

PORT OF BEIRUT: CUSTOMS, KEY TO ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Customs authorities play a strategic role in the economic activity of the Port of Beirut, the main entry point for goods in Lebanon. To support the recovery, France is working on two emergencies: restore their capacity for action and assist with the implementation of structural reforms.

Since the summer of 2019, Lebanon has been facing a major economic, social and political crisis. On 4 August 2020, this was compounded by two explosions in the Port of Beirut, the economic lung of the country. The port is the main entry point for goods and handles 82% of Lebanon's imports-exports, with the vast majority of the food consumed in the country being imported. The port also has a major transshipment and regional trade activity.

In this context, France is taking action to restore the capacity of the Customs authorities to fulfil their core missions.

One of the first emergencies was to address the immediate material needs, so that the Customs authorities could resume their surveillance missions in the port and Customs clearance operations.

However, at the same time, this short-term support needs to be combined with actions to support the structural reform of the Customs authorities. These measures are an essential prerequisite for the smooth operation of the activities of modern and digitalised Customs authorities, within a port ecosystem that meets international standards.

CONTEXT

As part of French aid in response to the explosion in the Port of Beirut in Lebanon on 4 August 2020, France took swift action and put together a team of experts. The work focuses on identifying the reconstruction needs for the port and proposing solutions to improve its operations: governance, customs, digitalisation, security, development, etc. The operator Expertise France is handling the coordination.



Following the explosions, the Customs authorities lost almost all of their facilities and equipment located in the port.

“Be part of a dynamic for the structural reform of Customs”



With Thierry Ivars, a Customs expert

Thierry Ivars has been mobilised since November 2020 and is responsible for the Customs component of the expert mission conducted as part of the support to the Port of Beirut. He is also responsible for the support for the implementation of short-term actions, such as the deployment of a mobile scanner, given by the French Directorate General for Customs and Indirect Taxation (DGDDI) with its retrofit financed by the Directorate General of the Treasury (DGT).

How have the Lebanese Customs authorities been affected by the explosion and what aid has France provided?

They lost almost all of their facilities and equipment located in the port. So, they no longer had the technical

tools to fulfil their missions. Initial emergency aid allowed the Customs officers to resume their surveillance missions. It was essential in order to prevent the economy from being stifled and to resume Customs clearance operations. The provision of a mobile scanner by the French State, which should be delivered in the summer of 2021, will make it possible to better detect hazardous goods and combat fraud.

However, there are still needs and the situation remains fragile, in particular concerning Customs computer systems and the Customs clearance system.

How can the difficulties experienced be overcome?

It is essential to secure Customs

data through the acquisition of a new data centre, as the previous one was destroyed by the explosion. In terms of Customs clearance, we recommend an update of the NAJM/ASYCUDA World system, which is used for Customs declarations, accounting... More generally, this must be part of a dynamic for the structural reform of Customs.

What will this reform lead to?

The reform of the organisation of Customs will facilitate decision-making and make it possible to modernise their tools and operation, in line with international standards. This will improve the efficiency of Customs operations and better protect the Customs territory.

FRENCH SUPPORT ON TWO LEVELS



RESTORE THE CAPACITY FOR ACTION OF CUSTOMS

- ▶ **Advice:** deployment of an expert in the field of Customs to ensure the continuity of the support (November 2020 - December 2021)
- ▶ **Equipment to resume the control operations:** delivery scheduled of a mobile scanner by the French company Smiths Detection



CONTINUE THE STRUCTURAL REFORM

- ▶ **Support the implementation of the Customs reform:** overhaul of the organisational structure, new Customs law, implementation of the 2019-2023 strategic plan, risk management plan.
- ▶ **Address the risks** to the Customs computer systems and Customs clearance system
- ▶ **Build the capacities** of the Customs authorities to comply with international standards (ethics, Trade Facilitation Agreement, etc.) with support from the World Customs Organization and the other partners

ABOUT EXPERTISE FRANCE

Expertise France is a public agency and the inter-ministerial operator for international technical cooperation. It will soon be joining Agence Française de Développement Group (AFD Group). The second largest agency in Europe, it designs and implements projects that sustainably strengthen public policies in developing and emerging countries. Governance, security, climate, health, education... It operates in key areas of development and contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) alongside its partners. For a world in common.