

Top customs tech takes trade to a new level

City of Ningbo plays key role in upping exchanges with enterprises in Central and Eastern Europe

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Ningbo Customs, located in Zhejiang province, is pushing ahead to increase trade between China and Central and Eastern European countries.

As one of China's busiest ports, Ningbo Port has played a prominent role in deepening cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European countries.

In 2018, the trade volume between Ningbo and CEECs reached 24.36 billion yuan (\$3.52 billion), a year-on-year increase of 23.1 percent, and 10.2 percentage points higher than the city's overall growth rate.

Ningbo's export volume was 21.05 billion yuan, an increase of 22 percent, and the import volume was 3.31 billion yuan, an increase of 30.5 percent.

In the first four months of this year, trade volume between Ningbo and CEECs hit 7.88 billion yuan, an increase of 7.6 percent over the same period last year.

In response to the increasing trade between China and CEECs, Ningbo Customs has taken steps to provide more effective and efficient services and procedures.

One such measure is smart inspection, which involves the usage and archiving of digital images of trade products and a large-scale product information filing system.

The imaging system collects images of common import and export commodities at Ningbo Port and carries out automated image analysis via image recognition technology.

So far, it has collected 400,000 images to store as its basic image library.

The image filing system records commodity data and other product information including that of traders.

This technology means that processing at the port can be carried out



Customs officials of Ningbo Customs in Zhejiang province inspect a rail-sea combined transportation site. GAO XUEFENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

with much greater ease than previously.

In the first four months this year, 147 enterprises used the systems registering more than 1,200 commodities. Smart inspection can save traders up to 50 percent in custom processing time, Ningbo Customs said.

"Thanks to such machine inspection launched by Ningbo Customs, our goods, which are already on file, can be given priority for inspection," said an executive surnamed Huang from local company Ningbo Far East Lighting.

The majority of goods coming into China from CEECs are declared at Ningbo Port.

"The images of our goods have been added into the smart machine inspection system, and they now provide auxiliary reference for customs inspection, accelerating the clearance speed of the goods and reduce our costs," Huang said.

Ningbo Customs is also using internet of things technology and cloud computing to monitor goods, especially those in transit.

The port uses a smart security lock system which collects real-time information on the status of goods using satellite positioning during the entire transportation process.

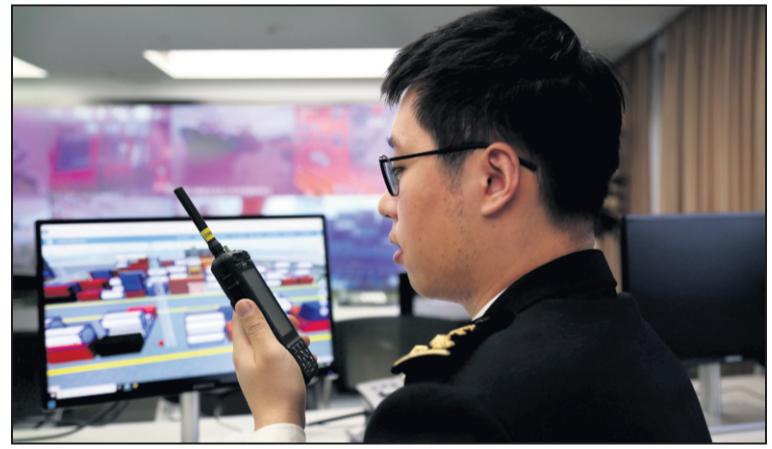
The use of such technology, together with online declaration

and automatic checks and simplified customs procedures, has greatly improved convenience for all parties, an official from Ningbo Customs said.

In May, Ningbo Customs signed a strategic cooperation agreement with the Ningbo branch of China Mobile to use 5G technology in customs supervision.

In the future, 5G and augmented reality technology will further improve customs efficiency.

Ningbo Customs said it will step up its efforts in customs supervision and promote the development of trade between Ningbo and CEECs.



A staff member of Ningbo Customs monitors port operations. XIANG LIANMEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Efforts made for better inspections, quarantine

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Ningbo Customs has made an effort to build a tight network in port inspection and quarantine to ensure the smooth running of the economy and society.

As an important city involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, Ningbo is using its geographical advantage as a port city to strengthen connections to Central and Eastern Europe.

The permanent exhibition hall for products from the Central and Eastern European countries at the Ningbo Imported And Exported Commodity Center has become the "first choice" for the countries looking to export commodities to China. A large number of local specialties appear here, such as biscuits from Slovakia, honey from Hungary, crystal from Bohemia and so on.

With the deepening of economic globalization, personnel, economic and trade exchanges are becoming frequent. Therefore, ecological risks pose new challenges to national security, an official from Ningbo Customs said. In addition to introducing efficient and convenient measures in customs procedures, Ningbo Customs has also stepped up its efforts in port supervision, the official said.

