



ΑΑΔΕ
Independent Authority
for Public Revenue (IAPR)



CEFTA
Central European Free Trade Agreement



Third High-Level Conference of Customs Directors General of the Western Balkans and EU Member States

Bridging Markets, Aligning Standards: Green Lanes as a Pillar of Enhanced Integration into the EU Single Market

Athens, 11 June 2026

Final Statement

The Independent Authority for Public Revenue of the Hellenic Republic, the CEFTA Secretariat through the SEED+ Action, and the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat jointly organised the Third High-Level Conference of Customs Directors General of the Western Balkans and EU Member States.

The Customs Directors General of the Western Balkans and EU Member States, together with representatives of the European Commission, the business community, and relevant regional and international organisations, convened in Athens to reaffirm their shared commitment to strengthening customs cooperation as a strategic component of the EU enlargement process and possible gradual integration into the EU Single Market.

Building on the momentum established through the previous high-level meetings in Budapest and Tirana, participants noted that the Athens Conference, titled *Bridging Markets, Aligning Standards: Green Lanes as a Pillar of the Enhanced Integration into the EU Single Market*, marked an important transition from the political endorsement of Green Lanes towards their broader operationalisation and implementation between CEFTA Parties and neighbouring EU Member States.

Participants highlighted that strengthened interoperability between customs systems, increased use of real-time electronic exchange of data, coordinated risk management, and enhanced cooperation among agencies at crossings are becoming central elements for ensuring secure, resilient, and predictable trade flows between CEFTA and the European Union, particularly in the context of the ongoing reform of the Union Customs Code.

The Conference further reaffirmed the importance of customs administrations as key institutional actors in supporting connectivity, supply chain resilience, supporting economic integration, and respective gradual regulatory convergence with the European Union.

Key conclusions of the Conference include:

- 1. Strengthening Alignment with EU Standards and Customs Processes:**
Participants reaffirmed the importance of continued alignment of CEFTA customs administrations with the Union Customs Code and related EU legislation as a fundamental element of the accession process regarding customs matters. They emphasized the need to accelerate the modernization, digitalization, and interoperability of customs procedures, while promoting implementation of best practices and paperless customs solutions in line with EU standards. The CEFTA customs administrations were advised to familiarize with the EU customs reform and the future regulatory, administrative and IT related changes.
- 2. Enhancing Regional Cooperation and Interoperability:**
The Directors General stressed the importance of deepening operational cooperation within CEFTA and with EU Member States through enhanced exchange of information, coordinated risk management, joint training activities, and interoperable IT systems. Participants highlighted the growing role of electronic data exchange and system interconnectivity in facilitating secure and efficient customs operations across the region.
- 3. Supporting Trade Facilitation, Connectivity, and Customs-Business Partnerships:**
Recognizing customs administrations as important facilitators of trade and economic growth, participants committed to further simplifying customs procedures, reducing administrative burdens, and improving transparency and predictability for economic operators. Participants also underlined the importance of stronger engagement with the business community, encouraging compliant and transparent trade practices while enabling trusted traders to benefit from simplified procedures and reduced controls.
- 4. Advancing Capacity Building and Institutional Resilience:**
Continued support for capacity-building and technical assistance programmes was recognised as essential for sustainable reform and effective implementation of customs modernization efforts. Participants welcomed the continued support provided by the European Commission, EU Member States, EUCAB, and other partners, including through increased participation of Western Balkan partners in relevant EU programmes and initiatives.
- 5. Supporting Future Regulatory and Operational Integration:**
Participants underlined the importance of continuing efforts towards strengthening the legal and operational framework for enhanced customs cooperation between CEFTA and the European Union. In this regard, they stressed the importance of facilitating secure exchange of information, interoperability of systems, coordinated controls, and

enhanced trusted trader cooperation as important elements of gradual integration into the EU customs environment.

6. **Advancing Green and Blue Lanes Between the Western Balkans and the EU:**
Participants reaffirmed their strong support for the Green and Blue Lanes initiative, jointly advanced by the CEFTA Secretariat and the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat in cooperation with the European Commission, with technical support provided through SEED+. Participants underlined the critical role of SEED+ in supporting the implementation of the Green Lanes and the further expansion of functionalities, particularly in the area of risk management. They welcomed the continued expansion and implementation of Memoranda of Understanding for electronic exchange of data. Participants emphasized that effective implementation of Green and Blue Lanes requires continued investments in infrastructure, interoperability, digitalisation, coordinated procedures at crossings, and real-time exchange of data among customs administrations and other competent authorities. Participants also welcomed the launch of the first Green Lanes call for proposals under the Safe and Sustainable Transport Programme (SSTP) by the World Bank, as well as the mobilisation of CONNECTA 2.0 technical assistance by the European Commission, aimed at supporting concrete infrastructure and connectivity projects at priority crossing points.

7. **Advancing Trusted Trader Partnerships and AEO Recognition:**
Participants expressed support for further advancing cooperation on Authorized Economic Operators (AEOs) between CEFTA and the European Union. They recognised trusted trader partnerships as an important instrument for facilitating legitimate trade, reducing controls for low-risk operators, strengthening supply chain security, and supporting the gradual integration of the Western Balkans into the EU customs framework and the EU Single Market.