



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**Brussels, 19 December 2013
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REV 1**

ENFOCUSTOM 189

NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Customs Cooperation Working Party
Subject:	Final report of the project group on initiative to identify learning points arising from operations outside of the direct auspices of the Customs Cooperation Working Party

1. Introduction¹

Joint Customs Operations (JCOs) are performed by customs authorities of MS and consist of specific operational, coordinated and targeted actions, generally of a limited duration. They are planned and managed under the auspices of the Customs Cooperation Working Party (CCWP).

The JCO model, developed by CCWP, is well established and has formal procedures for the planning, organisation, implementation and evaluation of the individual JCOs. Primary analysis and any consequent recommendations by the CCWP Experts Group followed by strategic oversight from the CCWP Plenary have been a key element in ensuring that the experience derived from JCOs is communicated to all MS, resulting in the identification of best practices to feed into more effective planning and targeting in further operations.

¹ The present report was adopted in the CCWP plenary meeting on 18 December 2013 with the modifications included in this revision. The first version of the document was issued as doc. DS 1974/13.

However, effective multi-national or multi-disciplinary operations outside the direct auspices of the CCWP are commonplace. Not all such operations are in the traditional law enforcement domain, in which the CCWP would see its primary role. Indeed, the role of customs can vary from central to peripheral, depending on the nature or focus of a particular operation. However, each of these operations would have the common denominator of requiring effective co-operation between multiple competent authorities operating in a cross-border environment.

At the meeting of the CCWP (Plenary Group) on 17 January 2013, the Irish Presidency presented document DS 1100/13 (*Initiative on identification of learning points arising from operations outside of the direct auspices of the Customs Cooperation Working Party – Mandate to CCWP Experts Group*). Through this initiative, the Irish Presidency sought to address the above-mentioned situation whereby operations outside of its direct scope are not formally examined by CCWP to establish if there are unique and valuable working methods or best practices emerging from these operations that could be of benefit in the field of customs cooperation.

The document directed the following tasks to the CCWP Experts Group to:

- a) Compile an initial listing of relevant operations other than JCOs, using the year 2012 as an initial baseline, and identify the primary focus of each operation; and
- b) Propose to the CCWP plenary meeting an appropriate methodology for evaluating and extracting the relevant learning points from the operations to be analysed.

The result of this deliberation was presented to the CCWP Plenary Group meeting on 15 May 2013 in document DS 1372/13, which was approved.

2. Objectives

A working group consisting of representatives from Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, Ireland and Lithuania was established based on the document DS 1525/13 (*Initiative on identification of learning points arising from operations outside of the direct auspices of the Customs Cooperation Working Party – Mandate to CCWP Experts Group*), which was approved by the CCWP Plenary Group on 19 June 2013. The task of this working group was to examine operations in areas of interest to Customs.

The purpose of any such examination was not to verify that all of the well-established and generally routine processes involved in the organisation and conduct of an operation were managed correctly. It was not the role of the working group to examine or comment upon the effectiveness of operations organised by other bodies. The sole purpose of such examination was to establish if there are unique and valuable learning points, which could feed into the development of best practice in customs cooperation area.

3. Methodology

In order to carry out this action, the following methods were implemented:

- Liaison contact with relevant agencies were established in order to exchange information concerning forthcoming operations and briefing / de-briefing information for historic operations;
- A sample of “other agency” operations were selected in areas of interest to Customs and that these selected operations were examined using the following factors, laid down in document DS 1372/13:
 1. Examine procedures and methods used to define a threat (e.g. post operational seizure analysis);
 2. Identify who carries out these functions (e. g. dedicated expert group);
 3. Establish approval criteria (defined threshold of expectation for success);
 4. Ascertain timeframe for implementation;
 5. Examine relevant funding arrangements;
 6. Structural issues: Identify control and communications mechanisms used to support operations based on risk or threat. (e.g. whether secure communications or virtual operational co-ordination unit was utilised);
 7. Outputs: whether basis of risk or threat is validated by the operation;
 8. Establish how emerging risk or threat is identified and how feedback is provided to the selection process.

