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Tariff Rates of the World: Are Customs Duties Really Growing Unimportant?

Carsten Weerth*

Some scientists and authorities are arguing that tariffs are growing more and more unimportant since eight GATT/WTO-Tariff-Rounds have resulted in tremendous reductions of the original tariff rates in the late 1940ies. The Non-Tariff-Measures however are gaining more importance.

A WCO-background-paper has been published in September 2008 which shows the amount of revenue of a state that is generated by customs duties. The results are amazing. Tariffs are not important any more for developed states however revenue from customs duties is of very much importance to the (least) developing countries. The WCO-background-paper is based on data of 142 countries, territories and economic unions (all referred to as 'countries').

I. INTRODUCTION: TARIFF REDUCTIONS IN EIGHT GATT-ROUNDS

Tariffs rates have been very high when the GATT was founded in 1947. During eight successful GATT-negotiations these tariff rates were reduced strongly (the mean of the reductions were as the following).

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Genf (1947): | - 19%; |
| 2. Annecy (1949) | - 2%; |
| 3. Torquay (1950–51) | - 3%; |
| 4. Geneve (1955–56) | - 2%; |
| 5. Geneve (1961–62 'Dillon-Round') | - 7%; |
| 6. Geneve (1964–1967 'Kennedy-Round') | - 35%; ¹ |
| 7. Geneve (1973–1979 'Tokyo-Round') | - 33%; ² |
| 8. Uruguay (1986–1994) | - 40%; ³ |

Further WTO/GATT-negotiations were not successful:

9. Seattle (1999)⁴ and until 2008

10. Doha (2001–2008).⁵

For an example of the sinking tariff rates the tariff situation of the European Community⁶ should be addressed:

The mean tariff of the EC for industrial goods sunk from 10.4% (1968)⁷ to 3.7% in 2004.

However the originating national tariff rates in Italy and France had been much higher in 1958 (founding of the EEC-6) but the tariff rates of the three BENELUX-countries (Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg) and Germany had been much lower – so the Common External Customs Tariff (CET) of the EEC resulted in a compromise (see Figure 1).

The EU is a growing economic and political union of 27 Member States (see figure 2). The EEC was later named EC and than EU – for the purpose of this paper all three names are used similarly (nowadays the common abbreviation is EU).⁸

Notes

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1 See Hasenpflug, 1977, p. 13.

2 The Tokyo-round resulted in a rather complicated formula that does not allow to show a simple percentage for reduction.

3 See Caves/Frankel/Jones, 2002, p. 238 ff. and Krugman/Obstfeld, 2000, pp. 238; the mean tariff rates, that were small already, sunk from 6,3% to 3,9%; the lists of bilateral results according to article II GATT are comprising about 22.000 pages of paper.

4 See Herrmann in Weiß/Herrmann, 2003, §25, Rz. 1115.

5 This overview was taken from Weerth, Dissertation 2007, p. 34.

6 Note: the European Community was founded 1958 as 'European Economic Community' (EEC) but was later renamed as 'European Community' (EC); since 1993 it is also known as part of the 'European Union' (EU). The numbers behind the abbreviation are standing for the Member States of the EU.

7 See Balaoing/Francois, 2005, p. 3.

8 See WTO Trade Policy Review European Union and Rogmann, *AW-Prax* 2006, p. 234.

Figure 1: Tariff rates of the European Community: From 1958 (founding of the European Economic Community and four Customs Tariffs in Italy, France, BENELUX and Germany), to the foundation of a Common External Tariff (CET) in 1968 to 1995 (accession of Sweden and Austria, founding of the European Union of 15 Member States, EU-15). The mean tariff rates for the Member States Denmark and UK (EEC-members since 1973) are also shown. Sources: Balaoing and Francois, 2005, p. 23, modified; with data from 1958 to the post-Kennedy-Round compiled from Resnick and Truman in Balassa, 1975, p. 63, data of the post-Tokyo-Round compiled from Greenaway, 1983, p. 95 and post-Uruguay-Round from Pelkmans, 2001, p. 250, and data from El-Agraa, 1994, pp. 507.

