

**73th Meeting of the Heads of Customs Administrations of the Member States
of the European Union and Turkey**

Prague, 18 - 19 May, 2006

**ECSA – European Customs Sports Association and its activities
19 May 2006**

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank Mrs Hola, the Deputy Director-general of Czech customs for allowing the European Customs Sports Association to take the floor at the DG Club Meeting today. This is a great opportunity for our association to become ever more known among the Directors general of all Member States.

When ECSA was created back in 1992, eight countries participated at the inaugural meeting in London: these countries were Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Italy, Ireland, France, Denmark and the United Kingdom.

Since then, eight other EU Member states have decided to join ECSA : the Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Sweden which brings us currently to 16 Member countries.

Some other countries as Slovenia and Malta were willing to participate in ECSA-activities but due to financial constraints decided not to join ECSA. I will come back on this issue later on in my speech.

But first of all, let's go some what deeper into **the main goals of ECSA.**

The constitution states that ECSA exists to promote better collegiate relations between customs and tax administrations in Europe through the medium of sport.

Many European Customs and Tax administrations already organise big sports events to which they invite colleagues working in other customs and tax administrations.

ECSCA merely co-ordinates and facilitates these events.

Through the organisation and promotion of common sports activities, ECSCA tries :

1. to strengthen mutual understanding between customs officials;
2. to create a stronger team spirit and;
3. to build a positive image of customs in general.

ECSCA hopes to promote the sports and cultural cooperation as well as mutual understanding between customs officials. It is obvious that the common practice of sports activities creates a we-feeling in and between the customs and tax administrations.

This is perfectly what the Commission says, repeated in every important document of TAXUD, namely that the customs administrations of the member states should act as if they were one.

Moreover, common practice of sports creates a more intense sense of team spirit. It has been proved that sportsmen and sportswomen very often have qualities such as perseverance and team-spirit. These qualities help us directly in our customs organisations. This expresses itself in the daily activities of the customs administrations but also in project working on an international level. ECSCA contributes to the national and international social network.

Outstanding sports achievements of customs officials at international happenings contribute to a positive image of customs through the whole European Union. The positive performance reflects automatically on the internal and external level.

A striking example of these 3 points is a drugs seizure in the Irish Sea a couple of years ago. This was made possible to the fact that a British and an Irish customs officer had exchanged information after having met at an ECSCA sports activity.

Last September there were four British colleagues here in Czech Republic at the running event in Kristin Hradek. One of them was an investigation officer In March, in

the framework of an ongoing drugs investigation there were some phone calls in an African language that nobody understood here and no translator could be found until someone remembered the officer's knowledge of African languages. He cleared the job, which in the official way would take an awful lot of time.

This examples, ladies and gentlemen, show that ECSA can also be very helpful for professional purposes.

Which sports does ECSA cover?

Most of the Member States who have joined ECSA do not only send customs officials to international sports events but also host sporting events covering several disciplines, such as:

- The marathon in Hungary
- rambling in the Netherlands
- the half marathon in Belgium
- skiing in Italy and Sweden
- football in Ireland, Finland and France
- table tennis in Poland, Slovakia and the United Kingdom
- badminton in Denmark
- and more customs related : the sniffer dog competition in the Czech Republic
- and finally, the pistol shooting in Hungary.

The two lasts ones have a direct link to our core activity, as you all know. At the latest edition of the sniffer dog competition in Prague for example, the participants exchanged best practices which allows the sniffer dog teams to carry out their job even more efficiently afterwards.

As you can see thanks to ECSA, there are best practices in and between the Customs organisations through cooperation, the creation of a stronger team-spirit and the building of a positive image. As a matter of fact, the "we-feeling" created by the practising of common sports activities contributes to the realisation of the objectives of a European customs policy as well.

How to become an ECSA member?

First there is the financial aspect. ECSA has its own finances which we raise through members annual subscription. We do not have sponsorship of any kind from commercial organisations. For the moment annual membership costs one hundred euro per member country.

Usually, the organisers get the best accommodation rates possible for participants and the participants pay these expenses themselves (as well as travel expenses to the event). If the organisers incur expense through costs of hosting or the event itself and their local administration cannot pay for whatever reason, ECSA can help here.

Each request for finance is examined by the Executive Committee on its merits at the AGM. 85% of ECSA funds that we spend each year are used to help with these costs. The rest is used to pay for the upkeep of the ECSA website or for promotional items like ECSA pins etc. All ECSA representatives of the Member States meet once a year at the annual meeting (AGM) organised by a host administration. This year we will meet each other in France. Once a year there is a spring and summer meeting of the Executive Committee with members elected from the members of the Council.

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Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of the sportsmen and sportswomen belonging to customs and tax administrations, I would like to make some strong appeals.

First I appeal to the Directors General of Austria, Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain, whose administrations have not joined to ESCA yet. Give your people the opportunity to take part in international sports events.

I want to make, as well, an appeal to the Directors General of the ESCA member states. Some countries such as Slovenia and Malta were willing to participate in ECSA-activities but decided due to financial constraints not to join ECSA. For those who can not afford to participate in ECSA, you can help your colleagues by acting as a godfather. You could do this by inviting non-member ECSA States in your region to participate in regional sport activities you organise in order to increase their know-how and commitment. We as an ECSA representative learned from our own

experience how important it is for the national ECSA representative that sport activities are supported by the Director General of his country, as it is the case in Belgium. I want to express my sincere thanks to all Directors General, who are well disposed to sports in general. .

Finally I want to appeal to the European Commission represented here by Taxud. As stated before, ECSA can perfectly help realising some objectives of TAXUD, as formulated by the Community programmes Customs 2007 and Fiscalis 2007. TAXUD can support ECSA in facilitating ECSA activities. A higher commitment of both sides can be examined based on clear objectives. A first step will consist in the designation of a representative of the Commission as a full member of the ECSA Committee who can examine further cooperation.

I would be very honoured if you would like to read some more information about ECSA on our website, www.ecsa.eu. We at ECSA would be delighted to publish news about internal administration sporting contacts in the rest of the world on our website as well as in our regular newsletter.

If you have any specific questions or remarks, you can always contact me by email or telephone. I will be more than happy to help you. You can find all my personal details on the screen behind me.

Thank you very much for your attention.