- In order to collect the necessary information from the MS on relevant operations outside of the direct auspices of the CCWP from the beginning of 2012 up to 30 June 2013 the working group has prepared the questionnaire set out in the document CM 3897/1/13 REV 1 on 20 September 2013;
- The questionnaire was sent to all MS delegations. Next, the analyses of the replies were included into the draft final report;
- The draft report submitted to the CCWP Experts for further comments.

There were no direct meetings between members of the working group. The exchange of information took place via e-mail.

4. Study: summary of replies to the questionnaire

21 MS² replied to the questionnaire. 9 questionnaires were filled by organisers and 29 – by participants. The response rate was 75 % (of all MS) and the statistics mentioned below are calculated on this basis.

General information:

The working group was provided with the information on the following 24 different operations:

– JCPO:

Athena III and Radar.

– JPO:

Cycar.

– International operations:

Pangea V, Pangea VI, Opson, Opson II, Sky-Net, Hope, Westerlies, Global Shield, Hope, Cage and Demeter II.

² BE, BG, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GR, HR, HU, IE, LT, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI and SK

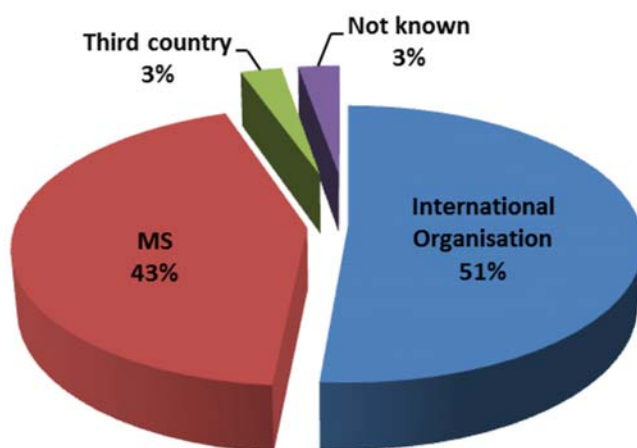
– Regional operations:

Black Pearl, Shadow V, Trojan Horse, Victory, Speedway II, Orion, Tabak, Quo Vadis, Goal, Gulfstream, Via Baltica IV, Hranica, Hranica II and Indago.

The information on the operations Athena III, Radar, Victory, Speedway II, Shadow V, Goal, Quo Vadis and Via Baltica IV was provided to the working group by the organisers (or co-organisers). In the other operations indicated above, MS were involved as participants.

After analysing the received answers to the questionnaire it can be noted that in most of the cases the Member States (43 %) and international organisations (51 %) were the main initiators of operations. See the chart below:

Chart 1. The percentage of respective initiators of mentioned operations

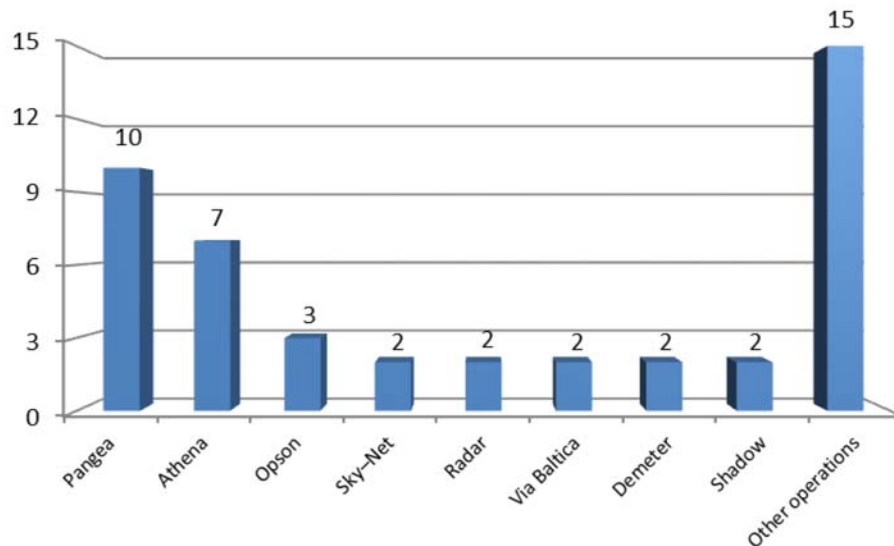


Organisers of the reported international operations were Interpol, Europol and World Customs Organisation (WCO). WCO was mentioned as an initiator of the international operations in a half of such cases.

