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**WCO, OSCE TRAIN CENTRAL ASIA CUSTOMS IN PREVENTING ILLICIT TRAFFICKING OF CULTURAL HERITAGE**

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A four-day training programme on the Prevention of Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Heritage (PITCH), organized by the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) with the support of the Border Management Unit of the OSCE Project Office in Dushanbe, completed in Tajikistan last week.

Twenty-one officers from the customs administrations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan participated in the training, aimed at improving the knowledge and skills of customs officers in preventing offences related to the illicit trafficking of cultural heritage.

The training was conducted as part of an OSCE project that aims to position this phenomenon higher on the agenda of the national services of OSCE participating states, with a focus on further capacity building, in a systematic manner, in accordance with identified best practices.

This approach is also in line with the WCOs global deployment strategy for the PITCH training for customs administrations, as set out in the WCO Councils 2016 Resolution on the Role of Customs in Preventing Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Objects as well as in United Nations Security Council Resolution 2347/2017. The WCO PITCH training is specifically aimed at enhancing the operational capacities of frontline customs officers who act as the first line of defence in the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural objects.

This joint WCO-OSCE initiative serves as an example of partnership, synergy and mutual support resulting in rapid deployment of the standard PITCH training for the benefit of Central Asian customs administrations, stated Ana Hinojosa, WCO Director of Compliance and Facilitation. She added that the WCO reaffirms its readiness to build on this success and continue providing the necessary support to its Members in this critical region.

We do believe that shared expertise and knowledge will contribute towards protection of the unique and extremely rich cultural heritage of Central Asian countries, said Goran Stojkovski, Customs Adviser at the OSCE Secretariats Border Management and Security Unit.

Bringing representatives of Customs administrations of participating Central Asian states together to benefit from the WCO PITCH training promotes the principles of confidence building and co-operation, as well as the sharing of resources and knowledge in the prevention of and fight against this specific phenomenon, said Stojkovski, adding that this is a great example of the implementation of the core commitments of the OSCE Border Security and Management Concept,

which has proved its efficiency since its adoption in 2005.

The deployment of the PITCH training for Central Asian Customs administrations was the first joint effort by the WCO and OSCE, based on the Working Arrangement that both Organizations signed in 2018, providing a framework for co-operation in areas of mutual interest.

The training was supported by experts from French Customs and the Netherlands, who covered modules on the identification, handling and documentation of cultural objects, the international legal framework, investigation sources and operational exercises. A working visit to the National Museum of Tajikistan was also organized as a part of the training.

<https://www.timesca.com/index.php/news/21013-wco-osce-train-central-asia-customs-in-preventing-illicit-trafficking-of-cultural-heritage>

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