

# CUSTOMS

1.20

## WHITE BOOK BALANCE SCORE CARD

Recommendations:	Introduced in the WB:	Significant progress	Certain progress	No progress
The FIC proposes the following improvements of the efficiency and transparency of the customs clearance procedure:				
Transparently communicate the planned liberalization of customs preferences with the interested industries and ensure the industry's consent at least 12 months prior to the commencement of the preference.	2018			√
We propose the following changes to customs declarations: 1) allow the use of a comprehensive guarantee with a reduced reference amount for several customs procedures, as well as relief from the obligation to provide the guarantee, in the manner prescribed for the transit procedure, 2) It is necessary to prescribe a simplified procedure that defines the process of correction of the customs value of previously imported/exported goods for a longer period of time.	2018			√
A significant number of legal provisions require a further specification through by-laws as well as compliance with other relevant laws, such as: (1) alignment of customs procedure with VAT Law, regarding the treatment of a foreign legal entity in a customs procedure; (2) decrease the frequency of sample-taking for core products and accept the analysis of accredited foreign laboratories; (3) specify the procedure for temporary export in order to customs authority approval is not required and regular export procedures can be applied in practise; (4) adoption of an act of the CA which would explain the procedure for determining and changing the customs value in case of transfer prices, and to specify the procedure for determining and changing the customs value in the event of a change in the price of goods ; (5) introduce an exemption from conducting misdemeanor proceedings for a person who only requests to change the data on the quantity of goods in the customs declaration after the end of the procedure and after determining the actual quantity of delivered goods; (6) consider the introduction of customs relief for the import of new equipment that is not produced in the country.	2021			√
Increase efficiency at all levels of administration: continue to improve the online information system so that it is accessible to all parties involved in the customs process; introducing a simplified correction of the customs document based on the correction of the quantity of goods that have been cleared; improve the system of risk analysis on the basis of which the type of goods and/or the importer for which an accelerated or simplified import procedure can be approved would be identified . We propose to consider the additional involvement of customs authorities during the verification of electronic invoices in such a way as to enable the sending of electronic invoices in their integral form, and that traffic participants do not print external representations of them.	2018		√	
Align the Decree on Customs Procedures and Customs Formalities with the new Customs Law, in such a way that the additional costs of the laboratory analysis are not borne by the applicant for the issuance of a binding information and abolish the fee for using customs terminals .	2019			√

## CURRENT SITUATION

The general rules and procedures that apply to goods brought into and out of the customs territory of the Republic of Serbia (later "RS") are regulated by the Customs Law ("Official Gazette of the RS Nos. 95/2018, 91/2019, 144/2020, 118/ 2021, 138/2022) and other bylaws; Customs tariff that is adjusted once a year with the Combined Nomenclature of the European Union; then international free trade agreements signed with members of the following agreements: CEFTA, EFTA, EU, Turkey, Eurasian Economic Union Great Britain and Republic of China; as well as by applying different customs procedures: NCTS, NCTS-P5, AEO, as well as other procedures regulated by the Customs Law.

Continuous amendments to the Customs Law and by-laws significantly facilitate and simplify the application of customs procedures for legal entities operating on the territory of the RS. However, a very significant role is played by international agreements on free trade, since their application increases the competitiveness of products on the regional and international markets.

The Republic of Serbia recognized the importance of expanding business cooperation with the EU has applied the transitional rules on the preferential origin of goods that are under the umbrella of the Regional Convention on the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean Union (PEM Convention).

With the goal of improving technical functionality, we support investing in the "National One-Stop System" project, which will connect all participants in foreign trade, both state authorities and the business community, and enable faster and more efficient exchange of data and documents. The project was initially presented in 2020, and the completion of the project is expected in 2025.

## POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

The following positive developments have been identified that affect day-to-day business operations:

- Additional alignment with EU regulations and acceptance of more flexible rules on the concept of origin of goods between Serbia, CEFTA and PAN-EU members.
- Free Trade Agreement between Serbia and China was implemented as of July 2024 and shall deepen the economic and political ties between two countries.

- Customs Administration is intended for introduction of Automated Import and Export systems by establishing the Institutional Framework for the Implementation of "AIS/AES" jointly with EU. Numerous benefits are expected from paperless business, such as: reducing the time and costs necessary to carry out import and export customs procedures, increasing the competitiveness of our economy and protecting citizens through better control of import and export, improving security and safety aspects as well as more efficient budget filling.
- New regulation is proposed for Electronic Bill of Lading, that is expected to be aligned and to have positive impact on the system of electronic invoices. It will impact most aspects of goods trade and it is expected to be adopted by the end of 2024.

## REMAINING ISSUES

### General Comments of the Council

- Liberalization of customs preferences for import significantly affects existing operations of legal entities in terms of planning and making future business decisions. In order to ensure the continuity of operations of existing legal entities, it is very important that planned preferences are timely and transparently communicated, as well as to ensure an agreement with the affected industry regarding the abolishment or reduction of import duties.
- In 2015 a significant customs duty relief was abolished for the import of new equipment not produced in the country for the purpose of expanding and modernizing existing production. We believe that duties for equipment, prescribed by the Law on Customs Tariff should be revised and reduced or abolished for products which are not produced in Serbia. Generally, duty relief can be a crucial driver for business expansion and further investments.
- The Decree on Customs Procedures and Customs Formalities prescribes that when considering a request for a binding information, if it is necessary to carry out the examination of goods that cannot be performed in the competent customs laboratory, the Customs Administration (CA) will obtain the offer of the organization or the person who will perform the analyses, and the person who submitted the request is obliged to pay the

costs of those analyses. Considering that in accordance with the new Customs Law, the administrative fee for the analyses service should be paid to the CA, it would be appropriate that the applicant should pay only the statutory administrative fee, while the fee for the service of the authorized laboratory should be paid by the CA.