Indicated regional operations were organised by Southeast European Law Enforcement Center (SELEC) or particular MS (Victory (CY), Speedway II (DE), Via Baltica IV (LT), Gulfstream (FR), Goal (PL), Quo Vadis (SI), Hranica (CZ), Indago (AT and CZ)).

Overall, operations Pangea (10) and Athena (7) were mentioned in most replies. Additional 5 operations (Opson, Radar, Demeter, Shadow, Via Baltica and Sky –Net) were mentioned by more than one country.

Chart 2. The number of responses where mentioned respective operations



Organisation of operations:

Organisers most often were satisfied with the contribution and the involvement of other MS (88%), as well as of WCO (63%) during the preparatory, operational and post-operational phases of the operation(s).

When it comes to the contribution from other MS or international organisations there was equal satisfaction with 7 operations: Radar, Victory, Shadow, Pangea, Goal, Quo Vadis, Speedway.

Generally (in half of all responses) MS who acted as organiser defined the following sources for their threat definition:

- Threat assessment emanating from post seizure analysis;
- Intelligence information;
- Multi-annual, annual threat assessments (global, European (e.g., SOCTA, etc.), regional).

For the most part it was a specialised unit of the organising international operations and ad hoc experts groups who carried out the threat assessment for the purposes of the preparation of the particular operation.

Overall, in more than half of all the responses it was reported that the basis for the risk or the threat was validated by the operation - most often by the seizures.

Duration of operations:

The duration of operations was appropriate for most of the reported operations (86%), except in 3 cases, where participating countries indicated the duration as being “too short” for international operations.

Furthermore the briefing and debriefing meetings were organized in half of mentioned operations. However all organized briefing and debriefing meetings were considered as useful.

Funding:

In 47% of the mentioned operations the cost for the participation in the operations were borne by the participating national administrations, therefore no funding issues arose. In 65% of these cases administrations did not consider funding of the operation to be an essential issue.

Despite the above-mentioned almost all of these administrations considered the funding mechanism used for the particular operations appropriate.

However the issue of funding (e.g., difficult to fulfil funding arrangements, lack of proper funding mechanism, etc.) was named as one of the main problems faced by the organisers and only in 22 % of the cases the organisers indicated that the funding issue is not essential.

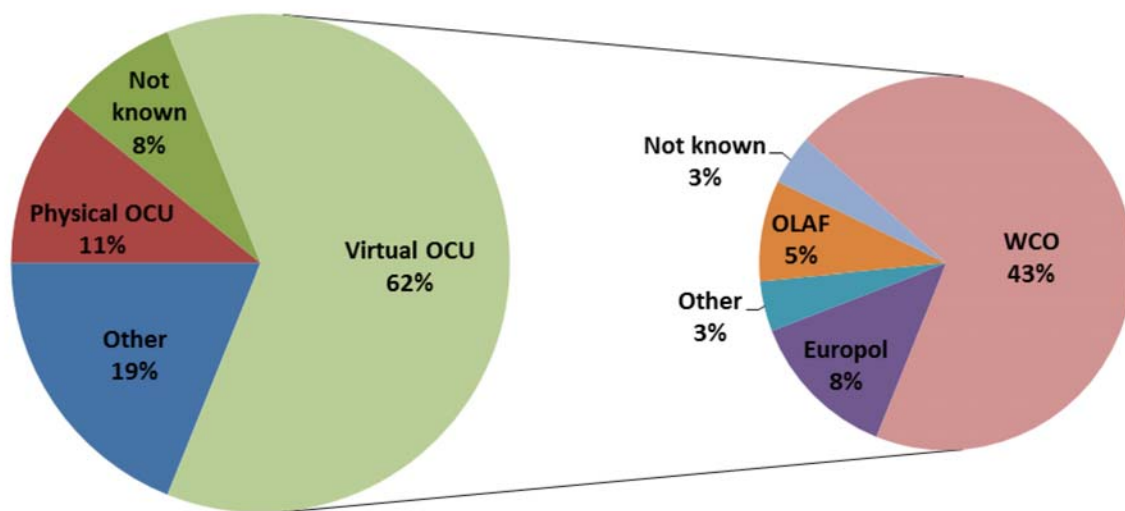
Planning:

In 84% of all reported cases the planning of the operation was indicated as being satisfactory and most of the replies indicated that administrations were satisfied with the execution and follow-up of the operations.

