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Latvia – External Border of EU and High Quality Education for Customs Professionals



The Latvian Customs together with other national customs authorities implement EU common customs policy and ensure smooth flow of trade among EU Member States as well as customs control at the external borders of the Community.

The Latvian Customs have proved to be a professional administrator of an international level being able to protect the interests of all EU Member States and to guarantee the protection of the single market and safety of the Community's citizens.

The importance of the customs services in our country is set by the geographical location of Latvia. The land border Latvia-Russia (245 km) and Latvia-Byelorussia (161 km) is also the external border of the EU. Customs control is ensured at 31 customs control point which includes 12 inland and 19 EU's external border crossing points - on roads and railways, at sea ports, Riga International Airport and international postal delivery points.

Before Latvia becoming the EU Member State the main role of the customs consisted primarily of collecting customs duties and indirect taxes. Revenue from taxes was one of the main sources of income of the national budget. After the 1st May 2004 customs fiscal function substantially decreased whereas the importance of function of facilitating international trade increased. The role of customs services became especially significant in protecting society from narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, counterfeit goods and goods endangering human health and environment as well as in prevention of distribution of weapons of mass annihilation.

The Latvian Customs can boast of modern infrastructure, up-to-date technical equipment and information systems which are important preconditions of effective customs control. The Latvian Customs take active part in implementing unified EU Customs Information Systems which will ensure higher security of international trade and allow to detect high risk posted goods as well as to considerably ease customs clearance process thus

speeding up the circulation of goods at EU borders and lowering administrative costs.

Education of customs professionals has a crucial role in customs administration.

After Latvia regained independence in the beginning of 90ies the newly established Latvian Customs had personnel lacking proper professional education - in 1993 out of 1700 customs professionals only 20% had higher education and only several tens of these had economic or legal education.

As compared with other countries where customs professionals are educated mostly at Customs Academies or colleges and training courses, Latvia was one of the first countries in the world to offer education for customs professionals at a civil university. On grounds of the long term agreement between the State Revenue Service and Riga Technical University the first 64 customs professionals began studies in February 1994.

Since then internationally accredited study programme of administration of Customs and Taxes has been set up. The programme offers higher education at three levels full time and part time studies. The first level higher education (college) can be obtained in two years with the qualification of Customs Expert or Tax Inspector. Professional Bachelor degree and qualification of Manager of Structural Unit of Customs Authority or Tax Economist can be obtained in 4 years. Master's studies last for 1 and a half year. Doctoral degree can be obtained as well.

As of today RTU has 4300 graduates in the profession of customs and taxes, 2000 of them at the time of their studies were employees of State Revenue Service. Thanks to this the Latvian Customs is now fully provided with skilled and competent customs professionals.

RTU provides also training courses for customs officers and certified customs brokers.

Riga Technical University academics are authors of over 30 books, brochures and other methodological literature on customs and taxes.



Latvia's input in education of customs professionals has been highly rated internationally.

In the year 2005 Riga Technical University was the third university in the world to sign the Memorandum of Understanding with the World Customs Organization (WCO) in order to promote cooperation in the development and provision of world class customs training, education, capacity building and research.

RTU is an active participant in the Partnership in Customs Academic Research and Development (PICARD) programme launched by WCO in 2006 with the aim to provide a framework for the cooperation between Customs and Academic world.

Along with activities in PICARD programme Riga Technical University together with University of Canberra (Australia), University of Munster (Germany) and University of Lausanne (Switzerland) have created the International Network of Customs Universities (INCU) and is a member of INCU Management Group. As of today the Network has been joined by 70 Affiliated Institutions from different countries all over the world. Since 2007 the INCU has been producing the World Customs Journal in five languages available on the internet and in print.

RTU participated in the development of unified PICARD Professional Standards.

On 26 January 2010, at WCO headquarters, the Secretary General of the WCO, Kunio Mikuriya, awarded the first WCO Certificates of Recognition to Riga Technical University and to University of Canberra and University of Munster, certifying that the academic programmes offered by these institutions comply with the WCO international standards for the Customs profession adopted by 176 member states of the WCO.

RTU takes active part in a number of international programmes. Several projects on improving strategic goods control have been developed in collaboration with the University of California, USA, and with Latvian Radiation Centre. Professionals from RTU together with experts from the Netherlands have taken part in projects offering training for customs professionals in Nepal, Uganda, Ruanda etc.

In honor of the 90th anniversary of Latvia, Riga Technical University in collaboration with the State Revenue Service established the Museum of History of Customs and Taxes.

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