THE VILNIUS MANIFESTO

On the Future of the European Customs Ecosystem

Customs Ecosystem Conference • Vilnius • 6–7 October 2025

PREAMBLE

We, the undersigned — representatives of trade and logistics associations, customs authorities, academic institutions, and European and national stakeholder organisations — have convened in Vilnius on 6 and 7 October 2025 to articulate a shared vision for the future of the European Customs Ecosystem.

Some signatories were not present at the conference but deemed it important to endorse this document.

United by our commitment to a well-functioning Customs Union and Single Market, secure borders, and the long-term competitiveness of European trade, we hereby set forth this Manifesto as a collective statement of ambition, priority, and shared responsibility.

RECITALS

WHEREAS the European Union faces unprecedented challenges in customs administration, including the exponential growth of e-commerce shipments, evolving security threats, and the need for strategic supply chain resilience;

WHEREAS the ongoing reform of the Union Customs Code represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to modernise the legal framework governing the movement of goods across the EU's external borders;

WHEREAS the successful implementation of a Single EU Customs Authority, the EU Customs Data Hub, an EU single window and harmonised digital processes requires unprecedented coordination between public authorities, economic operators, and knowledge institutions;

WHEREAS divergent national interpretations of customs rules, uneven digital readiness across Member States, and fragmented enforcement practices undermine the integrity of the Single Market and create competitive distortions and an uneven level playing field;

WHEREAS customs professionals — in both the public and private sectors — must be equipped with the competencies and tools necessary to navigate an increasingly complex regulatory and technological environment;

WHEREAS small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face disproportionate barriers to cross-border trade compliance, threatening their participation in global value chains;

NOW, THEREFORE, we, the signatories of this Manifesto, hereby declare and commit as follows:

Article 1 — VISION FOR THE EUROPEAN CUSTOMS ECOSYSTEM

The signatories share a unified vision of a European Customs Ecosystem that is:

i. Unified — coherent in interpretation, implementation, and enforcement across all Member States, eliminating competitive distortions arising from regulatory divergence;
ii. Cooperative — founded on trust-based partnerships between customs authorities, compliant economic operators, associations, academic institutions, and other stakeholders, recognising that effective customs administration requires collaboration, not confrontation;
iii. Simplified — reducing legal fragmentation, administrative burden, and unnecessary procedural complexity while maintaining robust controls and compliance standards;
iv. Digitised — powered by a single EU Customs Data Hub, leveraging interoperable systems and advanced technologies including artificial intelligence and data analytics, while ensuring accessibility for businesses of all sizes;
v. Resilient — capable of responding to geopolitical disruptions, protecting critical supply chains, and adapting to evolving trade patterns and security threats;
vi. Professionally Competent — supported by skilled professionals in customs authorities, qualified intermediaries, and corporate compliance functions, continuously developing their expertise through structured training and certification.

Article 2 — ENABLING CONDITIONS

To realise this vision, the signatories identify the following essential enabling conditions:

i. Structured Stakeholder Engagement — constructive consultation with trade associations, academic experts, and civil society throughout the legislative and implementation cycle, ensuring evidence-based and operationally sound outcomes;
ii. Partnership-Based Compliance — regulatory frameworks that reward transparency and voluntary compliance, foster predictability, and build mutual trust between authorities and economic operators;
iii. Regulatory Simplification and Legal Clarity — removal of redundant requirements, rationalisation of procedural obligations, and consistent application of customs rules across the Union;
iv. Coherent Digital Transformation — coordinated investment in interoperable IT systems, common data standards, and digital solutions accessible to all economic operators, including those without significant technical capacity;

v. Professionalisation of the Customs Function — recognition of customs as a strategic profession, supported by harmonised competency, training and certification standards and requirements, continuous professional development, and attractive career pathways;

vi. Adequate Resources and Implementation Support — sufficient allocation of financial, technical, and human resources at both Union and national levels to deliver on the ambitions of customs reform.

