EUCAB

EUROPEAN UNION CUSTOMS ALLIANCE
FOR BORDERS EXPERT TEAM









EUCAB FLASH

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EDITORIAL

Dear colleagues,

I am pleased to welcome you to the third edition of the EUCAB Steering Committee Flash. The articles within these pages highlight the excellent work EUCAB members are doing to build resilience and capacity within their administrations and bring together perspectives from across our customs community.

With Ireland holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU, I am conscious of our role in bringing Member States together, facilitating dialogue and building consensus. Likewise, EUCAB serves as a platform for customs administrations to convene, share expertise and align best practices.

Given the global nature of the illicit smuggling trade and the increasingly inventive methods used by those involved, international cooperation is vital to ensure our administrations remain at the forefront of anti-smuggling enforcement.

Such cooperation involves sharing knowledge and best practices and demonstrating different working methods. Initiatives in this space allow operational staff to develop expertise in specialised areas and gain an understanding of challenges faced across the customs community. Port visits are one such valuable channel of cooperation, enabling administrations to see first-hand the volume and complexity of consignments managed in different jurisdictions.

Collaboration is also essential in ensuring customs compliance and the overall safety of goods entering the EU — particularly given the expansion of e-commerce and the changes being introduced under the EU Customs Reform package.

As well, diagnostic missions are an effective tool for identifying where systems and processes are working well and where improvement is possible, providing a platform for administrations to enhance their security, compliance and risk management with a view to facilitating legitimate trade as efficiently as possible.

My thanks to all contributors to this edition, and to EUCAB members for their continued work towards a smarter and more resilient Customs Union.



Sincerely,

Ruth Kennedy
Revenue Commissioner and Director General of Irish Customs
Chair of the EUCAB Steering Committee
Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU



MARTIN REUTER

Head of European Union
Customs Alliance for Borders

A bridging force towards a new era for European Union customs

Nearly 70 years after the establishment of the Customs Union, EU customs are ready to take an equally decisive step towards the next chapter: the new UCC will soon be a reality, creating a future defined by simpler procedures, use of advanced data and technologies, and enhanced cooperation. A future aimed at a more cohesive Europe and more integrated customs administrations, where risks are shared and benefits are enjoyed by all.

However, the new EU customs system will not be fully operational in the near term, with the Data Hub expected to be up and running for e-commerce operations only in 2028. As for EUCA, which will be responsible for guiding the national authorities through the complexity of the modern international customs environment, it will require time to consolidate its organisation, staffing, and operational capacity.

In the meantime, it will be important to guarantee cooperation among EU customs authorities to face common challenges at the Union's external borders. To name a few: the exponential surge in low-value e-commerce shipments, large-scale transnational smuggling of illicit drugs and weapons, the evasion of sanctions, environmental crimes, new modus operandi by criminal organisations.

A shared vision of the Customs Union's future

EUCAB was officially launched in February 2025 as an operational framework, aligning with the UCC reform principles. It is the first initiative to have brought all 27 EU customs authorities together to enhance cooperation towards a more efficient Customs Union.

Six working units, thirteen expert networks, numerous meetings, three diagnostics tools already created, and more than 400 customs customs officers involved… these are just some of the numbers which tell part of EUCAB's story.

In fact, thanks to its continued activity, EUCAB has fostered a structured collaboration by providing a platform for exchange, coordination, and joint development of knowledge and communication tools, strengthening operational convergence and ensuring greater coherence in the implementation of EU customs policies. More importantly: EUCAB has supported a shared vision of the Customs Union's future.

Not only has EUCAB developed an operational scheme, but it has also built a community of professionals united by the same goals: protect the financial and economic interests of the Union and its Member states, ensure safety and security within the EU, safeguard the Union from unfair and illegal trade, while facilitating legitimate business activity. These professionals can now share experiences and best practices (gained through EUCAB) to their national peers, advocating for a harmonised approach to customs operations. This is meaningful, potentially impactful, and represents the true added value of the initiative.

As a confirmation of the interest that EUCAB managed to spark in customs officers, feedback indicates a high level of satisfaction: when surveyed, many experts involved in EUCAB's networks recognised the relevance of the activities for their work and were satisfied with the preparation and organisation of their tasks. Furthermore, the operational exchange was considered "particularly beneficial" by the respondents.

In a time of change, EUCAB's bridging function is essential. The success of the EU Customs reform will not depend solely on the legislative framework, but on the capacity of Member States to implement it coherently and collaboratively.

Set up for success: cooperation, innovation, common knowledge

With all this in mind, it is time to think of what lies ahead. EUCAB's vision of the future is clear: it must be a time when all customs authorities cooperate intensively, innovate relentlessly, continue to gain knowledge from each other; when customs are more resilient and ready to effectively address the threats of the modern world; but above all, a future where European customs move in the same direction and communicate the value of their work with a single voice. Because together we are stronger.

To get there, much work still needs to be done. EUCAB has been focusing on those areas that will shape the EU customs system of tomorrow: risk management, training, procurement and equipment, innovation, as well as integrity and resilience. To ensure a more effective EU customs framework, continued joint investment in these domains will be essential.

But EUCAB still needs some time to achieve this.

Continuing EUCAB is therefore not simply about maintaining an existing initiative—it is about preserving and reinforcing a strategic asset. A mechanism that reinforces cooperation, builds resilience, and helps ensure that European customs administrations can respond effectively to both current and future challenges.

For the good of the European Union, for the good of Europeans.

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International Customs Cooperation in Action: Netherlands Customs' Fight Against Organised Crime in Latin America

International customs cooperation has become a cornerstone in the fight against transnational organised crime. Dutch Customs is actively strengthening its global operational footprint through an expanding network of customs attachés stationed across Latin America and the Caribbean. Working closely with partner authorities, these experts contribute directly to upstream disruption strategies, improved intelligence sharing, and increased interdiction capacity along key trafficking routes.

Deputy Director General of Dutch Customs, **Mechteld Fletcher**, highlights that success in combating drug trafficking increasingly depends on early intervention in countries of origin and transit, rather than relying on enforcement at EU borders alone.

From Border Control to Upstream Disruption

Customs authorities have traditionally acted as gatekeepers at the EU's external borders. However, the globalisation of trade and the increasing sophistication of criminal networks have required a profound strategic shift. In response to these challenges, Dutch Customs now applies an innovative **"upstream disruption"** approach: intercepting illicit flows as early as possible-specifically at production, storage, or transit stages far outside Europe.

The Customs Attaché Network

A key instrument in executing this upstream strategy is the Dutch Customs attaché network, deployed through Dutch embassies worldwide, with a strong operational focus on Latin America and the Caribbean. These attachés operate directly at the complex intersection of diplomacy, law enforcement, and intelligence.

Beyond technical cooperation, long-term trust-building remains the absolute foundation of the network. The attachés operate in highly complex environments where resource constraints and corruption risks may be present. In these settings, deep personal engagement, mutual respect, and professional credibility are critical to maintaining secure, functional information-sharing channels.

> *Intervening earlier in the chain is significantly more effective: stopping shipments in the region prevents them from ever reaching European ports, reducing risk and operational pressure at the border.*
>
> *- MECHTELD FLETCHER*



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF DUTCH CUSTOMS

Expanding Presence Across High-Risk Routes

Because criminal organisations are notoriously agile and quick to shift their routing when enforcement pressure intensifies, the attaché network must remain equally dynamic. Dutch Customs currently maintains approximately **10 attaché positions** in the Latin American and Caribbean region, with further strategic expansion under active consideration.

Recent operational developments highlight this expansion:

- **Suriname:** A newly appointed attaché in Suriname carrying a coordinating regional mandate.
- **Peru:** A heavily strengthened operational presence.
- **West Africa:** An ongoing strategic assessment for a potential deployment to reflect the changing evolution of global trafficking routes.