Communication:

In 62% of the mentioned operations, the virtual OCU was utilised with secure web based communications (e.g. MAB Mail, SIENA, CENcomm, etc.), which in most cases (70%) was provided by WCO.

Chart 3. The proportion of respective communication mechanisms used to support mentioned operations and the proportion of organisations provided the facility for used virtual OCU utilised with secure web based communications



5. Overview

Based on the described methodology, the provided answers to the questionnaire and the part of the questionnaire where customs administrations were asked to indicate the good practises which could be useful for the initiation of JCO in future, valuable learning points were extracted, which could feed into the development of best practices in customs cooperation area. These best practices have been divided according the role of the administrations in a JCO either as organiser or as participant and divided by the 8 factors laid down in the document DS 1372/13 and in accordance with the provided feedback to the questionnaire:

5.1. The following factors could be considered as the learning points from the organisers point of view

5.1.1. Procedures and methods used to define threat

A good pre-operational analysis is essential as this will enable organisers/participants to carry out intelligence-led operations in the future.

Main sources of a defined threat targeted by the particular operation are multi-annual and annual threat assessments (for e.g. global, European (e.g., SOCTA, etc.)), regional threat analysis and threat assessments emanating from post seizure analysis and intelligence information. However, the specific aims of the operation should be determined at the initial stage of its planning.

5.1.2. Who carries out these functions

A specialised unit of the organiser of the international operations and preparation of threat assessments carries out the functions of the preparation of the particular operation. Ad hoc working groups could also be created for this task; however specialised units are used more often in such cases. In any case the Guide for Joint Customs Operations (doc. 11984/13 ENFOCUSTOM 112) and the JCO Library under AFIS are useful when planning an operation.

Organisers were most often satisfied with the involvement of other organisations for instance the WCO and EUROPOL as these organisations can carry out a great part of preparatory work by employing their own resources (e.g. the WCO Secretariat in op. Victory) therefore it is advisable when planning and organising the operation to ask for assistance from the relevant international body.

It is also advisable to take contact to other MS or organisations which have organised similar operations in the past like the one “you” are planning and draw on their experiences.

5.1.3. Approval criteria (defined threshold of expectation for success)

Seizures may be made during the operation which matches the list of risk indicators for that particular operation. It is recommended that for future operations of a similar kind, the list of risk indicators should be revised and adequate attention should be paid to the fulfilment of the operational plan.

Not only the seizures but also all the data gathered during the operation should be analysed and used for drawing up future threat assessments.

5.1.4. Timeframe for implementation

A maximum of up to two months should be allocated from the briefing meeting or initiation of the operation before the actual operational phase of the operation.

The operational phase may last from 1 up to no more than 14 days. However, different aspects of the targets of the operation should be taken into account for e.g. if the operation targets a specific sport event or certain movements of goods that relates to a particular holiday period, the timeframe should be adapted accordingly.

Up to one month is considered to be appropriate time to be allocated for the post-operational phase but also it depends on the specific targets of the operation. It could take even longer when an operation is more complex, targets different types of transport, goods and regions.

5.1.5. Funding arrangements

The faster the funding issue is solved, the better the planning will proceed (RADAR). This means that whichever type of funding is chosen by the organiser (operation is funded by special funds or participants will bear all cost on their own), this decision must be known well in advance in order to avoid additional problems related to the financing of the operation during the preparatory /pre-operational phase.

Briefing meetings could be organised as they are useful as to deciding on the final operational plan and when providing guidelines to other participating countries (Victory). Also possible gaps of information and different approaches to the operational phase could be assessed and re-evaluated (Speedway II) and changed accordingly in order to meet expectations of other participants. Briefing meetings are of more relevance as more different authorities are participating in the operation and as coordinating activities become more difficult to deal only by virtual communication. This criterion should be evaluated both on national and international level. In that case the funding is important though not crucial for the organising authority and should be considered especially if briefing and debriefing meetings are organised.

5.1.6. Structural issues: control and communications mechanisms used to support operations

One of the main factors for success is that the test of communication systems should be performed during the pre-operational phase or well in advance before the actual operational phase of the operation.

