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History



02 May 2019

The history of the WCO began in 1947 when the thirteen European Governments represented in the Committee for European Economic Co-operation agreed to set up a Study Group. This Group examined the possibility of establishing one or more inter-European Customs Unions based on the principles of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

In 1948, the Study Group set up two committees - an Economic Committee and a Customs Committee. The Economic Committee was the predecessor of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Customs Committee became the Customs Co-operation Council (CCC).

In 1952, the Convention formally establishing the CCC came into force. The Council is the governing body of the CCC and the inaugural Session of the Council was held in Brussels on 26 January 1953.

Representatives of seventeen European countries attended the first Council Session of the CCC.


After years of membership growth, in 1994 the Council adopted the working name World Customs Organization, to more clearly reflect its transition to a truly global intergovernmental institution. It is now the voice of 183 Customs administrations which operate on all continents and represent all stages of economic development. Today, WCO Members are responsible for processing more than 98% of all international trade.


Our historical milestones

1947	Thirteen Governments represented in the Committee for European Economic Co-operation set up a Study Group to examine the possibility of establishing one or more Customs Unions between the various European countries in accordance with GATT principles.
1948	The Study Group decided to establish two Committees: an Economic Committee which later evolved into the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and a Customs Committee which later became the Customs Co-operation Council (CCC).
1952	The Convention establishing the CCC enters into force on 4 November.
1953	The inaugural session of the CCC Council was held in Brussels on 26 January in the presence of representatives of seventeen European countries. This date is now celebrated annually as International Customs Day.
1974	The International Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs procedures (Kyoto Convention) enters into force on 25 September.
1980	The Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in the Prevention, Repression and Investigation of Customs Offences (Nairobi Convention) enters into force on 21 May.
1988	The WCO's International Convention on the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS Convention) enters into force on 1 January.
1993	The WCO Council adopts the Arusha Declaration on Customs Integrity.
1994	The WCO Council adopts the informal name "World Customs Organization" to better reflect the Organization's global nature.
1999	The WCO Council adopts the revised International Convention on the Simplification and Harmonisation of Customs Procedures (Revised Kyoto Convention)
2002	The WCO celebrates its 50th anniversary and is honoured with a visit by HM King Albert II of Belgium accompanied by the Hon. Didier Reynders, the Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

2003	The WCO Council adopts the Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters (Johannesburg Convention).
2005	The WCO Council adopts the Framework of Standards to Secure and Facilitate Global Trade.
2006	The revised Kyoto Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures enters into force. The WCO launches the Columbus Programme to support implementation of the Framework Standards to Secure and Facilitate Global Trade.
2007	The HS Nomenclature 2007 Edition enters into force on 1 January.
2012	The HS Nomenclature 2012 Edition enters into force on the 1 of January.
2014	The WCO launches the Mercator Programme to assist Customs administrations with implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA).
2017	The HS Nomenclature 2017 Edition enters into force on the 1 of January.


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