This distributed network serves as an early warning system, enabling customs authorities to detect shifts in smuggling patterns early and respond effectively to route displacement strategies.

Cooperation with Suriname: A Model for Structured Engagement

A notable example of this strengthened bilateral cooperation in action is the partnership with Suriname, which was formalised through a landmark **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** signed in 2024. This agreement establishes a comprehensive framework that enables:

- Structured and legally safeguarded information exchange.
- Joint operational approaches to tackling cross-border crime.
- Capacity-building initiatives tailored strictly to local operational needs.

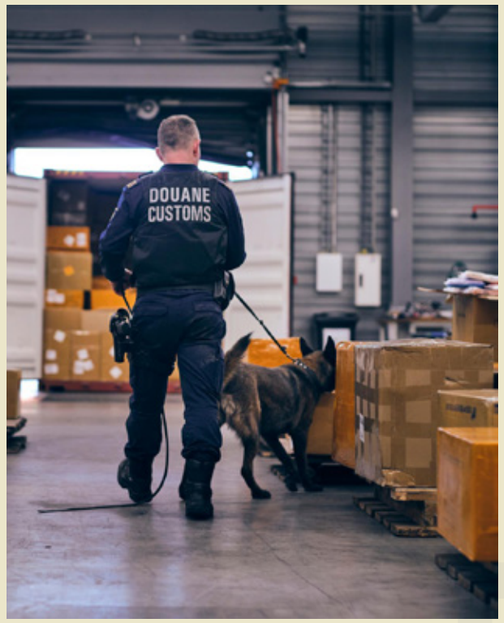
The tangible results of this structured engagement are already highly visible on the ground. The joint efforts have led to significantly improved detection rates and increased seizures at key maritime ports and airports, heavily supported by enhanced analytical risk-profiling capacity and targeted training programmes.

Capacity Building in Practice: Technology, Training, and K9 Units

Bilateral operational cooperation is systematically complemented by concrete technical support measures designed to turn policy into field-level capability. These practical initiatives include:

- **Advanced Technical Training:** Comprehensive training programmes focused on the optimal use and image interpretation of high-tech scanning equipment in major ports.
- **Expert Deployments:** Deliberate positioning of data and profiling experts to significantly strengthen local analytical capabilities.
- **K9 Development:** The robust development of local canine detection units, including the specialized on-site training of both handlers and dogs.

These combined initiatives enhance the ability of partner administrations to identify deeply concealed shipments and respond with rapid, decisive interventions when suspicious consignments are flagged.



Adapting to Route Displacement: The West Africa Nexus

As enforcement pressure successfully increases across traditional maritime corridors, trafficking networks adapt with corporate-like agility. Dutch Customs has observed a growing trend of cocaine shipments being deliberately rerouted via West Africa, where they are broken down before entering Europe in smaller, fragmented consignments to evade detection.

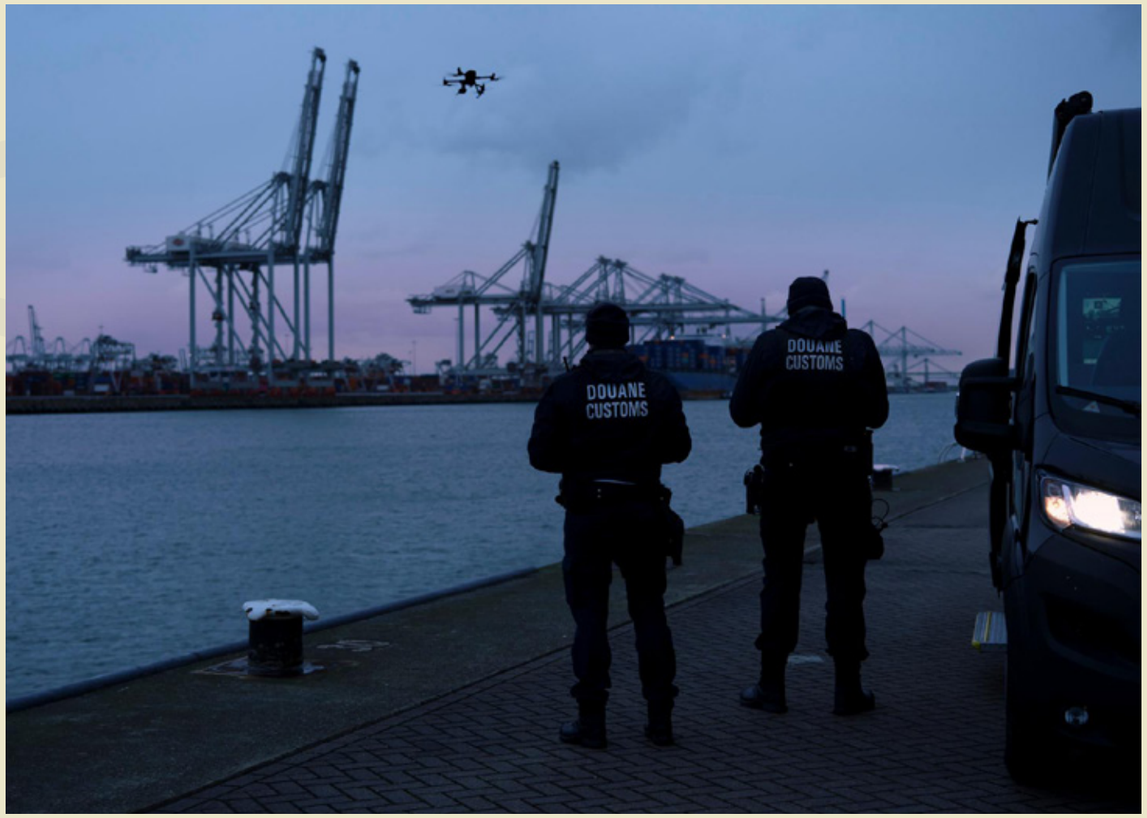
Recent operational successes perfectly illustrate the immense value of this intelligence-led, networked approach. A prime example includes the interception of a large cocaine shipment concealed within a dense cargo of wood in the **Port of Amsterdam**. Discovered through a combination of upstream risk analysis, advanced scanning technology, and K9 units working in close coordination with national enforcement partners, this case demonstrates how upstream intelligence translates directly into concrete operational outcomes within the EU.

Multilateral Cooperation

The targeted bilateral efforts of Dutch Customs are structurally reinforced through active participation in broader, multilateral cooperation frameworks. These platforms integrate intelligence from customs, police, and naval authorities across multiple jurisdictions, enabling a comprehensive operational picture and highly coordinated interdiction strategies. Key networks include:

- **EU-Level coordination mechanisms**
- **The Maritime analysis and Operations Centre - Narcotics (MAOC-N)**
- **Deepened cooperation with key European partner agencies such as Europol and Frontex**

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF DUTCH CUSTOMS



Attachés Abroad

Within the framework of EUCAB cooperation, customs attachés deployed abroad represent a vital strategic asset for the wider European Union customs community. Their operational roles align seamlessly with core EUCAB priorities:

- **Enhancing cross-border intelligence exchange** to safeguard external borders.
- **Strengthening operational cooperation** with critical third countries.
- **Supporting capacity building** in high-priority regional corridors.
- **Improving the early detection** of trafficking routes affecting the EU Customs Union.

The targeted expansion of attaché networks in Latin America, the Caribbean, and potentially West Africa reflects a broader EU trend toward the externalisation of risk analysis and upstream enforcement cooperation.

Cooperation as a Force Multiplier

EUCAB members continue to benefit daily from shared situational awareness and highly coordinated engagement strategies, heavily reinforcing our collective ability to respond to evolving hybrid threats.

The operational experience of Dutch Customs demonstrates conclusively that successfully combating modern organised crime requires far more than localized, national border gating. It depends entirely on sustained international partnerships, deep trust-based cooperation, and intelligence-led operations that span multiple continents.