Virtual OCU's (mainly the WCO CENcomm or the OLAF Virtual Operational Coordination Unit) already turned out to be a very useful and efficient tool and should therefore be used more in the future. They could be utilised together with secure web based communications (MAB Mail or SIENA were applicable). In addition to this also a physical OCU can be used as well depending on the scale and type and funding of the operation.

However, during the operations of a regional character where smaller number of countries and authorities are involved, even phone and e-mail conversations could be used as a main communication tool for the sake of prompt exchange of information between the participating states. If these kinds of regional operations are organised on a regular basis with partners who are used to take part in it, it will ensure a smooth running of the phases of the operation and if any difficulty arises it can be solved very quickly through direct contacts between the participants.

A good practice would be that the OCU takes some sort of daily contact with participants to hear how the operation is running as seen from their side. This could be in the form of a daily newsletter summing up the results and occurrences during the operation – and it would help to keep the motivation and interest going.

5.1.7. Outputs: whether basis of risk or threat is validated by the operation

A report on the overall assessment of the operation should be prepared by giving a very descriptive picture of the entire operation, the results achieved as well as the conclusions and if the risk or threat confirmed by the results achieved during the operation. For this purpose pre-defined tables for reporting the results should be provided to participants as this helps in preparing a detailed final report.

The assessment of the operation as a whole is important: it is good to know what went well, and what went wrong, when planning a new operation as all conclusions form an excellent basis for the preparation of next operation.

5.1.8. How emerging risk or threat is identified and how feedback is provided to the selection process

There should be a systematic post-operational analysis of seizures and other elements carried out in order to update existing threat assessments. This means that participants submit their national reports so that they can contribute to the final report.

Recommendations / conclusions of closed operations must be done at the earliest possible stage.

The final report should be precise and contain information on the achievement of the objectives set for the operation, the concrete seizure results as well as conclusions and recommendations so that they can be used in a constructive manner.

Having in mind that many countries that participate in JCOs do not necessarily face the same problems, it is not easy to define the threat. Therefore potential organisers have to be open to suggestions by potential participants while having in mind all relevant sources for defining the possible threat.

If results of the operation confirm reasons behind the operational plan, it is advisable to initiate a kind of project (continuous monitoring) that will monitor the described problem during a limited time. This will make it possible at a later stage to draft a more-to-the-point operational plan for future operations, while reflecting the real situation facing by certain MS that participated in the operation.

5.2. The following factors were considered as the learning points from the participants' point of view

5.2.1. Procedures and methods used to define threat

When MS only take part in the international/regional operation then most probably, it is organised by an international or regional organisation (for e.g. WCO, SELEC) and there is not much awareness as to the methods for threat analysis or to define threat. However, in these cases mainly global or regional, multi annual threat assessments were used as a basis to define the threat targeted by a certain operation.

The organisers must make available additional high-quality information (from different sources) must be available for the participants during the operation.

It is considered a good practice to disseminate data and analysis obtained from open sources and lessons learned from other previous operations. This will enable the organisers to prepare a complete manual on the control of consignments, contact points of certain business industries (for e.g. pharmaceutical companies if operation relates to the control of medicines). Also, sometimes involvement of private companies working in certain field of risk could help better define the threats and targets for the operation.

5.2.2. Who carries out these functions

When it comes to the participation, mostly ad hoc experts groups that usually takes part in the various international operations therefore have an appropriate experience and expertise. The nature and scale of the operation should also be taken into account as expertise not only in international operations is needed but also good knowledge of the specific area addressed by the operation, e.g. the group of experts dealing with drugs cannot be the same for operations dealing with IPR infringements.

5.2.3. Approval criteria (defined threshold of expectation for success)

Number of seizures was reported as a general factor for defining the success of the operation.

For the execution of the operation it is very important that all problems and questions that appear during the implementation period shall be answered swiftly by the organiser and the aim of the operation should be clearly defined and described in the plan of the operation.

Another important issue is that the invitations to the operation and the operational plan would be sent out well in advance in order for participants to be familiar with the operation and its targets. Also the detailed guidelines and daily reports were seen by the participating countries as an important factor for the success of the operation.

When certain type of operation has been repeated for a number of years and its planning works well with good support from other participating MS and the risk information is well established this could also be seen as an element for success of the operation.

