only finances the Community component. The development and deployment of the CCN/CSI communication network required an investment of EUR 23 million, of which half was financed by Customs 2002 and the other half by Fiscalis. The NCTS application represents 51% of the Customs 2002 IT budget (including half of the CCN/CSI expenditure and the management tools). The NCTS gave rise to considerable costs, since both development and deployment were involved. Most of the othercustoms applications were already in operation before the beginning of the programme. The "tariff" applications account for 15% of the total budget (those requiring most work were TARIC, TQS, EBTI, ISPP and SMS). AFIS/ SID and SIGL account for 13% and 5% respectively of the total budget. Lastly, the report states that overall, Customs 2002 has helped enhance cooperation both among Member States and between Member States and the Commission. In addition, it has prepared the way for the integration of future Member States' administrations into the management of Community customs. Because of the direct involvement of national and EU administrations in this type of programme, the credibility of evaluations would be improved if they could be based on the work of independent consultants. The positive effects of the programme must not let the Commission lose sight of the scale of the objectives and the variety of national customs cultures and situations. The objective of ensuring that Member States' customs administrations "work together as one" justifies intensifying all efforts. This is all the more necessary in view of the coming accession of new Member States and the changes to the external borders of the EU that this will bring with it. To ensure that our common external borders are well managed, facilitating

cross-border traffic while controlling risks, it may be necessary to engage in more coordination between the various services concerned and renewed cooperation with our neighbours. The successors to Customs 2002 should be capable of taking such developments into account.