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ECSA annual members' meeting in Amsterdam

ECSA Chairman **Lieven Muylaert (Belgium)** opened the 14th ECSA conference.

Lieven welcomed all the delegates and thanked **Theo De Goiejen (Netherlands)** for organising an excellent meeting. He said that Theo showed his skills once again that he has already demonstrated many times in organising the international customs participation in the Nijmegen Marches.

Lieven thanked the Dutch Customs Director for approving the meeting in Holland.

New Faces

Then, it was time to welcome the new ECSA faces and Lieven asked them to introduce themselves and to tell us a little about sport in their administrations and what they expected of ECSA.

Guntars Vicmanis said he was very happy to represent **Latvia** at ECSA for the first time.

Guntars explained the dramatic financial, political and economic changes in Latvia in recent times. He said that the Latvian Director believes that Customs sports are beneficial.

“Last September, we organised ice hockey against Finland in Riga. Our administration is becoming interested in communicating with our sister administrations through customs sport.”

Lieven replied that ECSA could help new countries with funding and experience.

Zigimuntas Pupkus represented **Lithuania** on behalf of **Ramune Tartilaite** who hopes to return to the ECSA annual meeting in 2006.

“We’re interested in shooting and sniffer dog competitions. Our management promotes these above other activities. We would like to participate in other sports to meet counterparts from other customs administrations.”

Lieven asked Zigimuntas to send our best wishes to Ramune.

Jan Gajdos is the new representative for **Slovakia** in place of our former ECSA colleague, **Juraj Gubi**.

“Our main hope is to organise an international event in 2006”

Lieven welcomed Jan to the conference.

New ECSA Roles

1. **Mick O'Hanlon (Ireland)** will act as Secretary at AGM's and will generally assist in running the organisation.
2. Website: Lieven said that the website is a priority for ECSA activity and Theo has been appointed as ECSA website officer.
3. **Katy Stifterova (Czech Republic)** is appointed Liaison Officer to manage contacts with new EU member states.

Treasurer's Report

Daniel Koener (Luxembourg) said that ECSA funds had grown from €7,800 to €8,884 in the last year - not including the €1,500 he hoped to collect in annual subscriptions at the meeting in Amsterdam.

"We operate two bank accounts for convenience. One is for deposits and the second is for operational items such as funding events etc."

Daniel passed the bank documents around the table for inspection by the delegates.

Lieven asked the members to formally approve the financial situation and this was done.

New Contacts

Lieven: "I sent invitations to every customs DG in the EU asking them to send a delegate to our meeting. Slovenia replied expressing an interest as well as Malta. Sadly, there were no other replies."

Katy and Lasse will continue to encourage other new EU members to join ECSA.

Katy spoke about her contacts with Austria. "The problem is that Austrian customs has reduced to fewer than 2,000 persons and their travel budget will not allow them to participate. Perhaps they might allow me to represent Austria, if they agree to pay the €100 annual ECSA subscription."

Lasse Lehtokangas (Finland): "We continue to tell Estonia and Norway about ECSA. Estonia is still not ready to join in fully but they keep in touch via Finland because Finland organises games between the three countries."

Laszlo: "I will open contact with Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia. I have many contacts there"

TAXUD

Theo: "There are new developments within TAXUD. IN the past, they were keen to assist ECSA but now, TAXUD will develop communications to make customs officers more aware of why they do the work they do. TAXUD recently created a working party to examine how to communicate better and how to create a corporate identity for customs throughout the European Union.

Lasse: "We have a Finnish proposal to draft a letter to TAXUD to seek a grant to assist ECSA activities.

We hope that every ECSA delegate will use his/her own TAXUD contacts to get more influence and some muscle for this proposal. I will send my draft proposal to Lieven and he will send it to the Commission."

Billy Robb (Great Britain)

"I think we should push countries that express an interest to join ECSA to host a committee meeting so they can get an idea of what ECSA is about."

Katy said that all the DGs would meet in Prague in May 2006. "We will push the ECSA agenda at this meeting and we will produce a brochure on ECSA events in time for their meeting."