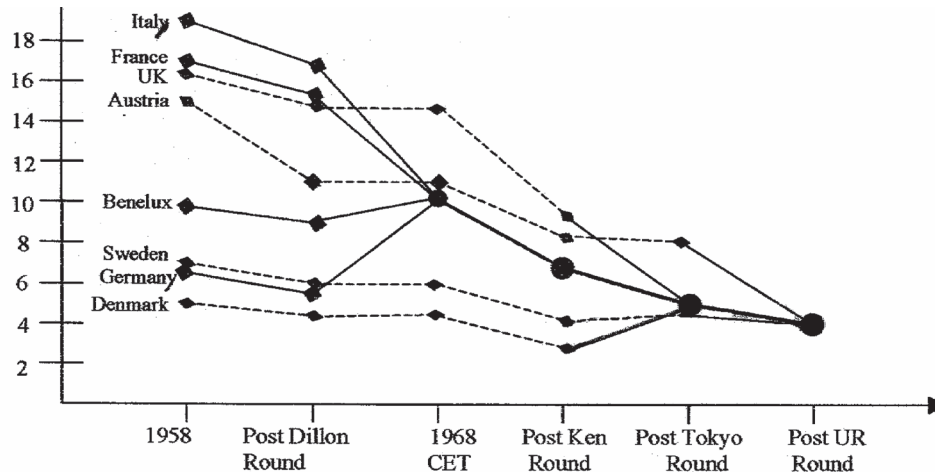


Figure 2: The EEC, EC, EU – a growing economic and political union – the figure shows the date of accession of new Member States⁹

Year	Member States	Accession of Member States
1958	Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, Italy, France (EEC-6)	-
1973	Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, Italy, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Denmark (EEC-9)	Great Britain, Ireland, Denmark
1981	Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, Italy, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Denmark, Greece (EEC-10)	Greece
1986	Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, Italy, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Denmark, Greece, Spain, Portugal (EEC-12)	Spain, Portugal
1995	Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, Italy, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Denmark, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Sweden, Finland (EU-15)	Austria, Sweden, Finland
2004	Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, Italy, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Denmark, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Cyprus, Malta, Slovenia, Slovakia, Czech Republic (EU-25)	Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Cyprus, Malta, Slovenia, Slovakia, Czech Republic
2007	Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, Italy, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Denmark, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Cyprus, Malta, Slovenia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Romania (EU-27)	Bulgaria, Romania

Notes

9 This Figure 2 was taken from Weerth, Dissertation 2007, Table 11, p. 77.

2. OVERVIEW OF REVENUE GENERATED FROM TARIFFS AND CUSTOMS DUTIES

2.1. Data sources of the WCO background paper

The publication of the WCO background paper¹⁰ enables research about the importance of tariffs – are revenues generated from customs duties still important for states or economic unions or are they growing unimportant?

The WCO has published the yearly amount of revenue generated from customs duties in the five years between 2000 and 2004. The WCO survey is based on information obtained mainly from information issued by other international economic organizations such as the IMF (International Monetary Fund),¹¹ the EU,¹² the OECD (Organization for the Economic Co-operation and Development)¹³ and some of the countries from 142 states and economic unions.

2.2. Technical and methodical descriptions

The usage of the terms ‘tariff’ and ‘duty’ in this paper is similar.

The least developed countries that are listed by the United Nations (UN) comprise 50 countries¹⁴ of which 33 countries are WTO-Member States¹⁵ (and further nine countries are in the process of WTO-accession¹⁶) – they are marked specially with an (*).

National revenues do not contain non-tax revenues or social security contributions.¹⁷

In the case of the EU revenues from customs duties mean mainly its own resources, which are composed of so called traditional resources (e.g., customs duties whether coming from the agricultural sector or not, and levies and other duties provided for in the sugar sector, minus 25% – which was only minus 10% before March 2001 – collection expenses currently incurred by the Member States), VAT resources, GNI resources, and other revenue. Customs duties are coming from the imposition of common customs tariff duties and other duties

on trade with non-Member States, which are collected by the Member States customs authorities (the EU itself does not have an own customs service but the customs authorities of the EU-27 Member States comprise the customs service ‘which shall work together as if being a single customs administration’) and paid to the EU after deduction of the collection expenses (of 25%).¹⁸

The UN has 192 Member States.¹⁹ No result was obtained by the WCO survey for ten least developed countries and all in all for 25 countries and two Chinese territories which are WTO-Members but not UN Member States (Macao and Taipei).