All phases of the operation (Pre-Operational, Operational, Post-Operational) are clear and each of them have special activities to be performed.

5.2.4. Timeframe for implementation

For participating countries it is always an important issue that an operation would not last too long as it requires allocation of additional national resources. In most cases, one week seemed to be the optimum length for an operation. However, there is a danger that the operation could be too short if it does not take into consideration the specific aspects of the target set for the operation (e.g. operation targeting illegal trade in endangered species during certain hunting period should be aligned to that period even if it is much longer than one actual week). The operational phase should be as flexible as possible and should adjust to different factors disabling perpetrators to identify the method used.

In the process of planning JCOs precise scheduling should be in place in order to avoid overlapping with other operations as the participants sometimes have difficulties in taking part in several operations organised in too close or overlapping timeframes.

5.2.5. Funding arrangements

For participating countries the main issue is whether briefing or debriefing meetings will be organised and if a Physical Operation Coordination Unit (POCU) will be established with the delegates from a number of MS. Funding is more often considered as an essential issue if these meetings are organised. Therefore before deciding on funding, the first decision is to be made is if there is a need for such meetings.

The holding of formal briefings and de-briefings, although can be time consuming and have budgetary implications, could be an ideal forum to discuss the parameters, objectives and outcomes of the JCOs. There is a general notion that if more participating countries with different authorities are taking part in the operation, the bigger the need is for such meetings. Also if something new is introduced for an operation which is not familiar to the participants, it would be advisable to arrange such a briefing meeting.

Due to the limited resources of the national administrations in the participating countries it is viewed as being reasonable that funding has to be the responsibility of the organising international organisation.

If there is no briefing meeting organised for a particular JCO/JCPO most information about the operation can be obtained at the CCWP Experts meetings. Therefore a good practice would be to inform the Member States in advance which JCO will be discussed at a CCWP Experts meeting and to request them that the meeting to be attended by somebody who will be competent in that particular matter (i.e. involved in that particular operation).

5.2.6. Structural issues: control and communications mechanisms used to support operations

Adequate attention should be paid to the communication and cooperation between national authorities in case several national agencies are involved in the operation. If all efforts are concentrated on international cooperation and communication, national issues may be left aside and therefore later create significant obstacles during the implementation phase. Therefore involvement of several departments creates a need for national level meetings with the involvement of officers from various departments and this can contribute to the improvement of implementation of the operation.

Legal issues on national level (e.g. different legislation framework) should also be analysed very carefully before taking part in the operations that involve several national authorities.

There should be always available a list of all National Contact Points with working contacts and qualified contact persons in an organisation committee or POCU.

A good practice that could be recommended in addition to IT communication system used for the operation, is that organizers would provide the unified form for exchange of information, which could be later used by participants at national level.

Sharing information using the virtual V-OCU from OLAF proved to be successful (Gulfstream) and the system now contains a full suite of reports making it much easier to analyse the outcomes of the operation. Therefore this type of reporting system could be adapted for all operations in the future.

It is always advisable that the organisers' team test chosen communication system for the operation a few weeks prior to the start of the operation. This gives the participating MS some time to see if the application works or not and will solve any practical communication issues.

For the optimum running of future operations it would be important to get clarifications in advance whether the participating countries will be able to provide nominal information prior to the operational phase.

5.2.7. Outputs: whether basis of risk or threat is validated by the operation

An important recommendation could be made as regards to the time frame between the actual threat analysis and the operational phase. This should not be too long as it may result that the study on the threat assessment will be different by the time the operation is actually initiated.

If a threat or risk assessment for a certain operation is very broad, (e.g. food fraud) every country can make its own specific risk analysis for the operation and later adapt it for the subsequent operation in this field.

5.2.8. How emerging risk or threat is identified and how feedback is provided to the selection process

The analysis carried out by the other agency (e.g. Europol) could be useful. Therefore, it should be useful to agree on it in a separate meeting and decided on how and what kind of information is gathered and what is the timetable for that. It is very important that all countries send all the data requested so that the said agency could perform a proper analysis as it is important to have a follow-up to the operation. The objectives of the operation are evaluated and seizures are presented, but it would be important to evaluate also the data that is being gathered during the operation and use it for a new threat assessment in future.

The dissemination of preliminary worldwide results and the provision of a press release of the participants in their national public campaigns should be done at the same time by all participating parties.

