

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my duty in my position as Secretary General of Clecat to welcome you again to the afternoon session of the CLECAT's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary Freight Forwarders Conference.

The afternoon session will be entirely devoted to the new Customs landscape that a series of legislative provisions are shaping before our eyes.

Let me say very clearly that this is quite a historical achievement. For the first time since its inception in 1957 the EU will have a common Customs system, which will be entirely deployed in electronic format. The Customs union, in terms of tariffs and trade policy is 40 years old this year, and we can safely say that it has been accomplished successfully without insurmountable trouble. However the same policy has been so far administered by different Customs authorities, each with its own system and peculiarity.

What we are building now is one big Customs house that will serve all citizens from the remotest areas of the union to the very heart of it, here in Brussels. This is a big challenge for our companies as well as historical opportunity.

The speakers and panellists who **agreed** to give us their views today will debate the EU perspective first, with a view to understanding what can be materially achieved in which timeframe. The session **following-on from that** will **then** dwell on the connections between our system and the international perspective, which is the very essence of Customs services.

Much work is still ahead of us and this legislative programme will be only fully accomplished in about five years, but the first changes will be apparent **much sooner**. Many of you have been dealing with a new concept, the Authorised Economic Operator. This is a voluntary scheme which is designed to identify a number of traders who are willing to engage in enhanced Customs compliance in exchange of a series of preferential channels for their business. It is a new season of trust building between the administration and the trade and I am sure our companies will be first in line in showing their commitment to a business pattern that will be both regular and trouble-free.

Without further ado, let me give the floor to our guest of honour, Mr László Kovács, Commissioner for taxation and Customs union.