2.3. Data about revenue generated from customs duties

In eight tables the results are presented. Table 1 separates seven groups of countries which receive different levels of revenue from customs duties – these seven groups are presented in seven different tables (table 2 to table 8). In tables 2 to 8 the countries are listed in alphabetical order. The mean [%] of the revenue received from customs duties is calculated from the years 2000 to 2004. The range [%] is also shown – that measure is part of descriptive statistics and shows how much the yearly data is altering (the higher the value the more inconsistent the yearly revenue from customs duties is).

Table 1: Overview of revenue generated from customs duties

Revenue from tariffs [%]	Number of Countries	Table
More than 50	8	2
Between 30 and 49,9	19	3
Between 20 and 29,9	20	4
Between 15 and 19,9	22	5
Between 10 and 14,9	28	6
Between 5 and 9,9	25	7
Between 0 and 4,9	20	8

Notes

- 10 See WCO, Survey to determine the percentage of national revenue represented by customs duties, September 2008, URL: <www.wcoomd.org/files/1.%20Public%20files/PDFandDocuments/Harmonized%20System/SurveyCDEN20080910.pdf> (visited 19.10.2008), 2008.
- 11 See IMF, Country Information (IMF-Website), IMF, Government Finance Statistics Yearbook 2006, IMF, Taxes on International Trade and Transactions, Excel-files provided from the IMF to the WCO (not published).
- 12 See European Commission, Annual Report for the financial year 2000–2004, Official Journal of EC/EU.
- 13 See OECD, Revenue Statistics 2006.
- 14 See UN, List of the least developed countries, URL: <<http://www.un.org/special-rep/ohrrls/ldc/list.htm>> (visited 2008/10/19), 2008.
- 15 See WTO, List of the least developed countries, URL: <http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/org7_e.htm> (visited 2008/10/19), 2008.
- 16 The least developed countries that are in the process of WTO-accession are: Afghanistan, Bhutan, Ethiopia, Laos, Sao Tome & Principe, Samoa, Sudan, Vanuatu and Yemen, see WTO, List of the least developed countries, 2008.
- 17 See n. 1 of the WCO survey.
- 18 See n. 2 of the WCO survey.
- 19 See UN, List of United Nations Member States, URL: <<http://www.un.org/members/list.shtml>> (visited 2008/10/19).

Table 2: List of countries which receive more than 50% of revenue from customs duties

Country	Revenue from tariffs [%]	Range [%]	WTO
Comoros*	59.8	12.9	No
Gambia*	59.9	12.7	Yes
Kuwait	77.7	7.0	Yes
Lesotho*	55.9	11.3	Yes
Libya	55.0	44.0	No
Maldives*	64.9	5.8	Yes
Sierra Leone*	50.8	5.0	Yes
Swaziland	54.5	8.6	Yes

Least developed countries are marked with an *

Table 3: List of countries which receive 30% or more but less than 50% of revenue from customs duties

Country	Revenue from tariffs [%]	Range [%]	WTO
Bahamas	48.8	6.0	No
Bahrain	37.0	16.4	Yes
Bangladesh*	40.6	8.3	Yes
Belize	42.4	6.7	Yes
Cambodia*	30.9	9.5	Yes
Dominican Republic	32.3	29.9	Yes
Iran	31.4	16.8	No
Liberia*	35.1	16.4	No
Madagascar*	49.9	8.2	Yes
Namibia	35.1	12.3	Yes
Nepal*	30.9	1.6	Yes
Oman	31.9	6.2	Yes
Saint Vincent & the Grenadines	47.2	3.8	Yes
Senegal*	34.6	6.4	Yes
Sudan*	40.8	11.1	No
Tonga	34.7	1.8	Yes
Uganda*	33.5	4.9	Yes
United Arab Emirates	37.9	13.4	Yes
Vanuatu*	39.6	2.5	No

