

Second High-Level Conference of Customs Directors General

of the Western Balkans and EU Member States

Customs Partnership for a Connected Europe

Deepening CEFTA–EU Customs Cooperation for Seamless Connectivity

Tirana 12 June 2025

Final Statement

The Albanian Customs Administration, Agenzia delle Dogane e dei Monopoli, the CEFTA Secretariat, the SEED+ Project, and the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat, organized the Second High-Level Meeting of Customs Directors General of the Western Balkans and EU Member States.

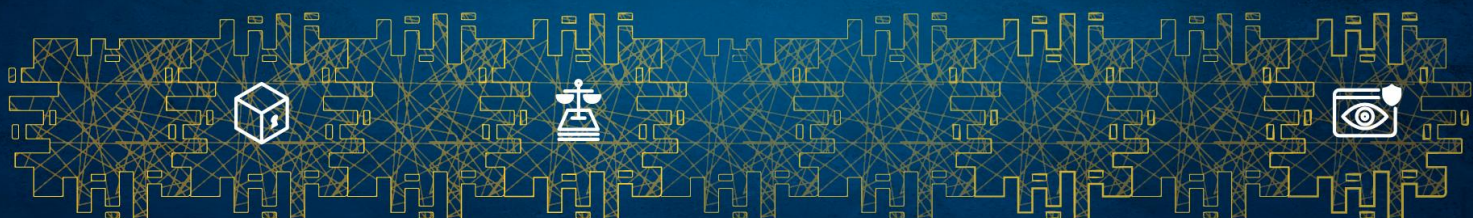
The Customs Directors General of the Western Balkan partners and EU Member States, together with representatives of the European Commission and relevant regional and international institutions, convened for a high-level meeting to reaffirm their commitment to deepening customs cooperation in support of the European Union enlargement process.

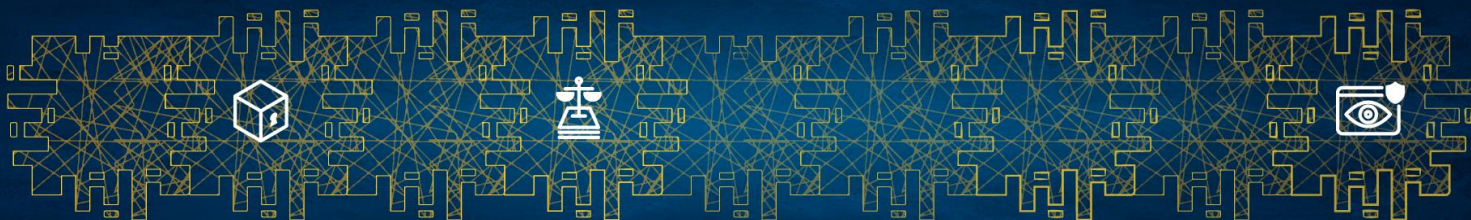
In the wake of reinforced collaboration in Europe, as recently endorsed during the European Political Committee held in Tirana on 16 May 2025, the inclusion of the Western Balkans to the European Union is a geopolitical investment of EU and that joining the European Union is not only about prosperity, but also about values.

The meeting underscored the crucial role of Customs in facilitating trade, ensuring security, and promoting economic integration across CEFTA. Participants welcomed the ongoing efforts of the Western Balkan administrations to align their customs policies and practices with the EU acquis and praised the progress made in digitalization, risk management, and agencies cooperation.

Key conclusions of the conference include:

1. Strengthening Alignment with EU Standards and Customs Processes:





Participants reaffirmed the importance of full harmonization of the Western Balkan customs systems with the Union Customs Code and related regulations as a cornerstone of the accession process. They committed to intensifying efforts toward the modernization and digitalization of customs procedures and the adoption of best practices in line with EU standards. This is an essential part of the enlargement preparations and a requirement to achieve smooth integration into the EU Customs Union.

2. Enhancing Regional Cooperation:

The Directors General emphasized the value of mutual cooperation within the CEFTA and with EU Member States. They strive to deepen information sharing in accordance with their respective rules, promote joint training initiatives, and further develop interoperable IT systems to ensure smooth customs operations and secure supply chains.