Diagnostics studies: a valuable tool for a shared approach to customs controls

Protecting EU financial interests, safeguarding the integrity of the Single Market and combatting illegal trafficking are among customs responsibilities. However, tackling cross-border threats is today extremely challenging: the explosion of e-commerce has determined a dramatic growth of trade flows, while organised crime is using increasingly sophisticated methods: new trafficking routes, innovative economic strategies, advanced modus operandi, cutting-edge technologies.

In such a complex scenario, operational excellence is not an option for EU customs, but a necessary requirement if they want to effectively respond to the threats across the Union's land, air and maritime borders.

Here is where diagnostic studies come into play.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF CZECH & FRENCH CUSTOMS

A ready-to-use method

In EUCAB a diagnostic study consists of a peer evaluation aiming to identify operational best practices and areas of improvement, through an objective and data-driven assessment, based on a specific diagnostic tool that has been developed. This is a structured questionnaire designed to provide a comprehensive overview of various dimensions: infrastructure, equipment, customs controls, risk management, training, co-operation and management.

An on-site visit helps directly evaluate the data collected in the diagnostic tool. A final report, with recommendations, is produced and made available to the customs authority.

After every diagnostic study, the Member State is asked for feedback and for more precise information on the actions they will take based on the recommendations given.

In addition, particularly efficient working methods and other best practices are presented to all Member States in a report. Furthermore, structural challenges that have arisen in various Member States are also presented here in anonymized form.

Participation in the diagnostic process is voluntary: the assessment is performed at the request of EU customs authorities and in close cooperation with the relevant national and local customs offices responsible for operations.

We can now delve more deeply into the contexts in which diagnostic studies are applied.

Road and rail: from CELBET to EUCAB

Studies on road and rail border crossing points were launched during CELBET, when 38 diagnostics were conducted and 3353 recommendations were given.

Everything achieved represents a legacy for EUCAB: the methodology and the tools developed back then now serve as a base for all the units' assessments.

As for road and rail border crossing points, it was the Land Border Collaboration Unit that took the baton. This experts' team has so far conducted 10 studies. During the first six diagnostics, a total of 443 recommendations were given and 15 individual best practices identified to be shared with the Member States.

By the end of 2026, the total amount of diagnostic studies is expected to reach 25.

Among the main findings, the Land Border Collaboration Unit found uneven performances in the border crossing points examined, ranging from high level of compliance to improvable performance, to need for corrective measures. To know what can be improved, where and how is a crucial starting point towards harmonised border controls in the EU.

Moreover, to ensure high standards of assessment, the pool of experts in charge of the diagnostic studies on land borders will enjoy specific training.

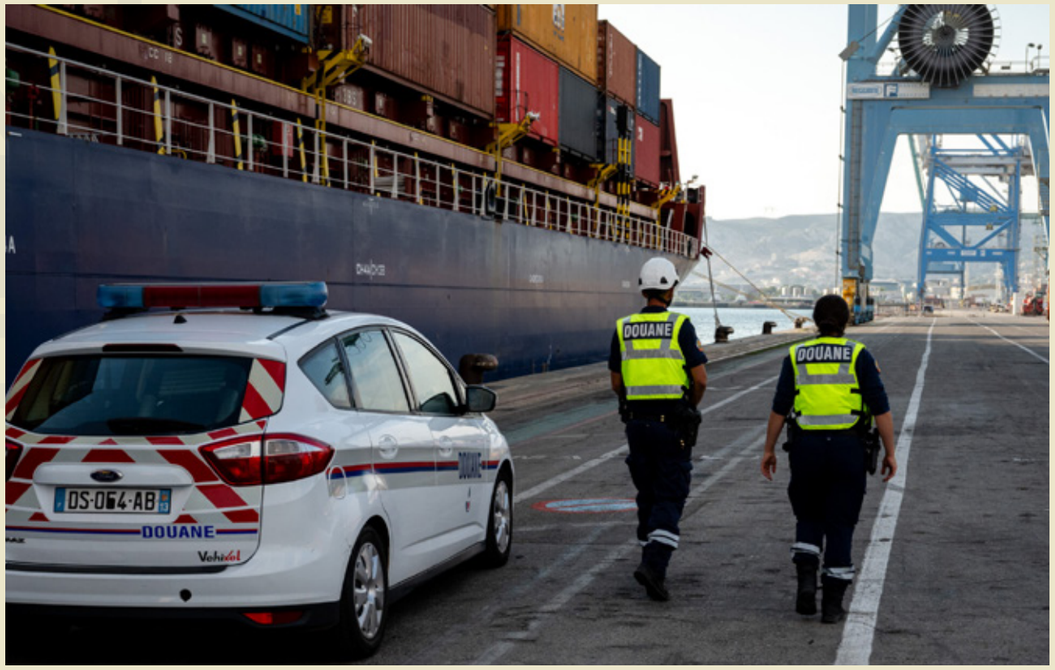
Air & Post: in search of excellence with complexity in background

Huge trade volumes due to the growth of e-commerce represent a heavy burden for airports and postal hubs. That is why customs look for operational improvements in this sector: the Air & Post Unit has already carried out 3 pilot visits and received diagnostic applications from 24 airports or postal hubs in 13 Member States.

The unit has adjusted the methodology launched by the Land Border Collaboration Unit to create a specific diagnostic tool to identify strengths and weaknesses, but also to collect best practices in areas such as passenger controls, cargo, express courier, e-commerce and postal services.

The diagnostic findings presented so far point to five closely connected priorities. Stronger risk management and smarter targeting—supported by better data and alignment across air, express, and postal flows—are essential.

More consistent and efficient controls are needed to reduce bottlenecks, while equipment



must be deployed more strategically and integrated into operations.

Despite high expertise among officers, growing complexity requires continued investment in specialised skills. Finally, cooperation with airports, operators, and authorities remains critical—but still falls short in practice.

Maritime: better controls through modernisation and alignment

Ports are central to global supply chains and are facing growing challenges related to the scale of international trade. At the same time, they remain important entry points for illicit goods and criminal networks. For this reason, the capacity of customs authorities to adapt their operational methods, enhance risk management and develop effective cooperation mechanisms has become a key priority.

In this context, the work being done by the Maritime unit is crucial to support EUCAB's goal of promoting best practices, strengthening cooperation and fostering more harmonised customs performances across the Union.

The team generally comprises 8 to 12 customs officers from the unit, together with national experts designated by the EU Member States.

With around 250 questions, the diagnostic tool is sent one month before the on-site visit. The tool examines the technologies and equipment used in daily operations, as well as the organisation of controls, risk management, training, cooperation with other authorities and the private sector, and the management of human resources.

The on-site visit then takes place over two days, the first intended to complement the information contained in the diagnostic tool through a series of interviews; in the second a physical visit of the port allows the expert team to observe the infrastructure and assess how customs are integrated into its operational environment.

Six EU ports have been reviewed so far, producing over 40 recommendations and identifying five priorities to improve customs operations.

Key among these is the modernisation of risk management through more automated and integrated systems. Strengthening controls is also essential, with better alignment between risk analysis and physical inspections.

The findings also highlight the need to match equipment with operational needs and invest in skills to address increasingly sophisticated threats. They also stress the importance of embedding Customs more firmly in the port ecosystem through closer cooperation and earlier involvement in infrastructure planning.

Mobile Units: Currently on the Move

While the diagnostic tools for the three other operational units are already being used in practice, the mobile unit is set to undergo pilot testing in the summer of 2026.

If Member States express interest, the first diagnostic visits are planned for after the summer break.

Work for the future

By facilitating exchanges between customs experts from different Member States and promoting the identification of operational improvements, diagnostic studies contribute to the development of a shared European approach to customs controls.

Furthermore, diagnostic studies represent both a practical operational instrument and a contribution to the ongoing efforts to consolidate the efficiency and effectiveness of customs controls, making the European Union a safer and more resilient place.