Least developed countries are marked with an *

Table 4: List of countries which receive 20% or more but less than 30% of revenue from customs duties

Country	Revenue from tariffs [%]	Range [%]	WTO
Algeria	25.7	3.5	No
Angola*	28.6	1.3	Yes
Cameroon	20.1	2.9	Yes
Cape Verde*	27.0	5.3	Yes
Chad*	26.5	5.7	Yes
Congo (Democratic Republic)*	26.6	6.1	Yes
Congo (Republic of the)	22.8	4.0	Yes
Côte d'Ivoire	29.8	1.1	Yes
Gabon	21.6	8.7	Yes
Haiti*	27.6	1.5	Yes
India	20.7	8.0	Yes
Jordan	21.7	9.8	Yes
Marshall Islands	26.5	8.2	No
Mauritius	28.4	8.6	Yes
Micronesia	27.6	4.1	No
Palau	24.6	5.7	No
Saint Lucia	24.3	5.7	Yes
Solomon Islands*	20.6	5.2	Yes
Yemen*	28.6	2.8	No
Zambia*	26.2	14.1	Yes

Least developed countries are marked with an *

3. RESULTS

The mean revenue generated from customs duties of all countries is 18.9% (range 1.6%).²³

Eight countries are generating more than 50% of their revenue from customs duties (see Table 2) of which two are not WTO-Member States (25%); however six of these countries are WTO-members (75%). Five out of eight countries (63%) are belonging to the least developed countries.

19 countries are generating 30 or more percent but less than 50% of their revenue from customs duties (see Table 3) of which five are not WTO-members (26%); however 14 of these countries are WTO-members (74%). Nine out of 19 countries (47%) are belonging to the least developed countries.

Note: Please check the footnote cues for continuous footnote numbering as FN 20-22 cues appears in Table 8

Notes

23 The mean revenue generated from customs duties was calculated from 113 countries for which data for all five years was available, see n. 4 of the WCO survey.

Table 5: List of countries which receive 15% or more and less than 20% of revenue from customs duties

Country	Revenue from tariffs [%]	Range [%]	WTO
Antigua and Barbuda	16.4	5.8	Yes
Benin*	17.0	1.6	Yes
Botswana	17.2	8.9	Yes
Ecuador	15.3	4.7	Yes
Egypt	18.2	0.8	Yes
Eritrea*	18.8	3.1	No
Ethiopia*	19.6	5.2	No
Fiji	19.4	1.6	Yes
Ghana	16.0	4.0	Yes
Guinea*	15.9	2.0	Yes
Guinea-Bissau*	19.6	4.4	Yes
Lebanon	19.2	24.3	No
Mauritania*	16.2	2.8	Yes
Morocco	15.6	6.3	Yes
Mozambique*	16.9	4.0	Yes
Nigeria	18.5	10.7	Yes
Paraguay	17.8	1.6	Yes
Philippines	19.9	1.2	Yes
Samoa*	17.0	2.4	No
Suriname	17.8	4.3	Yes
Tajikistan	18.0	5.7	No
Viet Nam	18.4	7.5	Yes

Least developed countries are marked with an *

20 countries are generating 20 or more percent but less than 30% of their revenue from customs duties (see Table 4) of which five are not WTO-members (25%); however 15 of these countries are WTO-members (75%). Eight out of 20 countries (40%) are belonging to the least developed countries.

22 countries are generating 15 or more percent but less than 20% of their revenue from customs duties (see Table 5) of which five are not WTO-members (23%); however 17 of these countries are WTO-members (77%). Eight out of 22 countries (36%) are belonging to the least developed countries.

28 countries are generating 10 or more percent but less than 15% of their revenue from customs duties (see Table 6) of which four are not WTO-members (14%); however 24 of these countries are WTO-members (86%). Seven out of 28 countries (25%) are belonging to the least developed countries.

