



Speech of Mr. Roberto ALBERTI
President of Fedespedi

*“FUTURE PROOFING THE CUSTOMS PROFESSION:
Education in customs and trade compliance”*

November 15th, 2018 - Bruxelles

Good morning ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, let me thank Clecat and its President Steve Parker for inviting me: I am very glad to be here today. Indeed, for me and FEDESPEDI – the Italian Federation of International Freight Forwarders which I am honoured to chair and represent here today – the *Freight Forwarder Forum* is a precious opportunity to bring our contribution to the current debate in Europe on the future prospects of our trade.

(SLIDE 1) Fedespedi contributes competence and professionalism to the services to businesses.

Before addressing the core theme on which I and the other speakers have been invited to contribute, I would like to tell you briefly who Fedespedi is, and what we do.

For over 70 years Fedespedi has been the only business organisation representing and protecting the interests of international freight forwarders. Our Federation can rely on a network of over 30 local associations. Our members represent over 90% of Italian freight forwarders: a sector which in Italy generates an overall turnover of approximately 13 billion Euro per year, and numbers over 30,000 operators.

Over the years Fedespedi has been winning major recognition attesting its institutional role and competence. Fedespedi today is an appreciated element of the main national panels and committees dealing with international trade issues: the **e-Customs Committee**, promoted the Customs and Monopoly Agency; the **Trade Facilitation Committee**, within the Ministry of Economic Development; the **Transport and Logistics Partnership Committee**, set up by the Ministry of Infrastructures and Transport; and the **Customs and Trade Facilitation Committee** of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)-Italy.

In our daily activity assisting companies, we are going to face not a few challenges, both within the EU and at a more global level: the implementation of the Union Customs Code, and the Single Market sagging under the blows of Brexit; new protectionism and the return of tariff and customs barriers; the tenth anniversary of the AEO Programme and the new competence criterion; the new frontiers of economic, environmental and social sustainability for freight forwarding companies; the management of human resources and of the new skills introduced by the digital era.

(SLIDE 2) In an increasingly complex and competitive international arena, building a culture around the logistics sector, is of the essence.

We are convinced that all these new trends will drastically affect international freight forwarders' activity as well as the skills and instruments they will need, and the way they will work. The international freight forwarder is a strategic actor as an international trade facilitator; for this reason, we believe that his role in the near future will be to:

- **Conceive his business activity in a new perspective**, evolving from a mere service provider to an advisor, acting as a partner for importers and exporters in ensuring all-around regulatory and customs compliance;
- **Consolidate or enhance his own set of special skills**, in order to stay competitive on an aggressive market where logistics, customs and trade are growing towards full integration: logistics and transport organisation, international contracts and treaties, freight terms, documentary credits and international payments, tax and customs laws and rules, fight to terrorism, insurance – all aspects that regulate and affect imports and exports of goods. There are hardly any other single business categories having such a wide-ranging scope, requiring freight forwarding companies to solve problems and deal with contingencies with specialised knowledge and competence;
- **Invest in human resources** – the most valuable asset for an international freight forwarder – and in continuous education and training to capitalise on the company's own wealth of knowledge and experience.

In this scenario, Fedespedit has identified its mission in promoting and sustaining the development of a "*culture of logistics*" starting from our members' human capital. The direction is, to invest in one of our major assets among the various services daily offered to business operators: training. Specialisation, qualification, and certification are the 3-way route we offer our member companies, so that they can seize the opportunities to develop and consolidate their businesses in the international markets, with an adequate preparation to face the challenges lying ahead of them.

This sort of preparation, in my opinion, is achieved by acting at two complementary levels: education (both at school and university), and professional training.

(SLIDE 3) The importance of education for the growth of the international freight forwarder's profession

Education, first of all: the demand for personnel holding a technical secondary school and/or university degree is steadily on the increase among freight forwarding companies. In the last few years, schooling and academic institutions, urged by business, have been making great efforts to integrate ministerial programmes with the specialisations required by the labour market. As regards the logistic sector in particular, attention has recently been paid above all to international trade issues and customs procedures.

It is therefore important to ensure that the ministerial and academic programmes continue along the path of the recognition of logistics in a broad sense, that is, the whole set of hardware and software infrastructures serving international trade. That way, it will be possible to contribute to building and consolidating a culture around logistic professions and, at the same time, enhance labour supply and demand matching.

For this reason, Fedespedi has been supporting and endorses some major projects carried on by a number of education institutions through cooperation and dialogue with the trade association system on various levels:

- On the initiative of our Lombardy association, Fedespedi edited the first series of **school textbooks** devoted to the teaching of supply chain management in secondary schools;
- Manifold are the occasions of interaction with **universities**: from organising orientation days to sponsoring Master courses, such as the Master on Marine and Transport Insurance promoted by the University of Genoa, offering the possibility to make internships at our member companies’;
- In order to support training and promote applied research in our sector, we have started collaborations with the **Minister for Education, University and Research** and with Invitalia (the National Agency for inward investment and economic development) on R&D projects in the industrial sector.

(SLIDE 4) The unique value of the training programmes offered by trade associations

Next to regular education curricula, increasing importance is being attached to high-quality professional training and updating, for which there is growing demand. The same holds true for the certification of competencies within companies. As a matter of fact, it is not unusual to encounter “Export Control Managers” or “Trade Compliant Managers” in Italy-based freight forwarding companies.

We believe that, along with universities, **trade associations can play a crucial role in this field**, a role which can prove valuable to their members. Thanks to their daily, close interaction with the latter, trade associations have grown well aware of their members’ needs in terms of training, and can meet such needs in a flexible, timely manner, by providing high-level training courses.

Moreover, these organisations are recognised by public institutions. As such, they are competent and reliable enough to promote and implement publications, courses and seminars – all useful instruments to ensure enterprises’ training and qualification in accordance with the specific skills required.

A success story we can personally relate and witness, is that of our course for “*Responsabili di Questioni Doganali*” (“Operators in charge of Customs Matters”), the 3rd edition of which will be held in 2019.

The course, certifying AEOs’ competences and recognised by the Customs and Monopoly Agency, over the last two years has enabled 80 enterprises to qualify as Authorised Economic Operators: not a slight competitive advantage for these businesses, if we consider that no less than 81% of import customs declarations and 72% of export customs declarations, in Europe just as in Italy, are made by AEOs.

It was absolutely natural for Fedespedito to afford its members the possibility to train at an academic level to qualify as Operators in charge of Customs Matters: we have been working for over 15 years to offer our members professional training in technical matters and soft skills to cope with the growing complexity of the logistic sector. And our efforts have been rewarded by our achievements: not by chance, 30% of all AEOs in Italy are Fedespedito’s members.

Last but not least, one of the aspects accounting for our members’ satisfaction and contributing to the success of our course, was the use of the digital channel (webinar): that made it possible to live broadcast lessons throughout the whole national territory.

(SLIDE 5) Conclusions

I would like to conclude my speech with what I can define our vision of professional training in the field of Customs & Trade in the near future.

We believe that training and opportunities to study and get to know customs and logistic matters in greater detail, are not just essential tools to stay competitive. They can also represent the basis for a dialogue between the Public administration and economic operators, enhancing mutual understanding and helping identifying adequate solutions to operative critical issues, in a real "international trade facilitation" perspective. That is witnessed by venues and opportunities to meet such as this one, where the public administration, national and EU trade association representatives, economic operators, experts and professionals become aware of being a "community", in a spirit of cooperation.