

An aerial photograph of a port area, showing a large white truck parked on a stack of shipping containers. The background is filled with more containers and port infrastructure. A large orange shape, resembling a stylized 'C' or a drop, is overlaid on the left side of the image. The title text is positioned within this orange shape.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF CUSTOMS DECLARATIONS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF CUSTOMS DECLARATIONS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union (EU) continues to take significant steps toward digitalization with the aim of enhancing security in international trade, accelerating customs processes, and ensuring transparency across the supply chain. This transformation began with the Import Control System 1 (ICS1) and has since evolved into a more advanced structure through ICS2. In parallel, the integration of the Electronic Freight Transport Information (EFTI) regulation and the next-generation NCTS 6 system has established a comprehensive digital infrastructure.

What Are ICS1 and ICS2? How Are They Implemented?

ICS1 was the EU's initial pre-arrival safety and security declaration system for goods entering the Union. However, the growing complexity of global trade and supply chains highlighted the need for a more robust, multi-stakeholder system.

In response, the EU developed ICS2—a system that prioritizes extensive data sharing, real-time processing, and elevated security standards. Replacing ICS1, ICS2 aims to establish a more efficient and integrated trade network.

Implementation Timeline:

For maritime transport: June 3, 2024

For road and rail transport: April 1, 2025

Transition deadline for road carriers: September 1, 2025

Under ICS2, all economic operators importing or transiting goods through the EU are required to submit an Entry Summary Declaration (ENS) containing complete and timely safety and security data. This allows high-risk shipments to be identified in advance, ensuring the uninterrupted flow of legitimate trade.

EFTI Regulation

Launched in parallel with ICS2, the ****EFTI regulation**** mandates the digitalization of transport documents for companies moving goods into the EU. Its core objective is to replace paper-based documentation with digital platforms, thereby speeding up logistics processes.

EFTI facilitates seamless data sharing between carriers, logistics providers, and regulatory authorities, boosting the effectiveness of electronic pre-arrival systems like ICS2. It also helps minimize document mismatches at EU border points, delivering both time and cost efficiencies.



NCTS 6 and the Future Outlook

As a key component of the EU's digitalization vision, the ****New Computerised Transit System – Version 6 (NCTS 6)**** is poised to become a cornerstone of digital transit processes. NCTS 6 will enhance the quality and interoperability of transit declaration data and will integrate seamlessly with systems like ICS2 and EFTI.

With the full deployment of ICS2, the expansion of EFTI usage, and the integration of NCTS 6 into international transit processes, the logistics sector is on course for a fully digitized customs and transport infrastructure in the coming years.

Economic operators active within the EU and associated countries must, therefore, prioritize the modernization of their customs declaration systems and prepare for this digital transformation. This shift not only ensures compliance with legal obligations but also unlocks strategic benefits—such as increased speed, transparency, and operational efficiency in transport processes.

Conclusion

ICS2, EFTI, and NCTS 6 represent complementary steps in the EU's digital transformation journey and are reshaping the future of customs and transportation operations. Concepts such as security, speed, transparency, and digital alignment have become strategic priorities for all logistics stakeholders.

Businesses that adapt to this transformation in a timely manner will not only remain compliant but will also strengthen their competitive edge in the global marketplace—where digitalization is no longer optional, but a fundamental requirement for sustainable growth.