Article 3 — COMMITMENTS OF THE SIGNATORIES

The signatories express their strong willingness to contribute actively to the success of EU Customs Reform by:

i. Providing a unified and authoritative voice on European customs matters, facilitating constructive dialogue between stakeholder communities and EU institutions, including the future EU Customs Authority;

ii. Supporting and initiating pilot projects and proofs of concept that test and validate new customs procedures, digital solutions, and compliance models before broader implementation;

iii. Offering technical and operational expertise grounded in real-world practice, contributing to evidence-based policy development and impact assessment;

iv. Enhancing customs competence across sectors through training programmes, professional certification, and knowledge exchange;

v. Facilitating SME readiness for digital customs and data-driven supply chain processes, ensuring that smaller enterprises are not left behind by the reform agenda;

vi. Strengthening structured dialogue platforms, including the Trade Contact Group (TCG) and associated collaborative networks, as forums for ongoing consultation and cooperation;

vii. Engaging actively with EU and national decision-makers to sustain reform momentum and ensure effective, timely implementation of the new customs framework.

Article 4 — PATHWAY FOR CONTINUED COOPERATION

The signatories commit to sustained collaboration and propose to advance this agenda through the following actions:

i. Disseminate and promote this Vilnius Manifesto as a shared statement of ambition, inviting additional stakeholders to endorse its principles and join its implementation;

ii. Advance concrete pilot initiatives that translate policy concepts into operational solutions, demonstrating the practical benefits of customs modernisation;

iii. Reinforce cooperation mechanisms through the informal TCG network and complementary platforms, ensuring continuous stakeholder engagement throughout the reform process; including the establishment of a business–

academia group to act as a counterpart to the EU Customs Authority within the consultation mechanism with the private sector;

iv. Explore the establishment of a European Customs Knowledge and Practice Hub — a centre of excellence facilitating the exchange of good practices, supporting innovation in customs processes, and promoting the customs profession to new generations;

v. Reconvene periodically to review progress, assess the implementation of this Manifesto's objectives, and adapt priorities to evolving circumstances.

DECLARATION

Adopted in Vilnius on 7 October 2025, this Manifesto represents a collective pledge by its signatories to work together toward a unified, trusted, and technologically advanced European Customs Ecosystem.

The signatories call upon the European Commission, the Member States, the European Parliament, and all institutional partners to support and enable this shared ambition — for the benefit of European trade, security, and prosperity.

SIGNATORIES

The undersigned organisations, institutions, and individuals hereby endorse the principles and commitments set forth in this Manifesto:

Trade and Industry Associations

AmCham EU - speaking for American Business in Europe

BusinessEurope

CLECAT – European Association for Forwarding, Transport, Logistics and Customs Services

CONFIAD - CONFIAD Pan European Network (Confédération des Agents en Douane), International Federation of Customs Brokers and Customs Representatives

EBCA - European Branded Clothing Association

EEA - European Express Association

EFA - Europäisches Forum für Außenwirtschaft e.V.

EuroCommerce - representing the Retail and Wholesale Sector

ESC - European Shippers Council

EUROPRO

EurTradeNet - European Alliance of customs-related service providers

FEPORT - Federation of European Private Port Companies and Terminals

FESI - Federation of the European Sporting Goods Industry

IATA – International Air Transport Association

IRU - International Road Transport Union

IVA - International VAT Association

LCPA - Lithuanian Customs Practitioners Association

NOCA - National Organization of Customs Agents

NSBS - Bulgarian National Freight Forwarding

OCEAN - European Ship Suppliers Organization

ODASCE - L'Office de Développement par l'Automatisation et la Simplification du Commerce Extérieur

PIFFA - Polish International Freight Forwarders Association

TIA - Transport Innovation Association

Customs Authorities

Customs of the Republic of Lithuania

Academic and Training Institutions

Chartered Institute of Export & International Trade

CKI - Customs Knowledge Institute

D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov

Erasmus School of Law

ICTL - Institute of Customs and International Trade Law at the University of Münster

Liège Customs and Trade Law Academy, ULiège

RTU - Riga Technical University

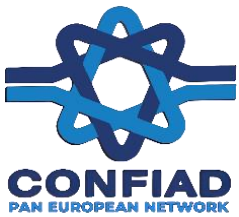
SMK - University of Social Sciences

VMU - Vytautas Magnus University


AmCham EU
SPEAKING FOR AMERICAN BUSINESS IN EUROPE


BUSINESSEUROPE


CLECAT


CONFIAD
PAN EUROPEAN NETWORK


EBCA
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EFA
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IRU


IVA
INTERNATIONAL VAT ASSOCIATION


CUSTOMS
PRACTITIONERS
ASSOCIATION


NATIONAL
ORGANIZATION
OF CUSTOMS
AGENTS































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