

New Customs Union Action Plan

Thomas Wahl

News

On 28 September 2020, the European Commission presented a new [Customs Union Action Plan](#), setting out a series of measures to make EU customs smarter, more innovative, and more efficient. The Action Plan follows the announcement by Commission President *Ursula von der Leyen* in her [political guidelines](#) that the Customs Union needed to be taken to the next level, especially by ensuring an integrated European approach to customs risk management, which supports effective controls by EU Member States.

The Action Plan reacts to several challenges that the Customs Union is currently facing, such as the fast-changing trade world with new business models, e.g., e-commerce; difficulties in ensuring adequate and effective controls to protect the EU's financial interests from fraud; resilience in reacting to emergency situations, e.g. the coronavirus pandemic or Brexit.

In order to meet these challenges, the Action plan focuses on four areas and includes the following key initiatives:

- *Risk management*: greater availability and use of data and data analysis for customs purposes; establishment of intelligent, risk-based supervision of supply chains and a new analytics hub within the Commission for collecting, analysing, and sharing customs data that can inform critical decisions, help customs authorities identify weak points at the EU's external borders, and manage future crises.
- *Managing e-commerce*: strengthening of obligations for payment service providers and online sales platforms to fight tax fraud in e-commerce (legislative proposal: Q1/2023).
- *Promotion of compliance*: "Single Window" initiative to facilitate border formalities for businesses (legislative proposal of October 2020 à separate news item).
- *Customs authorities acting as one*: roll-out of modern and reliable customs equipment under the next EU budget (as of 2021); new reflection group formed of Member States and business representatives to help prepare for future crises and challenges (launch planned in early 2021).

Another strategic priority will be on international customs cooperation. In this context, the Commission is working towards an EU-China agreement on a new Strategic Framework for Customs Cooperation 2021–2024 and is extending its monitoring system on the origin of products eligible for preferential trade arrangements.

The Action Plan includes a number of measures to crack down on fraud and other illegal activities:

- Providing customs with more data and data analysis by means of a new system;
- Strengthening the customs risk management strategy;
- Giving customs access to data provided by payment service providers and online platforms;

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- Reinforcing cooperation between customs and market surveillance authorities to prevent dangerous and non-EU-compliant goods from entering the EU;
- Reassessing and, if necessary, strengthening the EU rules on cooperation with Member States to combat customs fraud;
- Strengthening international cooperation.

The Action Plan takes up some of the results of the foresight project “The Future of Customs in the EU 2040,” which was launched in 2018. The aim of this – partly still ongoing – project is to create a shared and strategic understanding among Member States and other key stakeholders of ways to deal with current and future customs challenges and to generate a vision of what the EU customs ecosystem could look like in 2040.

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