Lieven said he was encouraged by everything he heard and that everyone must keep repeating the message about ECSA at every opportunity.

ECSA Website

Theo: "My colleagues Gill Heddermans has done a great deal of work with Finland's Janne Kallio and they met to discuss technical issues behind our website.

They have made great improvements. Now, when you – the national ECSA representatives for your administrations – wish to make a change to anything on the website, all you have to do is click on the Webmaster and send an e-mail with your changes. The changes will be published on the website in a matter of hours.

I ask and urge everyone at our meeting today to read your own pages on the website and check the content. Then, mail your changes to the Webmaster.

I hope to present a much better updated website to the AGM in 2006 but you must send your photos and information IMMEDIATELY to the Webmaster".

Lasse explained to **Giampiero Piacentini (Italy)** that it is possible to add a link to the Associazione Doganale Italiana website to ECSA's website.

Lieven explained the website this way: "We have built a house with many rooms, a room for every country. You must furnish these rooms with reports and photographs of your own sports activities, all the time. When you return home after our meeting, please check **ecsa.eu** and check the contents of your own homepage.

I am looking at a Finnish pen that Lasse kindly gave me and it has a logo on it saying *www//tulli.fi*. I think we should get pens and key rings etc showing *www//ecsa.eu*. We will have these at our next meeting.

Snapshots of the age profile of our administrations, country by country

Lieven invited each delegate to give a brief report of sports in his/her administration:

Mick O'Hanlon (Ireland): "The average age of the 6,600 colleagues in the Irish administration is 37. We do not have an organised sports club but the Irish Revenue supports and encourages participation in ECSA events and I organise all the Irish participation.

Since our last meeting, Ireland send participated in the Brussels 20K, Nijmegen, the Czech cycling event, the Czech athletics, the Budapest marathon as well as the inter- Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England Lupton Cup football and we also sent five colleagues to the World Police, Fire and Customs Games in Canada.

We hope to participate in most events again next year as well as the ECSA six a side football in the Czech Republic.

Giampiero Piacentini (Italy) "We had many financial problems this year since we reorganised our administration but we were still able to organise skiing in Italy and attend the 20K in Brussels, the athletics in the Czech Republic, the marathon in Budapest.

In 2006, we will organise skiing in Italy. I will e-mail everyone with the programme for this event that will take place in March.

We will also participate in all the ECSA events in 2006 and we will also organise an arts event in Italy. I will have more information soon about this."

Laszlo Kopf (Hungary) "The Hungarian Finance Guard is 55 years old in 2005. We organise football, handball, table tennis, tourist outings, athletics, chess, volleyball and we have 400 members.

We have several dedicated sports days during the year

We attended several ECSA events this year and I want to thank everyone who organised these events. I also congratulate Una Reilly (Ireland) on becoming the women's ECSA marathon champion. The next Budapest marathon takes place on 1 October 2006 and our shooting competition takes place in September 2006.

Botond Hejj (Poland) "2005 was a very significant year for us because we hosted our first-ever ECSA event the table tennis event. It was attended by Netherlands, Lithuania, Slovakia, Great Britain and Poland.

We will host this again in 2006.

Lasse Lehtokangas (Finland) "We organise winter games and summer games. Next summer we will include a sailing event. We also have ice hockey events with Latvia and football against Russia and we participate in Nijmegen".

Palle Lundborg (Sweden) "Our sports club is 50 years old in 2005. We have money to assist our competitors who participate in ECSA events. We organise national football, golf and bowling. The average age of Swedish customs officers is rising. We thank all those who organised ECSA events for us".

Svend Mandel Hanson (Denmark) "We did not participate in 2005 in international events and we cannot host international events for 2006.

We are restructuring 6,000 tax colleagues and 4,000 customs colleagues into a new combined service. We are concerned about losing our customs identity.

We organised domestic sports days with many events and we hope to participate in ECSA events in 2006."