25 countries are generating five or more percent but less than 10% of their revenue from customs

Table 6: List of countries which receive 10% or more and less than 15% of revenue from customs duties

Country	Revenue from tariffs [%]	Range [%]	WTO
Albania	13.1	5.6	Yes
Azerbaijan	10.9	8.4	No
Belarus	10.7	5.4	No
Burkina Faso*	12.5	2.7	Yes
Central African Republic*	14.0	4.6	Yes
Dominica	12.5	2.1	Yes
El Salvador	10.2	0.8	Yes
Equatorial Guinea*	10.9	4.7	No
European Communities (EU-15)	12.8	4.2	Yes
Georgia	10.2	5.6	Yes
Grenada	13.1	2.1	Yes
Guatemala	11.7	1.4	Yes
Honduras	11.9	6.9	Yes
Kenya	12.1	17.3	Yes
Malawi*	12.4	2.3	Yes
Mali*	12.6	1.1	Yes
Mongolia	10.9	3.3	Yes
Niger*	14.4	2.7	Yes
Pakistan	14.8	5.6	Yes
Panama	11.3	2.3	Yes
Rwanda*	14.4	2.1	Yes
Sri Lanka	13.6	2.1	Yes
Syrian Arab Republic	10.1	3.0	No
Thailand	12.0	3.0	Yes
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	11.7	7.8	Yes
Tunisia	12.3	4.2	Yes
Venezuela	10.4	5.5	Yes
Zimbabwe	10.5	6.5	Yes

Least developed countries are marked with an *

duties (see table 7) of which three are not WTO-members (12%); however 22 of these countries are WTO-members (88%). Two out of 25 countries (8%) are belonging to the least developed countries.

20 countries are generating less than 5% of their revenue from customs duties (see table 8) of which one is not a WTO-member (5%); however 19 of these countries are WTO-members (95%). One out of

Table 7: List of countries which receive 5% or more and less than 10% of revenue from customs duties

Country	Revenue from tariffs [%]	Range [%]	WTO
Argentina	5.3	2.9	Yes
Armenia	5.1	1.5	Yes
Barbados	9.8	2.7	Yes
Bolivia	6.5	3.0	Yes
Brazil	6.6	3.0	Yes
Chile	5.5	5.7	Yes
China	9.3	4.1	Yes
Columbia	7.2	3.3	Yes
Costa Rica	6.4	1.1	Yes
Croatia	6.4	7.3	Yes
Hong Kong (China)	5.3	1.4	Yes
Jamaica	9.5	1.0	Yes
Kazakhstan	5.0	1.2	No
Korea (Republic of)	6.1	0.6	Yes
Malaysia	6.1	2.4	Yes
Moldova	8.2	3.9	Yes
Myanmar*	6.6	3.2	Yes
Nicaragua	8.2	4.4	Yes
Peru	9.5	4.1	Yes
Russia	6.9	4.1	No
Serbia and Montenegro	9.8	4.1	No
Tanzania*	9.6	4.7	Yes
Trinidad and Tobago	6.9	0.7	Yes
Ukraine	8.2	3.0	Yes
Uruguay	5.9	2.6	Yes

Least developed countries are marked with an *

Table 8: List of countries which receive less than 5% of revenue from tariffs

Country	Revenue from tariffs [%]	Range [%]	WTO
Australia	2.7	0.6	Yes
Bhutan*	4.1	3.4	No
Brunei Darussalam	3.9	1.9	Yes
Bulgaria (2007: EU-27)	3.8	1.0	Yes
Canada	1.8	0.3	Yes
Iceland	1.5	0.3	Yes
Indonesia	4.6	0.4	Yes
Israel	1.0	0.2	Yes
Japan	1.8	0.2	Yes
Kyrgyzstan	3.5	0.8	Yes
Mexico	4.1	1.6	Yes
New Zealand	1.8	0.4	Yes
Norway	0.4	0	Yes
Papua New Guinea	3.6	1.9	Yes
Romania (2007: EU-27)	4.4	2.4	Yes
Singapore	1.7	3.2	Yes
South Africa	2.9	0.8	Yes
Switzerland	2.4	0.2	Yes
Turkey	1.4	0.6	Yes
United States of America	1.8	0.5	Yes

* Least developed countries.