EUCABS'S WAY TOWARDS STRONGER CUSTOMS ADMINISTRATIONS

ROAD &RAIL
- 10 studies
- over 443 reccomendations
- 15 best practices

AIR &POST
- 3 pilot visits
- 24 diagnostics applications from 13 memberstates

MOBILE
- pilot testing
- first diagnostics visits after summer break

MARITIME
- 6 port visits
- over 40 reccomendations



IGOR SOOS

Director of Customs Office
in Prague

Air & Post Cooperation in Practice: Strengthening Customs Work at Prague Airport

As passenger and cargo traffic continue to grow across Europe's air transport network, customs authorities are under increasing pressure to balance facilitation, security and effective risk management. At Václav Havel Airport Prague, record volumes of passengers and freight, the expansion of non-Schengen routes and the rapid development of e-commerce are reshaping the operational environment, requiring ever more sophisticated control and cooperation mechanisms.

In this interview, **Igor Soos, Director of the Customs Office in Prague**, shares his perspective on the evolving customs landscape at one of Central Europe's key aviation hubs. He discusses emerging risks, operational successes, the role of canine units and international cooperation, while highlighting the added value of the EUCAB Air & Post Network in strengthening information exchange, promoting best practices and enhancing the collective resilience of Europe's airport and postal customs community

What is the current level of operations at Václav Havel Airport Prague, and how does it affect the activities of the Czech Customs Administration?

Václav Havel Airport Prague has been rapidly returning to pre-pandemic levels in recent years and has already surpassed them in some areas. In 2025 a total of 17.75 million passengers were handled, which is virtually on par with the record year of 2019. And further growth is expected in 2026, reaching up to 18.9 million. From the Czech Customs' perspective, it is important to emphasize not only the volume of passengers but also the pace of growth. For example, in 2023 the airport handled 13.8 million passengers, and in 2024 the figure was 16.4 million. This increase directly translates into greater demands on control activities, capacity, and duty organization.

However, we are seeing even more significant growth in the freight sector. In 2025 a record 96,600 tons of cargo were handled, representing a year-over-year increase of 48%. Imports accounted for approximately 61% and exports for 39%. This trend has long been driven primarily by the growth of e-commerce and the expansion of long-haul air routes.

The cargo terminal's capacity, which normally stands at 60,000 tons per year, is effectively being utilized at the limit of its capabilities, with the maximum handling capacity capable of reaching up to 100,000 tons. For customs authorities, this means the need to respond flexibly to peak periods while simultaneously strengthening analytical and control mechanisms—all amid a current shortage of customs officers on duty.

How is the network of routes outside the EU expanding, and what does this mean for oversight activities?

A significant factor is the growing number of routes outside the EU, or more specifically, outside the Schengen Area. There are currently approximately 50 to 60 direct scheduled flights from Prague to non-Schengen destinations, which are concentrated in Terminal 1. In total, the airport offers connections to roughly 195 destinations. In addition to traditional long-haul routes to North America and Asia such as New York, Toronto, Dubai, Doha, and Seoul, the range of connections to the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast Asia is also expanding.

From the Czech Customs' perspective, it is important to note that these routes often pose an increased risk in terms of the importation of narcotics, illegal goods, or violations of regulations concerning market protection and public health.

Another trend is the launch of new or resumed routes, such as to Philadelphia, Amman, Sharjah, Tashkent, and Sanji, as well as the expansion of service to Hanoi and Seoul. Service to the United Kingdom and Turkey is also expanding significantly.

For customs officers, this means they must continuously adapt risk profiles, focus on new destinations, and respond to changes in trade flows.

Can you provide specific examples of seizures or current modus operandi?

One of the most significant recent examples was the international Operation DAMOCLES, organised under LEWP-C and co-run by EUCAB, in which 13 EU Member States participated. The goal was to uncover organised crime in air and maritime transport, particularly in drug smuggling.

This operation was highly successful at Prague Airport. Over the course of two weeks, nearly 4,000 passenger screenings, 3,700 vehicle inspections, and several aircraft inspections were conducted. Another key factor was the involvement of multiple law enforcement agencies in the operation, not only customs but also the immigration police, the municipal police, and the tax administration.

Among specific cases, one example worth mentioning is the uncovering of an organized group that had long been using the transit area of Terminal 1 to transfer dozens of kilograms of gold between passengers. The scheme was quite sophisticated: the goods were handed over in transit between a passenger arriving from Istanbul and a person who was supposed to depart at the time of the meeting but did not and subsequently left with the gold back into the country.

The case was successfully resolved thanks, among other things, to the analysis of surveillance footage and international cooperation, including partners in Turkey. It also highlighted the fact that even the transit area can be used for illegal activities.

Another interesting example is the area of plant product imports. Based on a report from our Dutch colleagues, cases were identified of incorrectly declared origins of food products, particularly vegetables and herbs imported from Southeast Asia (cilantro, parsley, chili peppers, etc.)—that contained pesticide levels far exceeding the limits.

Thanks to close cooperation with the Czech Agriculture and Food Inspection Authority, inspections were significantly tightened, systematic sampling was implemented, and the overall situation improved.

What role do canine units play at the airport?

Canine units are an integral and highly effective part of the control system. Customs Office in Prague has its own training facility in Kněževes, located in the immediate area of the airport.

Training takes place in a specialized hall where a realistic airport environment is simulated, including a decommissioned baggage carousel located on site. The dogs are trained not only for routine situations but also for emergency ones.

In terms of specialization, service dogs are trained to detect drugs, tobacco products, CITES species, and cash as part of “cash control” procedures and more recently, to detect kratom (mitragyna speciosa).

Training takes place in two phases: first the emphasis is on obedience and handling stressful situations; subsequently, on specific scent specialization. The entire process typically takes five to six months.

Currently, six service dogs are deployed at Václav Havel Airport Prague, where they significantly contribute to the effectiveness of detecting illegal activities, particularly in environments with high volumes of people and goods.

From your perspective as the director of the airport customs office, what is the added value of the EUCAB Air & Postal Hubs?

I view EUCAB as a much needed, even essential, initiative for cooperation between airports and postal hubs. It is an irreplaceable element that facilitates the exchange of information across a wide range of areas, connects us across Europe, and highlights examples of best practices as well as shortcomings. We need to help identifying these shortcomings, determining their causes, and finding ways to address them. I believe that the way EUCAB was presented at the first network meeting on 5th March 2025, best captures its essence. In my view, cooperation among the 27 Member States in the areas of airports and postal hubs is crucial and the key to success.

If I may speak personally about how I view the EUCAB Air & Post network, I would like to say that I view it very positively. This environment allows us to share a wide range of very useful information about procedures, control equipment used, airport facilities, detected incidents, trends, new sources of information, and so on. Only by staying informed within the airport and postal sectors we can continue to improve, especially in the face of current threats, wars, and other significant risks. We cannot allow ourselves to be devoured by the dangerous outside world, particularly Russia and China, so let’s work together to ensure we remain strong. If EUCAB were to contribute, even only partially, to the harmonization of standards at airports - so that organized crime groups know that the risk of their activities being detected is the same at all international public airports and they will have no choice between weaker and stronger entry points into the EU that would be a big success. Also ensuring the sharing of information on serious cases, high-risk passengers, as well as a 24/7 exchange of information, is essential at the operational level. Even here in Prague, we recognize that we still need to work on these issues. The issue of information sources, PNR data, and equal access to them for all customs administrations, ideally even on intra-EU flights without undue concern about misuse, is key to the success of our work. However, we must not forget the somewhat neglected issue of general aviation.

That is why I consider direct contact with our colleagues at airports and postal hubs to be important for our work. I know that my colleagues at Václav Havel Airport Prague are already preparing for working visits to other EU airports, because we all need is to be on the same level of knowledge.