- The Customs Law stipulates that economic operators may be authorized to use a comprehensive guarantee with a reduced amount for customs debt and other charges, or to have a guarantee waiver. This right is restricted by Article 141 of the Regulation on Customs Procedures and Customs Formalities, which only prescribes the possibility of reducing the reference amount by 50%.

#### Application of legislation

- The Customs Law stipulates that the maturity period of a customs debt may not exceed 8 days, which is too short for taxpayers who process a lot of customs documents on a daily basis. We suggest that customs authorities should enable the debtor to pay the customs debt within a period not exceeding 31 days. We believe that this would allow flexibility in customs clearance, resulting in a reduced number of errors in the processing of customs documents.
- The Customs Law excludes the possibility of rectifying customs documents if, following customs clearance, based on the inventory stock count of goods at the receiving dock, the receiver identifies a discrepancy in the inventory relative to the quantity reflected in the customs documents. Such omissions are mainly unintentional and occur during the loading or delivery of goods, but they result in legal violations on the part of the legal entity, even when the declarant self-declares the omission.
- Quality control inspections are regular at each importation of goods but are slowing down the customs clearance process even for the regularly imported goods that have been inspected by foreign accredited laboratories. Overall, the quality control tests are without deficiencies in the case of regular importers.

- The Decree on Customs Procedures and Customs Formalities provides that, until the date of deployment of electronic systems the movement of goods between the temporary storage facilities shall be affected by applying the transit procedure. This restricts the rights of holders of the AEO authorization.

- The following deviations have been noted in practice: i) decisions on the request to amend the customs declaration are made after the prescribed deadlines; ii) full implementation of Article 158 of the Law is not allowed, declarations are still forwarded electronically, although the Law allows the holder of the approval to submit a declaration in the form of recording in business books, iii) restrictive approach is still applied when it comes to discounts and still insists on submitting contracts in writing although it is no longer necessary.

- Customs Authority has provided the official Explanation on how the duties are calculated and the customs value is determined for finished products that are exported to the territory of Serbia outside the zone, and which are produced in the free zone from materials for which exemption from customs duties was applied. The application of the Explanation has been delayed few times and still it is not adopted.

- Customs regulations do not define temporary export as a special customs procedure, which means that the temporary export of goods does not require the approval of the customs authority, but to apply the provisions relating to the export of goods. However, the customs authorities require temporary export to be applied for and an authorization issued, which unnecessarily slows down and complicates the implementation of the export procedure.

- The problem was noticed that in the case of the need to change a large number of declarations related to a longer period of time, the changes would be made for each declaration individually.

- FTA are applied without major difficulties, but documents of origin and "BTI" should be issued and processed more efficiently.

## FIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The FIC proposes the following improvements of the efficiency and transparency of the customs clearance procedure:

- Transparently communicate the planned liberalization of customs preferences with the interested industries and ensure the industry's consent at least 12 months prior to the commencement of the preference.
- We propose the following changes to customs declarations: (1) the date of issue of the customs invoice - it is recommended that the date of issue of the customs invoice should be the final date of clearance of goods and not the date of the acceptance of a declaration; (2) allow the use of a comprehensive guarantee with a reduced reference amount for several customs procedures, as well as relief from the obligation to provide the guarantee, in the manner prescribed for the transit procedure.
- A significant number of legal provisions require a further specification through by-laws as well as compliance with other relevant laws, such as: (1) alignment of customs procedure with VAT Law, regarding the treatment of a foreign legal entity in a customs procedure; (2) decrease the frequency of sample-taking for core products and accept the analysis of accredited foreign laboratories; (3) we propose that opinions of the Customs Administration should be more precise and detailed; (4) specify the procedure for determining and changing the customs value in the event of a goods' price change; (5) specify the procedure for temporary export in order to customs authority approval is not required and regular export procedures can be applied in practise; (6) adoption of an act of the CA which would explain the procedure for determining and changing the customs value in case of transfer prices; (7) ensure the full applicability for "new" rules of origin on trade with PAN-EU members; (8) improve efficiency for issuing "BTI" documents, (9) introduce an exemption from conducting misdemeanour proceedings for a person who only requests to change the data on the quantity of goods in the customs declaration after the end of the procedure and after determining the actual quantity of delivered goods; (10) consider the introduction of customs relief for the import of new equipment that is not produced in the country.
- Increase the efficiency at all levels of administration: efficient handling of requests that are in the administrative procedure; a better on-line information system available to all parties involved in customs process; introducing a simplified correction of a customs document based on the correction of the quantity of goods cleared, improve the risk analysis system according to which goods and / or importer type would be identified for an accelerated or simplified import procedure.
- Align the Decree on Customs Procedures and Customs Formalities with the new Customs Law, in such a way that the additional costs of the laboratory analysis are not borne by the applicant for the issuance of a binding information and abolish the fee for using customs terminals.