List of countries that are not included in the survey

Afghanistan*, Burundi*, Djibouti*, Kiribati*, Laos*, Sao Tomé and Príncipe*, Somalia*, Timor-Leste*, Togo*, Tuvalu* from the UN list of the least developed countries²⁰ and Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cuba, Guyana, Iraq, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Nauru, Qatar, Northern Korea, Saint Kitts and Nevis, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan from the UN list of UN Member States.²¹

Macao (China) and Taipei (China) from the list of WTO Member States.²²

Notes

20 See List of the least developed countries, URL: <http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/org7_e.htm> (visited 2008/10/19).

21 See UN, List of United Nations Member States, URL: <<http://www.un.org/members/list.shtml>> (visited 2008/10/19).

22 See WTO, List of WTO Member States, URL: <http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/org6_e.htm> (visited 2008/10/19).

Table 9: Results in short – revenue from tariffs [%], number of countries, WTO-Members [Number (%)] and least developed countries [Number (%)]

Revenue from tariffs [%]	Countries	WTO-Members	Least developed countries
More than 50	8	6 (75%)	5 (63%)
Between 30 and 49,9	19	14 (74%)	9 (47%)
Between 20 and 29,9	20	15 (75%)	8 (40%)
Between 15 and 19,9	22	17 (77%)	8 (36%)
Between 10 and 14,9	28	24 (86%)	7 (25%)
Between 5 and 9,9	25	22 (88%)	2 (8%)
Between 0 and 4,9	20	19 (95%)	1 (5%)

20 countries (5%) is belonging to the least developed countries.

4. DISCUSSION

The WTO-membership (Yes/No) as of 2008 is in few cases misleading, because four countries became members after the period of time that was included in the survey (2000–2004) – Cape Verde, Tonga, Ukraine and Viet Nam.

The European Union consisted out of 15 Member States from 1995 to 2004 (EU-15). In May 2004 ten countries became members so that the EU-25 was founded (see Figure 2).

On 1 January 2007 Bulgaria and Romania became EU-Member States (EU-27).

The revenue situation within the EU is rather different from the rest of the world. The revenue from customs duties are distributed between the Member State that is collecting the duties (25% are staying in the Member State) and the EU (75% of the customs duties collected are being sent to the collective sink of EU revenue) – therefore Member States might share a different view on the importance of customs duties than the European Commission. The result about the importance of customs duties when calculated according to the national revenue of every single Member State is more likely to be under 5% of all national revenue collected.

5. CONCLUSION

Eight countries are heavily relying on revenue of customs duties (more than 50% of their overall revenue)

and 19 countries are collecting more than 30% of their overall revenue from customs duties.

Amazingly enough three quarters of these 27 countries that are relying on customs duties as a major contribution to their income are WTO-members (75% and 74% respectively).

However for a country to rely heavily on customs duties for their national revenue contradicts the WTO-membership which targets at the reduction of tariffs.

The least developed countries are still highly depended from the revenues created by customs duties. Again the result is amazing (see table 9):

From the countries that receive more than 50% of revenue from customs duties (table 2), 63% are least developed countries.

The least developed countries have a share of about 40% in the next three groups (tables 3 to 5), which contain the countries that receive between 15 and 29.9% of their overall revenue from customs duties.

However below that threshold it can be seen, that the fewer the amount received from customs duties, the fewer least developed countries are in the tables (see table 6 to 8 with a share of 25%, 8% and 5% respectively).

Most of the developed countries receive less than 5% of their revenue from customs duties. However the EU is in a special situation. There are two different sinks for revenue – a national sink, which is collected from national citizens and which is spent according to national targets (e.g., culture, education, defence) and a collective EU sink, which is collected from the national governments of the Member States and the customs duties and which is spent according to EU targets (e.g., common market, common infrastructure, common regional funding, common agricultural funding). Within the EU there are therefore different views about the importance of customs duties – Member States tend to assume them not important any more whereas the European Commission is very much aware of the importance of this traditional revenue for financing the EU.

All in all it must be concluded, that tariffs and revenue from customs duties are still very much important in most parts of the world, in particular for the least developed countries and for all developing countries in general. However revenue from customs duties is not important in industrial states and for the EU-Member States – but revenue from customs duties is still important for financing the EU infrastructure.

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