To prevent animal and plant diseases entering the country, Ningbo Customs carried out classification entry management on the exhibits at the permanent exhibition hall for products from the Central and Eastern European countries based on different risk levels. Exhibits are divided into three categories — entry with approval, limited entry and prohibited entry.

At the same time, they have enhanced the prevention measures for key animal and plant diseases



Customs officials check smart security locks. GAO XUEFENG / FOR CHINA DAILY. Officials examine goods. GAN XIAOYI / FOR CHINA DAILY

during the on-site inspection and quarantine.

Ningbo Customs said they strictly inspect wooden packaging and carry out quarantine treatment on unqualified wooden packages. They also set up quarantines for pork products from areas affected by the African swine fever virus. They destroyed products from epidemic areas and unidentified pork products. This prevents the introduction of animal and plant diseases.

With successful China-CEEC investment and trade expos between 2015-18, a growing number of imported foods from countries in Central and Eastern Europe have come to Ningbo. This has become a supervision focus, Ningbo Customs said.

In response, Ningbo Customs took the initiative to promote the reform of the working mechanism of food

access to China. With the authorization of the General Administration of Customs, Ningbo Customs assessed and researched foods from 10 countries and regions in Central and Eastern Europe — Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Moldova, Austria and Ukraine.

Ningbo Customs has also participated in a lot of foods assessment work for the General Administration of Customs in recent years. For example, Estonian aquatic products, Romanian honey, Czech malt, Latvian honey, Slovenian honey, Argentine peas, Slovak mutton, Swedish honey and Armenian bee products. As of April 2019, a total of 116 kinds of food under seven categories from 13 Central and Eastern European countries had passed risk assessment and are allowed as exported foods to China.

Simplicity in procedures key to success

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Ningbo Customs has implemented a series of measures to simplify customs procedures in recent years, paving the way for economic and trade development between China and Central and Eastern European countries.

One such measure has been going paperless, which has saved both time and money, according to Ningbo Customs.

"We are exploring the market in Central and Eastern Europe, so it is very important for us to fulfill orders on time," said a manager surnamed Yang from Anhui Sentai WPC Rosenthal Group.

"Online customs procedures enable us to enjoy the convenience of customs clearance at anytime and anywhere."

According to Ningbo Customs, more than 95 percent of its customs procedures, such as declaration and clearance, are processed online, instead of using paper. It means that these processes have been reduced to mere minutes and seconds.

The efficient customs procedures have helped increase growth in imports and exports, and have created a new competitive advantage for Ningbo Port, Ningbo Customs said.

Goods declaration in advance of arrival at the port is another measure launched by Ningbo Customs.

Under such a measure, traders, with the name, specifications and quantity of the goods on board, are able to go through customs declaration at sea, before arrival at the port or within three days before the export goods arrive at the places under customs supervision.

This effectively reduces the time it takes to dock a cargo ship and saves a lot in costs too, the official said.

"Waiting time is reduced and the supervision work is also moved forward, which is conducive to preventing any risks," said Wu Zefeng, an official at Ningbo Customs.

"We work with relevant enterprises in advance, provide customs clearance guidance and policy explanations, and provide high-quality customs services for importing goods from Central and Eastern Europe," Wu said.

The program Authorized Economic Operator, known as AEO, has also speeded exports of Ningbo-manufactured goods to Central and Eastern Europe.

The AEO certification program was advocated by the World Customs Organization to strengthen the partnership between customs and industry, reduce barriers to customs procedures and enhance international trade efficiency.

"Thanks to the great support of Ningbo Customs, our company gained AEO certification and we have received preferential treatment in the trade with Central and Eastern European countries," said Xu Pengfei, president of Ningbo Jinding Fastening Piece, an industry leader producing a variety of products including nuts, bolts and screws.

Ningbo is home to a large number of fastener manufacturing enterprises, and in recent years the city has sought cooperation with the Czech Republic, Romania and other mechanical products manufacturing powers in Central and Eastern Europe.

In the first months this year, Ningbo's fastener product exports to Central and Eastern European countries amounted to 65 million yuan (\$9.41 million), an increase of 63 percent on the same period in 2018, according to Ningbo Customs.

To support local fastener product manufacturers to export products to Central and Eastern European countries, Zhenhai Customs House, under the administration of Ningbo Customs, has released a series of measures, such as priority for customs procedures, simplifying document auditing, reducing import and export inspection and establishing full-time coordinators.

From January to April this year, the export volume of fasteners of Ningbo Jinding Fastening Piece to Central and Eastern European countries increased by 1.7 times over the same period last year.

Ningbo Customs is also providing support for the rapid development of export enterprises in areas such as applications for certificates of origin, classification management of enterprise credit rating and diversified customs tax guarantees.



Ningbo Customs provides consultancy services for a company representative. WU WEICHUN / FOR CHINA DAILY