Prague Airport hosted an EUCAB diagnostic visit in April. What was the main benefit of this process?

As soon as the possibility of inviting colleagues from other Member States for a diagnostic mission to Prague as part of an EUCAB activity was mentioned, we were very pleased, and I knew right away that we had to request the



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF CZECH REPUBLIC CUSTOMS

SAFER, SMARTER, MORE CONNECTED: EUCAB DIAGNOSTIC MISSION IN PRAGUE

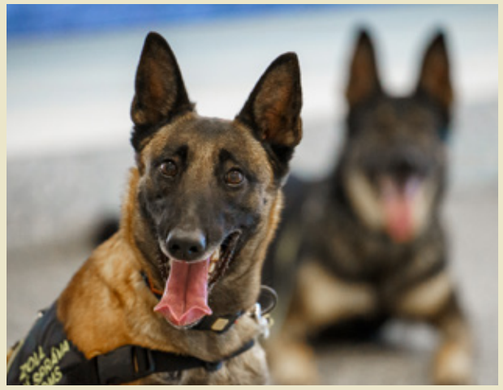
On 29–30 April 2026, international experts from EUCAB gathered at Václav Havel Airport Prague for a two-day diagnostic mission focused on modern customs operations and border control practices.

Through operational visits and expert discussions, the mission examined key areas of customs enforcement — from passenger clearance and cargo inspections to the use of advanced control technologies. Mobile X-ray systems, sniffer dog units, and terminal operations were all part of the on-site assessment.

More than an evaluation exercise, EUCAB diagnostic missions foster cooperation, knowledge exchange, and the development of smarter and more efficient customs procedures across Europe. EUCAB remains committed to supporting a safer, more connected, and future-ready customs environment.

mission. I'm glad that the mission was approved by both the top management of the Czech Customs and EUCAB, and hence was feasible to take place. The preparatory work, however, was very intensive and quite challenging. Anyone who works at an airport knows that there are a great many topics you'd like to discuss, so we had to select only the most important ones. I'm glad that, in the end, we were able to present a little extra as well. The mission was organized in close collaboration with a colleague from the Directorate General (DG) who serves as the Customs Programme Coordinator and EUCAB NCP, and a number of other colleagues from the Supervision and Customs Section of the DG and our Customs Office. As part of organizing the visit, we had a visit plan drawn up well in advance, we scheduled presentations on selected topics, set specific time slots for their delivery, and allocated the time needed to visit key facilities at the airport, including the baggage sorting area and our Canine Training Centre in Kněževes.

Here, too, we had to scale back our activities to ensure everything could be completed with some time to spare. I consider the opportunity to present selected topics and workplaces face-to-face rather than via correspondence or other means (such as MS Teams) to be the most valuable. Only personal contact allows you to express everything precisely, to infuse your communication with enthusiasm and emotion even negative ones and to emphasize what's important. It's only through this kind of interaction that you can tell whether the other party is trying to do things right. For our work to be done well, it's not enough to just show up in the morning and go home in the afternoon with a clear head you have to do much more. Personal contact with colleagues from other airports allows you to exchange ideas, and you'll eventually discover that the customs community working at borders in this case, airports and postal hubs very often shares the same perspectives on issues and perceives the problems that need to be addressed in the same way. Moreover, thanks to these meetings, we're able to extend invitations and arrange further visits to share best practices.



However, the road to improving efficiency, safety, and cooperation is a long way. I am convinced that EUCAB, including initiatives such as the diagnostic mission, undoubtedly helps confirm that the issues you are trying to address with regulatory bodies or other authorities at your airport or postal hubs align with the perspectives of your European colleagues at other airports. Then you know that your perspective is correct, and you will therefore be in a stronger position when negotiating with them.

How can EUCAB help us better respond to the challenges in the aviation and postal sectors?

Before I begin to answer this question, allow me, on behalf of myself and my colleagues at the airport, to thank everyone involved in the work of the EUCAB expert team. A big thanks goes to both the Air & Post unit leader and, of course, the other active members and teams. As I mentioned in the previous section, cooperation especially in the airport sector is essential. I often like to say that there is strength in cooperation. And this applies not only to the various agencies operating at the airport but also within EUCAB. We cannot just focus on our own affairs in our own country or at our own airport and think that is enough.



It is by no means enough. Every weak spot in Europe poses a risk to us all. Smugglers, organized groups, and criminals will quickly identify these vulnerabilities and adapt the flow of illegal goods accordingly. We can make certain airports as secure as we want, but unless there are uniform standards for all types of external borders so that we know how they should be equipped, what risk analysis tools should be used, what data sources and other information should be available, how many customs officers should be on duty, and so on it will always be a challenge.

We are referring, for example, to data that is crucial for risk analysis in passenger transport—so-called PNR data, to which customs authorities have very limited access, even though, on the other hand, we have a duty to ensure border security in a wide range of areas. Where does the problem lie? In excessive and unfounded fears that customs officials will misuse the data? In politicians? Probably so. I also see an opportunity in introducing certain staff exchanges that would allow us to give our colleagues from airports the chance to see how the processes managed by Prague, for example, are set up elsewhere. For instance, to determine whether we have placed too much emphasis on administrative tasks, which prevents us from spending as much time on actual operations. In the future, this could also be useful when standardizing internal methodologies at airports and similar locations.

What is EUCAB greatest impact? Certainly, it lies in the essential and highly beneficial establishment of communication and connections within the airport customs community a community that is sometimes not sufficiently understood by higher authorities as well as in fostering European values and sharing information on how, where, and what works, and why it doesn't work elsewhere. It will help bring colleagues together, make us stronger and more determined, and give us a sense of satisfaction that we are doing our job of serving and protecting our borders well, not only at our own airport, but throughout all of Europe.

I would also very much like us to have the necessary funding to meet our needs at airports, corresponding to the importance of our work and the need to protect citizens across the entire EU.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF CZECH REPUBLIC CUSTOMS



MICHAEL LACHAUX

Regional Director
Marseiile Regional Directorate
of Customs

Beyond Borders: Strengthening Customs Cooperation in Europe's Ports

Maritime transport remains the backbone of global trade, connecting markets, supporting economic growth and facilitating the movement of goods on an unprecedented scale. At the same time, ports face increasingly complex challenges linked to illicit trafficking, organised crime and the need to secure supply chains without disrupting legitimate trade. In this environment, effective customs action depends not only on robust national capabilities, but also on strong international cooperation, shared expertise and a common understanding of emerging risks.

Michael Lachaux, Head of Marseille Regional Customs Directorate reflects on the role of collaboration, technology and operational knowledge-sharing in strengthening customs controls across Europe's maritime gateways. Drawing on the experience of one of the continent's leading ports, he highlights how the EUCAB Maritime Network contributes to a more connected customs community, supports the exchange of best practices and helps Member States build a coordinated response to evolving maritime threats.

From your perspective as Head of Port, what is the added value of port evaluation through the EUCAB Maritime Network?

In the face of increasing sophistication and globalisation of fraud mechanisms, particularly in the maritime sector – main transport vector for goods by volume – information sharing is a key lever. It makes it possible to continuously adapt law enforcement authorities to evolving threats.

Beyond ad hoc exchanges of intelligence or operational information, the challenge now lies in strengthening partnerships around methods and means. The objective: building a border that is both resilient and harmonised.

In this context, the arrangements proposed by EUCAB fully meet expectations. It is based on a cross-analysis carried out by a pool of experts from the main European ports. This approach, based on a collaborative and caring dynamic, fosters mutual learning between auditors and auditees, thus contributing to enriching the knowledge of the entire port customs community.

Moreover, the legitimacy of the recommendations made, anchored in concrete skills and operational experiences, will facilitate their understanding and deployment on the ground, subject to comparable application configurations.