Graham Hopwood (Great Britain) "We became part of the new HM C&E & Inland Revenue in April 2005 with more than 100,000 staff of which customs makes up 22,000. We retained the customs name in the new administration that's now called HM Customs & Revenue.

The old customs sports club merged with the Inland Revenue sports club to become the Revenue & Customs Sports Club with 28,000 members. We are worried about bringing two philosophies together against this background. The last time we had a merger was between Customs & Excise in 1909.

We were pleased to participate in ECSA events in 2005 but we do not know what the future holds or whether the new sports club will approve funding for ECSA participation." Graham then announced that he would be retiring in December. All the delegates wished Graham well in his retirement and thanked him for his contributions in recent years.

Mick O'Hanlon (Ireland): "As your nearest 'neighbour' I wish your new sports club well and I hope that the traditions of the former HM C&E Sports club will lead the way for the new club."

Joel Bastion (France) "We organise shooting, running, football and skiing. There will be a major sports tournament in Clermont Ferrand organised for businesses and public administrations with perhaps 2000 participants. I will send a mail when I have details."

In 2006, we will attend the Italian skiing, Brussels 20K, Budapest marathon and ECSA football in Prague.

We will organise a cross-country race either in Bordeaux or La Rochelle in March 2007 and we seek ECSA designation for this. Even though it is almost two years away, I need to know what countries are interested in participating as soon as possible.

France will also host the ECSA 2006 AGM"

Katy Stifterova (Czech Republic)

"We had a very big turnout at the shooting championship that we organised. We had new competitors from Lithuania, Latvia and Netherlands. The disciplines included precision, relay, situation and Europolice par4. Czech Republic took first place, Slovakia was second and Luxembourg was third".

Katy told the conference about the sniffer dog competition that had been hosted in the Czech Republic in 2004 and 2005.

"We know that Hungary wants to host this event every second year and we are looking for other countries to host it in the intervening years. We hosted the 2004 event and it had ECSA status. As a result of this ECSA event, we now have bilateral agreements between the Czech Republic and Netherlands and Lithuania about best sniffer dog practice in these countries."

(Some discussion followed where the delegates agreed that this sniffer dog event should be promoted because all of our DGs would be interested in it. The conference also considered the worth of the shooting competitions, as many administrations are unarmed)

Lieven: "The eastern and central side of the EU is more aware of armed customs services, so, training an conventions on how and when to use firearms are very important in this ECSA region".

Daniel: "Even though we have no internal land borders, the entire EU depends on the amend customs services in the east and centre."

(The conference agreed to continue to support the shooting events for ECSA status and funding)

Katy: “We organised a running event in September and we also hosted the dogs again. The sniffer dogs’ event was attended by Israel, USA, Lithuania, Austria. Unfortunately, it was by invitation only and it was not an open event so, we didn’t look for ECSA status.

We also hosted a cycling event attended by the UK, Ireland, Luxembourg, Slovakia and Sweden.

On the ECSA front, we sent athletes to the Brussels 20k and won two golds, to Nijmegen (for our first time), to the World Police, Customs and Fire games in Canada where we won five golds, two silver and two bronze medals. However, we know now to prioritise ECSA events over WPCFG as they didn’t even know what continent the Czech Republic is part of!

Next year, we will host the ECSA biennial Six A Side football championships.”

Jan Gajdos Slovak Republic: “Our biggest event is the national marathon but unfortunately it coincides with the Budapest marathon that is designated the official ECSA marathon.

We would ask ECSA to consider our claim for recognition of our Marathon event. The Kosice marathon is the oldest in the world and Slovakian customs invited participants from many countries but due to the ECSA designation for the Budapest marathon, on two runners came from other administrations.

We hope to organise the ECSA football event for 2008 and we are thinking seriously about the shooting event for 2006.”

(Lieven replied to Jan’s point about ECSA status for the Slovakian marathon: “We come together in conference each year to discuss and negotiate wherever events like these can clash.

We had a problem in 2003 where there was an unplanned clash of skiing events in Italy and Finland, where both events had separately been given ECSA status. Now, we should find a solution that encourages every country to decide on a particular event for ECSA designation.

