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Answer given by Mr Šefčovič
on behalf of the European Commission
(19.8.2025)

1. The customs legislation applicable to free zones is found in Articles 243 to 249 of the Union Customs Code (Regulation (EU) 952/2013, 'UCC'). These Articles enable customs administrations in the EU Member States to designate part of the Union customs territory as a free zone and set out the conditions to be followed in compliance with the provisions of the UCC. EU Member States have a duty to inform the Commission about free zones in their territories (Article 243(2) UCC).

2. A study on free zones in the EU provides comprehensive information on their operation and proposes guidelines and good practices for their implementation in line with the European Green Deal¹. Additional guidance on international best practice is contained in the World Customs Organisation's 'Practical Guidance on Free Zones', developed with EU input².

3. Although not specifically linked to free zones, the EU's regional policy has various financial instruments for the promotion of border regions, including programmes like Interreg³. Recent Commission proposals include a new Pact for Eastern Border Regions and reforms to Cohesion Policy⁴, offering higher EU co-financing and pre-financing for specific regional projects. The Connecting Europe Facility⁵ instrument supports growth and competitiveness through infrastructure investment, enhancing cross-border interactions. For Ukraine only, the Ukraine Facility⁶ is the primary tool, complemented by the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe⁷.

Cross-border trade is facilitated by collaboration mechanisms such as Common Transit Procedure⁸ for customs, joint border controls at shared Border Crossing Points, cooperation between Romanian and Ukrainian customs (potentially, with use of the Customs Programme⁹) and the EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes initiative¹⁰.

¹ Study of the impact of free zones and proposals for guidelines on their future modernisation in light of the European Green Deal, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a40ce9b8-68d0-11ee-9220-01aa75ed71a1/language-en#:~:text=The%20underlying%20objective%20of%20the%20study%20is%20to,a%20comparison%20of%20EU%20and%20non-EU%20free%20zones> In addition, Annex VII of this study¹ contains the proposal for guidelines with good practices on how free zones can contribute to the European Green Deal.

² https://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programmes/free-zone/wco-fz-guidance_en.pdf?la=en.

³ Programme Interreg VI-A-NEXT Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine (<https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/programmes/2021TC16NXCB010>) and Programme: Interreg VI-A- NEXT Romania-Ukraine (<https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/programmes/2021TC16NXCB012>).

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/communication/mid-term-review-2025/communication-mid-term-review-2025_en.pdf.

⁵ https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/connecting-europe-facility_en.

⁶ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/funding-technical-assistance/ukraine-facility_en.

⁷ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/funding-technical-assistance/neighbourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument-global-europe-ndici-global-europe_en.

⁸ https://taxation-customs.ec.europa.eu/customs/customs-procedures-import-and-export/what-customs-transit/union-and-common-transit_en.

⁹ https://taxation-customs.ec.europa.eu/about-us/eu-funding-customs-and-tax/customs-programme_en.

¹⁰ https://transport.ec.europa.eu/ukraine/eu-ukraine-solidarity-lanes_en.