Finally, the very format of evaluations, combining on-site visits and direct exchanges between professionals, contributes to the co-construction of a common toolbox. This is imperative in an environment where no single actor has universal solutions that can meet all the challenges.

How can cooperation with EU countries and external partners help improve port security?

Essentially cross-border fraud is based on the ability of criminal organisations to circulate illicit goods to feed domestic markets. Faced with this reality, a limited response to a single border, a port or an airport is no longer enough.

Effectiveness is now based on a shared understanding of the issues at stake and the development of coherent strategies capable of closing the loopholes that could allow the entry of banned products into European territory. Both ports and airports fully illustrate this structural vulnerability.

In this context, cooperation and the exchange of best practices within the European Union appear to be indispensable, as well as the strengthening of links with partner countries

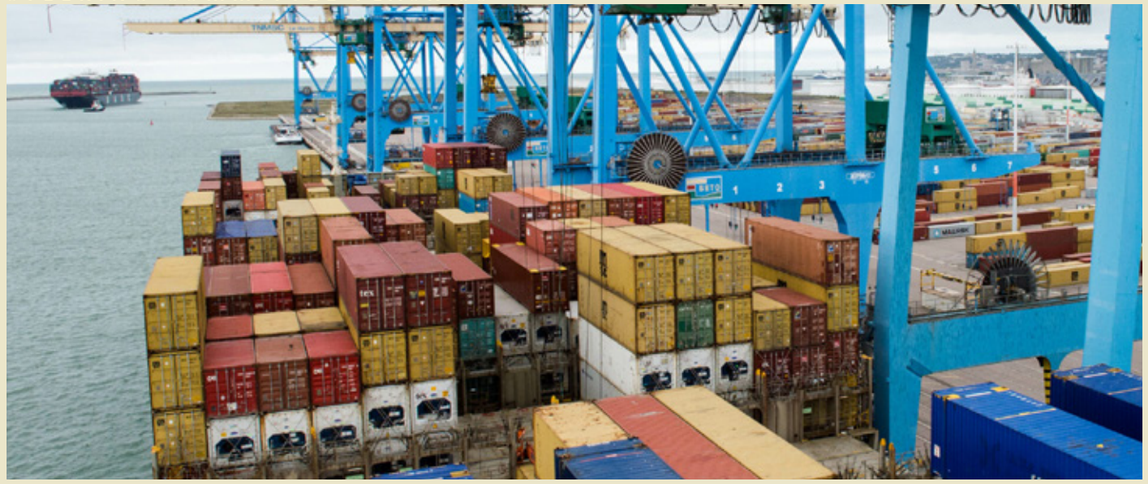
THE GRAND PORT MARITIME DE MARSEILLE

€ 235 mln
in turnover

4.6 mln
passengers on its two basins

74 mln
tonnes of goods

10k
received vessels each year



facing the same challenges in the face of these illicit flows, whether at dispatch, transit or at the time of release for final consumption.

The customs response is thus multi-layered – national, European and global. It also implies a wider mobilisation of all public and private actors, in particular those in the supply chain. Because securing the flow of goods has become both an economic and a security issue.

A key lever is access to logistic data, via automated processes allowing immediate operation by targeting centres in particular. Without this anticipatory capacity, customs action necessarily remains partial and loses efficiency.

This coordination logic must also extend to other law enforcement authorities. 'Union of forces' is a strategic objective to combat fraud.

With its role as 'goods police' , customs have a unique expertise. It provides a solid basis for building a collective strategy to stop the circulation of banned products.

What role does technology play in detection, security and daily customs workflows at the port?

Faced with the explosion in the flow of goods, technology is now an essential lever to enable customs to reconcile the fluidity of trade and the effectiveness of controls. In this context, the exclusive use of human resources is no longer sufficient.

Non-intrusive search devices, as well as data analysis tools used by targeting centres, have become essential in ports. They make it possible to optimise controls, avoid the dispersion of resources and preserve operational capacities.

Better anticipating and scheduling controls means both making them more relevant and providing officers with a more secure framework for intervention. As customs officers are less subject to the immediate pressure of flows, they are able to adapt their methods of action with greater discernment.

However, technology alone cannot form the basis of customs strategies. The human factor remains central, both in terms of the number of staff and the level of qualifications and training.



In Marseille, where a scanning tunnel is to be deployed on the port by 2028, this priority is fully integrated. What is at stake is clear: accompany the arrival of this state-of-the-art tool with increased investment in skills, in order to ensure its optimal and fully effective use.

How can EUCAB help Member States respond better to common maritime challenges?

Faced with convergent threats and comparable operational constraints, EUCAB occupies a strategic position by offering a 360-degree vision, freed from intra-Community borders. Its approach makes it possible to analyse flows in a transversal and coherent manner.

This positioning offers national customs administrations a valuable asset: to be able to rely on solutions that have already been tried and tested or are being developed elsewhere in Europe. A way of avoiding exploratory approaches that are costly in terms of time and resources, while limiting the risk of adopting systems that are less efficient or disconnected from existing standards.

With this in mind, strengthening the sharing of experience appears to be a priority. The aim is to give national customs a broader view of the challenges linked to illicit flows, beyond their own borders. The establishment of an identified customs community, promoting regular and interactive exchanges, could be a structuring lever.

Such a mechanism would make it possible to pool learning and adapt responses more effectively to evolving threats, as not all States are simultaneously exposed to the same risks. Because if understanding your environment remains the first step, knowing how to respond to it is the essential extension.

To meet this challenge quickly and effectively, a way forward is needed: capitalize on the expertise and know-how of each member state.

Looking ahead, how would you like cooperation within the Maritime Network to develop further?

The success of EUCAB will depend above all on its success in attracting support from customs in the field. A central issue, which necessarily involves a more fluid and structured sharing of know-how, methods and means.

From now on, the analysis can no longer be limited to a strictly local approach. It must be part of a broader vision, capable of anticipating inherently shifting threats that move with the vulnerabilities of borders. Some ports or countries, which are more exposed than others, are thus privileged entry points for constantly adapting criminal organisations.

In this context, better understanding the challenges faced by its neighbours is already refining its own strategy and adjusting the means to deploy.

Innovation, in particular, must be seen as a common good. The development of new methods or tools benefits from being shared, in order to ensure consistent and homogeneous responses to shared threats.

As such, the Innovation Network could play a structuring role in this dynamic. By facilitating the dissemination of initiatives and fostering synergies, it would contribute to enhancing collective effectiveness.

As a watermark, the objective remains unchanged: improving risk awareness, streamlining trade between actors and ensuring a responsive and efficient customs response. An imperative in the face of ever-changing criminal modus operandi, always on the lookout for loopholes that could be exploited.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF FRENCH CUSTOMS

A Day at Estonia's Luhamaa Border Crossing Point on EU's Eastern Frontier. Where Customs Controls Meet Geopolitics

The Luhamaa border crossing point situated on the European Union's external border with Russia is far more than just a border point. It is one of the strategically important BCP on the European Union's external border with a country currently subject to the most extensive international sanctions regime. Here, performance is not measured simply in numbers of inspections, but vigilance and attention to detail are essential.

In recent years, the daily work of customs officers has changed significantly. Successive sanctions packages adopted by the European Union have introduced new restrictions on imports and exports, while Estonia has, in many cases, taken proactive measures, introducing national sanctions to strengthen enforcement even before EU wide implementation.

As sanctions have tightened and full customs controls have been introduced for outbound traffic, every working day has become more intense and demanding. All sanctions-related controls ultimately serve one purpose: contributing to ending the war of aggression being waged on European soil as soon as possible

A border under full control

As the first light of a new day emerges over Luhamaa Customs Point, we meet **Toomas Huik**, Head of the Luhamaa Customs Point, to understand how sanctions enforcement works in practice.