Billy Robb: “The approach is correct to support one event per country and we encourage other members to decide on prioritising events for ECSA status – especially where a probability of a clash exists with an event in another country.”

Jan and Laszlo briefly discussed the possibility of alternating the marathon as an ECSA-designated event. Lieven said he understood Jan’s difficulty to have to tell the Slovak top management that their top event is not an ECSA status event. Billy suggested Lieven should draft a diplomatic letter to the Slovak DG to explain the position with an offer of funding for any new event they might host.

The delegates agreed it was a great pity that such a clash of events exists but they agreed to fully support any other new Slovak event. Jan and Lieven will explore possibilities and this issue will be carried forward to the next EC meeting.)

Zigimuntas represented **Lithuania** on behalf of **Ramune Tartilaite**: “We attended the Polish Table Tennis tournament, the Czech shooting competition and the Nijmegen Marches. Our thanks to all the organisers for the warm hospitality we received.

Nationally, our biggest event is the marathon. It is not an ECSA designated event but you are welcome to participate next July. We have our own sniffer dog trials and basketball Vs Latvia.”

Zigimuntas told the conference about a very unusual event in Lithuania – mushroom gathering! He explained this was part of a day’s rambling and a social event for customs.

Guntars Vicmanis **Latvia**:

“We attended the sniffer dog and shooting events in the Czech Republic. Latvia organises an annual customs sports event over a weekend in the summer. We also had an ice hockey event against Finland.

Latvians are not keen on running events, for some reason. We have a high turnover of staff in Latvian customs. I would encourage ECSA to support more sports such as billiards, darts, bowling etc”.

Guntars asked Lieven about the policy on ECSA funding.

Lieven: “Normally, it depends on the number of countries attending the event and it is discussed at EC level on an event-by-event basis.”

Daniel Koener (**Luxembourg**) “At national level, we have running, marching, cycling and football. On the international front we attended Brussels 20k, Nijmegen, Budapest, the Czech cycling and shooting championships.

We sympathise with Slovakia because we organise similar events that coincide with ECSA status events but we do not seek funding or status for these. However, we continue to organise these events outside the ECSA framework and we cordially invite anyone who would like to attend”

Lieven suggested that the next EC meeting should study all the events that are hosted by ECSA members and consider a formula to prevent any clashes. Daniel suggested a rotation system; perhaps over a five-year period that decides which events get ECSA status. This will be carried into the next EC Meeting.

Theo De Goiejen (**Netherlands**): “We participated in the Brussels 20k, Warsaw Table Tennis and the shooting in the Czech Republic. Thanks to all the organisers for the enthusiasm and welcomes you gave our sporting colleagues.

Netherlands continued to organise the Nijmegen Marches in 2005 when we had 196 customs marchers of whom 58 were from outside the Netherlands. This is very important – in 2006 we need the home addresses of all the participants from your countries. This event has reached its absolute capacity of 47,000 people and there are now much stricter controls in place by the overall organisers.”

Lieven Muylaert (Belgium) “Belgian Customs competitors attended the sniffer dogs, the Budapest Marathon, the Czech shooting, Nijmegen and the Kosice Marathon.

We had 11 ECSA countries represented at the Brussels 20k in 2005 and I invite you all to send competitors to the 2006 event.”

Any Other Business?

- The delegates exchanged papers of results from the various ECSA events in 2005 and they agreed to carefully read the content of their homepages on the ECSA website.
- The question of ECSA status for the Kosice marathon was left to the EC committee meeting that will also examine the database of events that are held in each country to solve the possibility of clashes of events in future.
- The next EC should also consider the possibility of giving ECSA status to events on a three-year or five year cycle.

Next Meetings:

The 2006 AGM for ECSA delegates will take place in France (either in Nice or Toulon) on 29 September 2006.

The first EC meeting of 2006 will take place in Finland (17-19 February) to coincide with the Finnish Customs Winter Games.

The second EC meeting will probably take place in Luxembourg (date to be arranged).

Lieven closed the meeting and thanked everyone for his or her contributions.