

Lithuania

Representative



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History

On 11 March 1990, Lithuania proclaimed to the world that it was re-establishing its sovereignty. It was very important to the country which regained its independence to show to the world that it had state borders with the neighbouring countries and protected them, and that economic protection of the state borders was built upon its sovereignty and institution symbolising it, i.e. the Customs.

On 9 October 1990, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania ? Reconstituent Seimas adopted the Temporary Law on Customs. Two days later, the Customs Department was established by Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania. This was the beginning of the activities of the re-established independent Lithuanian Customs. That autumn, 30 employees started to work with the Customs Department. The same year, the first seven customs houses started to operate.

The re-establishment of the Lithuanian Customs took place under very difficult circumstances. These were troublous times, full of dangers to Lithuania and, in particular, to the officers working on the border. Lithuanian customs offices suffered numerous attacks by hostile Soviet armed forces and Soviet military troops (OMON). They ravaged, fired constructors` coaches which were the only work facilities of customs posts at that time, terrorized both psychologically and physically officials working therein. About thirty customs officials suffered from attacks.

On 31 July 1991, Lithuania was shocked by a severe tragedy: OMON forces attacked Medininkai post, ten officials working therein, i.e. customs inspectors Antanas Musteikis, Stanislovas Orlavičius, Ričardas Rabavičius and four of their brothers in arms, policemen on duty at the post, were brutally murdered. Only customs inspector Tomas Žernas survived.

Pressure at the Lithuanian border was kept not only by often attacks, but also by the presence of two Customs services at the border, as the Customs of the Soviet Union was operating in Lithuania until the very collapse of the August abortive coup in Moscow. Only on 26 August 1991, their activities were discontinued and functions were transferred to the Customs Department. In the same year, the emblem of the Customs of the Republic of Lithuania and the uniform of customs officials were approved.

At that time, the main tasks and functions of the young Lithuanian authorities were to enforce the laws determining customs policy, apply customs tariffs and collect customs charges, prevent smuggling and other violations of customs rules. Legal basis and material facilities as well as properly qualified staff were necessary for the said purposes. This problem was started to be solved in 1992, when the Customs School was opened (in 2001 it was reorganised into the Customs Training Centre).

1993 was very important to the development of Customs, when the Customs legal basis was strengthened by the Customs Law and Tariff Law of the Republic of Lithuania replacing the provisional legal acts, regulation of foreign trade by means of customs tariff was started in the middle of that year.

At that time, the Lithuanian Customs started to apply the provisions of some international conventions, treaties and agreements. Customs procedures, customs control, payment of taxes, application of guaranties were regulated, the first customs warehouses were registered, customs brokers started their operation. In 1993, the first Statute of Service with the Lithuanian Customs (new revision came into force in June 2003) and customs rules were approved, the same year the Customs

Department of the Republic of Lithuania was reorganised into the Customs Department under the Ministry of Finance pursuant to the Government Resolution.

One of more significant changes of customs activity was the reorganisation of customs system made in 1996. The number of 14 operating customs offices was reduced to 10 territorial customs offices, their activity zones were defined, 74 posts and their units were established.

Continuously developing and growing modern customs authority, improving qualification of customs officials made a positive impact on the state budget. Customs revenue increased every year: the Lithuanian Customs collected 9,9 mil. Litas of customs duties and taxes in 1992, 573,4 mil. Litas in 1994, 2 bn. 904 mil. Litas in 1997, 3 bn. 432 mil. Litas in 2003.

The Customs activity is inseparable from the fight against smuggling. On 1 January 2002, the Customs Criminal Service was established at the Lithuanian Customs. One of its main functions was to detain goods attempted to be brought illegally into Lithuania and to protect in this way the internal market of the European Union.

After the restoration of independence, Lithuania not only established and strengthened state institutions, but shortly started getting prepared for a new challenge: integration into the European Union.

The main element of the EU common market is the Customs Union based on the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital. In the Customs Union, all customs duties among the EU member states are eliminated, and the common foreign trade and Customs policy is implemented with the third countries outside the EU.

Therefore, particularly significant works had to be accomplished by the Customs on Lithuania's preparation for the EU membership. Administrative structure had to be reorganised, information systems interfaced with the EU information systems had to be introduced, posts on the future external EU border had to be modernised, legal acts complying with the EU legal provisions had to be prepared, etc.

The Customs Code of the Republic of Lithuania adopted by Seimas in 1996, prepared according to the provisions of the Community Customs Code and main international Conventions regulating Customs activities has formed a stable legal basis for the functioning of the Customs system. The Customs has been following it since 1998 to 1 May 2004, when, upon joining the EU, its activities have been started to be regulated by the Community Customs Code.

On Lithuania's preparation for the EU membership, international co-operation in Customs matters was of particular importance. The possibility to develop international relations appeared already in 1992, when Lithuania became the member of the Customs Co-operation Council (present World Customs Organisation) that makes great influence on the Customs policy of the European Union. Involvement in the activities of this Organization was one of the most important steps after which the Lithuanian Customs started to participate actively in all most important events of the world Customs community. It should be noted that the World Customs Organisation arranged a regional Customs conference in Vilnius, May 2003, with the participation of Michel Danet, WCO Secretary General. The Lithuanian Customs, having started its activities on the border in the temporary constructors' coaches, presently due to international support has several well equipped modern customs posts. These are Medininkai and Šalčininkai road posts on the border with Byelorussia, Nida road post and Panemunė - road post opened this spring on the border with Kaliningrad region (Russia).

One of the most important dates to Lithuania and its Customs is 28 November 2001, when the EU-Lithuanian negotiations on the chapter 'Customs Union' were finalised in Brussels. Thus, the Lithuania's readiness to implement Community legislation regulating Customs activities was recognised officially.

Successful integration into the European Customs family would not be possible without creating the integral Customs Information System. Upon creating the Informatics Division at the Customs Department, the Customs Information System was started to be developed.

In 2001, the Customs Information Systems Centre was established. The previous year, the automated system for customs data processing ASYCUDA, electronic declaration system allowing operators to present import and export declarations electronically; New Computerised Transit System (NCTS); other systems ensuring more rapid movement of cargoes and better control of trade with the third countries were introduced.

On preparation for the successful Lithuania's accession to the European Union, 10 territorial customs houses were reorganised on 1 July 2002 into 5, operating in the biggest towns of Lithuania: Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai and Panevėžys.

In 2004, the number of Customs posts was optimised, about 2,700 employees work within the Customs system. Not only individual officers, but the entire system have been prepared to work better: mobile groups inspecting cargoes on the basis of advance information protect the internal market of the European Union, particular attention is paid to the co-operation with legal traders with a view to fostering rapid and smooth foreign trade.

Commemorating its 85th anniversary this year, the Lithuanian Customs ended one of the most important stages of its activity, i.e. merged into the cohesive EU Customs system. On the day of Lithuania's accession to the EU, the Customs posts on the state border with Poland and Latvia discontinued their operation.

New tasks are awaiting for it in future: to become a model EU Customs service with diligent customs officers, honestly carrying out their duties, reliably protecting the external EU border and ensuring smooth movement of cargoes, passengers and vehicles.

Sports

Floorball, Basketball, Shooting, Football, Walking

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