"On outbound traffic from Estonia, 100% customs control applies. This means that all trucks and goods, all border crossers and everything they carry — absolutely everything — undergo either X-ray scanning or physical inspection," Huik explains. "Because both freight operators and regular travelers know that controls are comprehensive and thorough, the number of border crossings has dropped





dramatically. People do not come here without a reason, and as a result, queues are rare."

The impact of these measures is visible. Where more than 100 trucks once crossed the border daily, the figure is now ten to fifteen times lower. Moreover, due to Russia's repeated deliberate provocations, consistently violating the border regime and carrying out ongoing intelligence activities, the Estonian government closed border crossing points at night in order to reallocate resources more effectively. Yet fewer crossings do not mean less work.

From a Northern and Eastern European perspective, Estonia is currently the only country whose border with Russia remains open to pedestrians, freight transport and other vehicles. "Following acts of sabotage carried out by Russia at our neighbours' borders, we remain in a constant state of heightened readiness," Huik says. "At the same time, for pragmatic reasons, it is essential for Russia that at least one Schengen border remains open for vital goods."

Detecting Sanctions Circumvention

Huik notes that private individuals most frequently breach the rules, particularly by violating EU restrictions on carrying euro-denominated cash across the border. "For companies, the picture is more complex: false information is submitted, the origin of goods is misrepresented, and incorrect commodity codes are used. Awareness of sanctions has improved, but violations have not disappeared."

Trade with Russia has been declining for years. In 2025, exports fell by approximately 40% compared to 2024, while imports into Estonia decreased by around 30%.

In 2025, the Estonian Tax and Customs Board detected 5,786 sanctions violations in total — 3,879 outbound and 1,906 inbound.

For companies, most violations concern wood and wood products, charcoal, vehicles and vehicle parts, machinery and mechanical equipment, electrical equipment, and iron and steel products.

One common circumvention scheme involves falsifying the declared destination of goods. "Some carriers list a Central Asian country as the destination, but in reality, the goods end up in Russia. We have taken sanctions circumvention through third countries very seriously and have initiated criminal proceedings against several companies," Huik says.

Huik explains that destination manipulation is widespread for understandable reasons: "Russian and Belarusian companies are already prohibited from transporting sanctioned goods to the EU. That market has shifted to companies in third countries. These countries are used as intermediaries to make trade in sanctioned goods appear legal. For example, we have dealt extensively with wood products allegedly originating in Kazakhstan, where minimal processing was used to give Russian timber a Kazakh origin. And such processings have not been sufficient to change the origin."

Customs authorities require additional documentation from carriers to verify whether Russia is genuinely only a transit country. "If the goods are sawn timber, we may request Kazakh forest certificates. But verifying their authenticity is another matter. When necessary, we involve document experts or send inquiries to the countries of declared origin. We have

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF ESTONIAN CUSTOMS

even seen forest certificates submitted from China for plywood shipments. Sometimes the documents presented do not match. And when one version finally meets the requirements, identical documents suddenly start appearing from multiple carriers," Huik explains.

Several EU Member States have agreed on concrete steps to ensure more uniform enforcement of sanctions, including clear requirements for proof-of-origin documentation. This common approach is currently followed by Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Croatia. However, preventing a shipment from crossing the border does not always require lengthy legal proceedings.

"EU sanctions regulations grant border states considerable discretion. If we have reasonable grounds to suspect that goods declared as originating in Kazakhstan actually originate in Russia, customs authorities have the right to block their import," Huik says.

As for smuggling, Huik says "Full customs control has proven to be an effective deterrent. We rarely encounter illicit cigarettes or other smuggled goods in vehicles or passenger luggage because the risk of being caught is very high. However, this does not mean the problem has disappeared — illicit traders have simply adjusted their routes, and much of the contraband now enters Estonia through the Schengen area."

Technology Supporting Customs Operations

As the day progresses, technology becomes one of the team's most valuable allies.

Huik emphasises the importance of maintaining Estonia's reputation for technological and digital capability:

"For example, we use automatic gates that can quickly close both the Estonian and Russian entrances if necessary, ensuring a rapid response in emergency situations. We have



also integrated truck scales with our automatic number plate recognition system. Trucks are now weighed automatically, and the data is recorded directly in the information system, improving the accuracy of risk analysis and increasing the effectiveness of controls."

These technologies enable officers to work more efficiently, make better-informed decisions, and manage increasingly complex risk environments.

As global trade becomes more interconnected and sanctions enforcement more sophisticated, digitalisation is becoming an essential component of effective border management.

The Value of European Cooperation

Continuous improvement is essential at a border crossing point where risks evolve constantly.

Recently, EUCAB experts conducted a Diagnostic Study at Luhamaa. Although the work of the Luhamaa customs checkpoint was highly commended, colleagues at the Estonian Tax and Customs Board were advised to conduct risk assessment trainings more regularly and to enhance cooperation with the Border Guard. In addition, constructive recommendations



were provided to further support the smooth flow of border crossings, strengthen risk-based controls, and advance digital development and infrastructure.

Now that the operating hours of border crossing points have been reduced, customs officers are able to operate at the border with greater resources, which supports the already thorough 100% customs control on outbound traffic and allows for significantly more comprehensive checks on inbound traffic as well.

For customs officers, the value of such initiatives lies in the opportunity to exchange experiences with colleagues from other Member States. Although customs administrations operate under a common European framework, the realities they face can differ significantly depending on geography and operational environment. Sharing expertise helps identify practical solutions and strengthens the overall effectiveness of customs controls across the Union.

A Shared European Mission

As evening approaches, the final vehicles of the day move through the crossing point, before closing.

Huik concludes that working at the EU's external border with Russia presents unique challenges and is constantly evolving. It requires continuous professional development, swift implementation of new sanctions measures, and clear communication with the public. Yet it also highlights the importance of cooperation among customs administrations across Europe.

Through exchange of knowledge, operational experience, and best practices, customs officers strengthen their collective ability to respond to emerging threats and safeguard the Union's external borders.

"What makes the EUCAB unique is that while customs officers perform technically similar tasks across Member States, the practical realities of their work can differ greatly depending on geography. Exchanging experiences helps us better understand the challenges faced by colleagues at different borders."

At Luhamaa, as at every EU external border, customs officers share a common mission: protecting society, facilitating legitimate trade, and contributing to a safer and more secure world.



DRS. MAARTEN H.A.P. VELTMAN RA

Chair of the Innovation Coordination Group (CGI) at the Dutch Customs Administration

Innovation Through Cooperation: Preparing Customs for the Future

Innovation is no longer a future ambition for customs administrations—it is an operational necessity. As supply chains become more complex and criminal networks increasingly exploit new technologies, customs authorities must continuously adapt the way they assess risks, target controls and manage resources. Across Europe, emerging tools such as artificial intelligence, image recognition, smart tracking technologies and advanced scanning systems are opening new possibilities for more effective and intelligence-led customs controls.

Against this backdrop, the EUCAB Innovation Network provides a platform for Member States to explore new technologies, exchange experiences and translate innovative concepts into practical solutions. In this interview, **Drs. Maarten H.A.P. Veltman RA** shares his views on the role of innovation in modern customs work, the value of cross-border cooperation and the importance of building the skills, partnerships and mindset needed to prepare the customs community for the challenges and opportunities of the years ahead.

Which areas of innovation is the network currently exploring?

Within the EUCAB Innovation Network, we are exploring a broad range of technologies that have direct relevance for customs operations. Key areas include artificial intelligence and machine learning, image recognition, scanning technologies, smart seals, tracking devices and sensing technologies. These innovations all have one thing in common: they help us move from manual, reactive control processes towards smarter, data-driven and more proactive approaches.

A good example is the use of AI and image recognition in scanning equipment. By combining large datasets with machine learning models, customs can significantly improve the detection of anomalies in container images. This reduces reliance on manual interpretation

Another example is the application of smart seals and tracking devices in the supply chain. These tools provide real-time information (in the future) on the location and integrity of goods, allowing customs authorities to monitor movements more effectively and intervene only when necessary.