3. Supporting Trade Facilitation and Economic Integration including through fostering inter-agency cooperation and customs-business partnerships:

Recognizing Customs as a key enabler of trade and growth, participants agreed to strengthen efforts to simplify customs procedures for traders, reduce administrative burdens, and enhance the transparency and predictability of the customs environment. This includes shifting to a fully paperless and interoperable customs environment as well as improving information sharing and cooperation between customs and other relevant institutions. Participants see a need for enhanced cooperation and interaction with the business community by encouraging and educating traders towards compliance. Trusted traders providing full transparency to customs should benefit from faster customs processing, reduced inspections, and other simplifications.

4. Capacity Building and Technical Assistance:

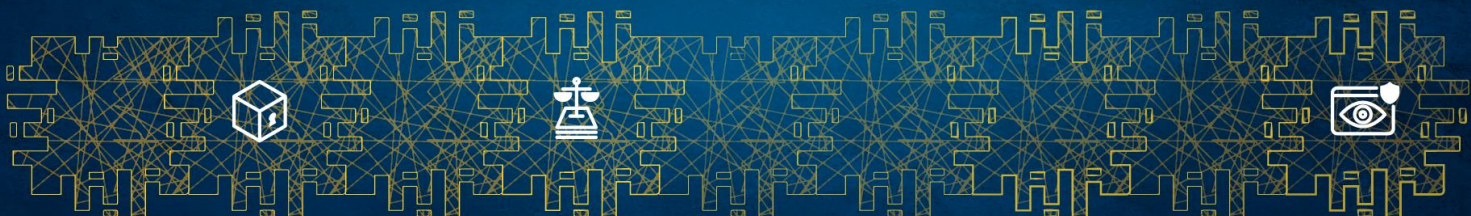
Continued support for capacity-building programs was acknowledged as essential for sustainable reform. The European Commission and EU Member States expressed readiness to provide technical assistance and expertise to help Western Balkan partners implement reforms effectively. Participation of Western Balkan partners in EU Programs such as the Customs Program should be encouraged to foster integration into the EU customs community.

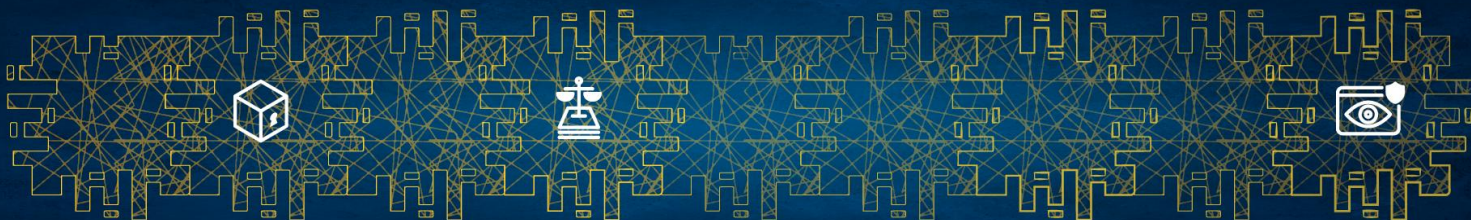
5. Sustainability and Future Engagement:

Participants encouraged the Council of the European Union to grant the Commission a mandate to review the customs section of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, on the one part, and the Western Balkan partners, on the other, signed in Luxembourg on 29 April 2008. In particular, this review could update the Agreement to reflect the evolving political and economic framework, marked by increasing integration between EU and Western Balkan markets and the urgent need to facilitate and secure the border-crossing processes, including through enabling enhanced exchange of information and mutual recognition of authorized traders and customs controls.

6. Advancing Green and Blue Lanes Between the Western Balkans and the EU:

Participants reaffirmed their support for the Green and Blue Lanes initiative, developed by the CEFTA Secretariat, the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat (TCT), and the European Commission,





with SEED+ providing technical support. Initially a crisis-response tool, it has become a strategic platform to reduce waiting times, streamline procedures, and enhance supply chain resilience. They called for its expansion to all key crossing points between CEFTA Parties and neighboring EU Member States, along with efforts to improve infrastructure and coordination. Real-time data exchange through SEED+ and stronger cooperation among customs administrations remain key to maximizing its impact.

7. Advancing AEO Recognition:

Furthermore, participants expressed support for efforts aimed at enabling mutual recognition of Authorized Economic Operators (AEOs) between CEFTA and the EU. They recognized this as a strategic step toward facilitating trusted trade partnerships, reducing controls for low-risk traders, and strengthening the integrity of the regional supply chain.