The report should include necessary information as for overall results of the operation and as per single country as well. Therefore feedback on detections, seizures and legal prosecutions from each participating state is essential.

Risk indicators should be adjusted to each type of transport and not too many commodities or several means of transport should be targeted during one operation.

It is also sometimes important to provide possibilities for the exchange of information with third countries customs (bordering with EU) authorities.

6. Conclusions

- At the initial stage of a JCO it would be advisable to decide first on the need for briefing, debriefing meetings and the creation of POCU and afterwards ensure funding for JCO if such meetings are organised;
- Multi-annual and annual threat assessments (e.g. global, European (e.g., SOCTA, etc.)), regional threat analysis and threat assessments emanating from post seizure analysis and intelligence information are the main basis for the JCO;
- Specialised units for the organisation of international operations and preparation of threat assessments are the best solution for the preparation of the particular operation by a MS;
- Recommended time framework for the operation implementation: up to two months could be allocated for the preparation of the operation, from 1 up to 14 days for the execution of controls, up to one month for the evaluation of results;
- Virtual OCU's (WCO CENcomm or OLAF Virtual Operational Coordination Unit) may be used in the future and utilised together with secure web based communications (MAB Mail or SIENA);
- Adequate attention needs to be paid to the communication and cooperation between national authorities when preparing to organise or participate in a particular operation that involve several national authorities;
- It would be important to evaluate not only the seizures but also all data that is being gathered during the operation and use it for a new future threat assessment ;
- Analysis carried out by another agency could be seen as useful for the identification of emerging risk or threat before the start of the operation.

7.1 Recommendations

- Further continue with work on developing learning points by including it into the work of experts in the 7th CCWP action plan³ under the Action 7.5 “To identify the need for new models of cooperation between customs and other agencies / joint customs operations. To implement the strategy of the future customs law enforcement co-operation within the context of the EU policy cycle while taking into account the link with the tax authorities”;
- To consider updating the Guide for JCOs based on the conclusions of this report;
- To consider reviewing the current Coordination Mechanism for joint operations (CCWP/ LEWP/ FRONTEX/ EUROPOL)⁴ in order to reflect the latest developments in the new EU Policy Cycle and to improve the multi-agencies approach and the correspondent operational coordination.

7.2. Follow up of recommendations

- To include the above mentioned recommendations into the Roadmap for progressing recommendations suggested for inclusion in the monitoring file

³ 7th CCWP Action Plan, reflective of EU Policy cycle, doc. 12468/6/13 REV 6
ENFOCUSTOM 120 ENFOPOL 284 COSI 104

⁴ doc. 13077/2/10 REV 2 COSI 54 ENFOPOL 230 ENFOCUSTOM 73 FRONT 123

ROADMAP FOR PROGRESSING RECOMMENDATIONS
SUGGESTED FOR INCLUSION IN THE MONITORING FILE

Action Number: CCWP Experts		Action Title: "Initiative on identification of learning points arising from operations outside of the direct auspices of the Customs Cooperation Working Party"		
Group Leader	Lithuania			
No.	Recommendation	Plan for ensuring delivery of recommendation		
		By whom?	How?	By when?
1.	Further continue with work on developing learning points by including it into the work of experts in the 7th CCWP action plan ⁵ under the Action 7.5 "To identify the need for new models of cooperation between customs and other agencies / joint customs operations. To implement the strategy of the future customs law enforcement co-operation within the context of the EU policy cycle while taking into account the link with the tax authorities";	CCWP	Project group	End-2015
2.	To consider updating the Guide for JCOs based on the conclusions of this report	CCWP Experts	Presidency	2014
3.	To consider reviewing the current Coordination Mechanism for joint operations (CCWP/ LEWP/ FRONTEX/ EUROPOL) ⁶ in order to reflect the latest developments in the new EU Policy Cycle and to improve the multi-agencies approach and the correspondent operational coordination	CCWP	Presidency	2014

⁵ 7th CCWP Action Plan, reflective of EU Policy cycle, doc. 12468/6/13 REV 6 ENFOCUSTOM 120 ENFOPOL 284 COSI 104

⁶ doc. 13077/2/10 REV 2 COSI 54 ENFOPOL 230 ENFOCUSTOM 73 FRONT 123