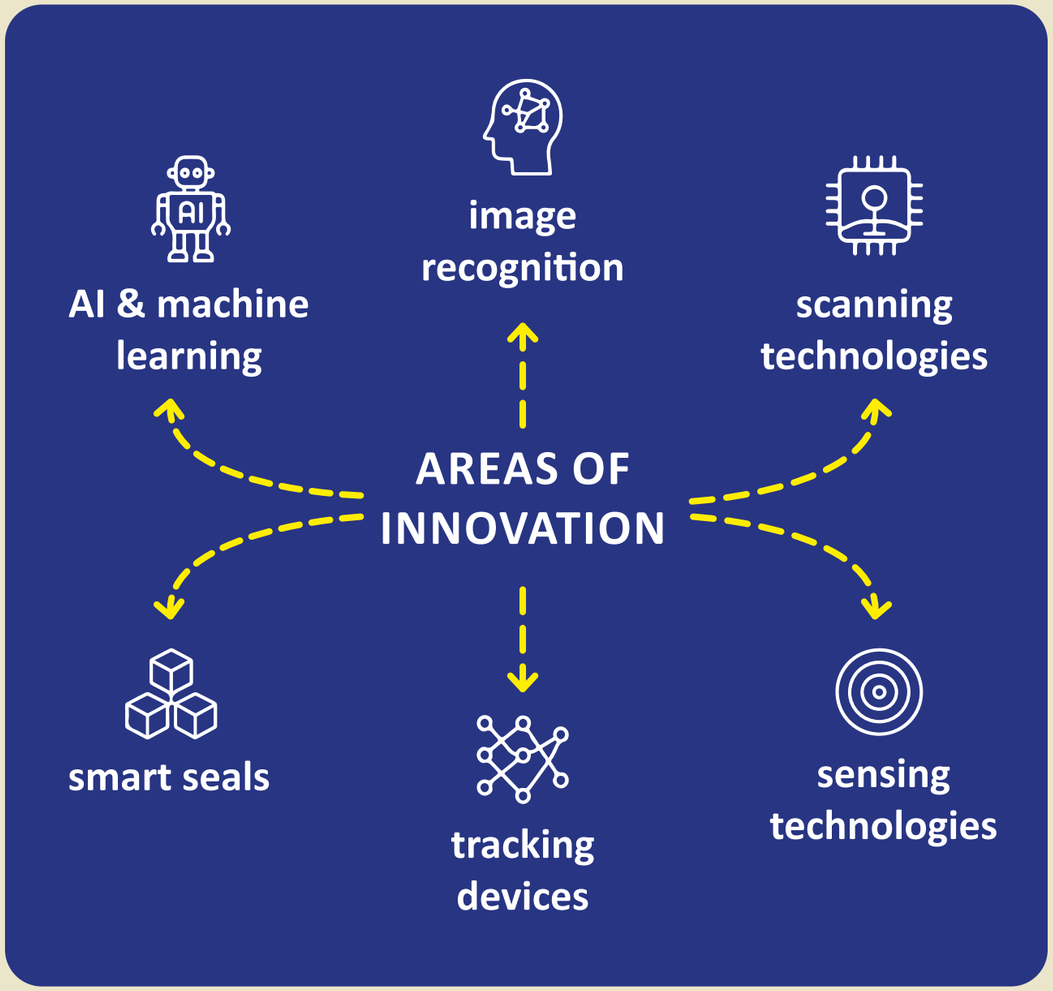
Criminal networks sometimes hide tracking devices in shipments containing drugs to monitor their movement in real time. These devices help smugglers maintain control over their logistics and detect possible customs interventions. For customs authorities, finding such a device is a clear indicator of organized crime. It can provide valuable intelligence, but also requires careful handling to avoid alerting the criminals. Therefore, it is important that we actively detect and trace these devices to better understand and disrupt smuggling networks.

The strength of the network lies in sharing these experiences. Member States can learn from pilot projects, avoid repeating mistakes, and build on proven solutions. This exchange of best practices helps ensure that innovation is not theoretical, but directly applicable in daily customs operations.

How can innovation help customs stay ahead of emerging risks while facilitating legitimate trade?

Innovation is essential to maintaining the balance between effective enforcement and the facilitation of legitimate trade. With increasing trade volumes and more complex supply chains, traditional control methods are no longer sufficient on their own.

New technologies enable smarter risk analysis. By combining data from multiple sources and



applying advanced analytics, customs can better identify high-risk consignments and focus controls where they are most needed. This allows low-risk flows to move more quickly across borders, improving efficiency for both authorities and businesses.

In addition, technologies such as AI and advanced scanning improve the detection of fraud, smuggling and counterfeiting. They allow customs to identify hidden patterns that would be difficult to detect manually. This is particularly important in areas such as e-commerce, where the volume of small consignments continues to grow rapidly.

At the same time, innovation supports trade facilitation. By automating processes and improving data quality, customs can reduce administrative burdens and processing times. The goal is smarter controls—targeted, risk-based and proportionate.

How can cooperation between Member States help accelerate innovation in customs?

Cooperation is a key driver for accelerating innovation. Not all Member States have the same resources, expertise or starting position. By working together, we can ensure that knowledge and experience are shared, and that no administration has to develop solutions entirely on its own.

Through the Innovation Network, Member States gain insight into how new technologies can be applied in practice. Seeing concrete use cases helps to better understand both the opportunities and the limitations. This is crucial for informed decision-making.

Another important aspect is avoiding duplication. Without cooperation, multiple Member States might develop similar solutions independently, which is inefficient and costly. By sharing results and aligning efforts, we can make better use of available resources.

Finally, cooperation helps us assess the real added value of innovation. Not every new technology delivers immediate benefits. By evaluating experiences collectively, we can identify what works, under which conditions, and at what cost. This leads to more realistic expectations and more sustainable implementation.

What were the main objectives for continuing the Innovation Network under EUCAB?

The continuation of the Innovation Network under EUCAB is driven by a clear practical need. Customs administrations are facing rapid technological developments, increasing trade volumes and evolving risks. There is a strong demand for a platform where knowledge, ideas and experiences can be exchanged in a structured way.

One of the main objectives is to ensure continuity. Innovation is not a one-off effort; it requires ongoing cooperation and long-term commitment. By embedding the network within EUCAB, we create a stable framework that supports collaboration over time.

The network also addresses the challenge of translating innovation into practical solutions. This is where the principle “Think big, start small” plays an important role. It encourages Member States to explore ambitious ideas, but to test them through pilots and small-scale implementations first.

This approach reduces risks and allows for gradual scaling. It also makes innovation more accessible, especially for administrations with limited resources. By starting small and sharing results, we create a pathway from concept to operational use.

Looking ahead, how can the customs community prepare for future technological challenges?

Preparing for future challenges requires a combination of technology, skills and cooperation. Innovation can help optimise internal processes, automate repetitive tasks and improve the use of available resources. This will be essential as workloads continue to increase.

However, technology alone is not enough. Customs officers will need new skills, particularly in data analysis, digital tools and understanding complex systems. Training and continuous learning will be key. At the same time, a mindset open to change and experimentation is equally important.

Cooperation with external partners will also play a crucial role. This includes collaboration with other government agencies, research institutions and the private sector. Many innovations originate outside customs, and by working together, we can accelerate their adaptation to our specific needs.

In addition, partnerships with industry can improve data quality and supply chain transparency. This strengthens both enforcement and facilitation objectives.

Looking ahead, the challenge is not only to adopt new technologies, but to integrate them effectively into customs processes and organisational structures. By continuing to invest in cooperation, knowledge sharing and practical implementation, the customs community will be well positioned to meet the challenges of the future.

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EUROPEAN UNION CUSTOMS ALLIANCE
FOR BORDERS EXPERT TEAM