

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

G/L/215
4 December 1997

(97-5323)

REPORT (1997) OF THE COMMITTEE ON MARKET ACCESS

1. The Committee on Market Access held five formal meetings in 1997: on 3 March, 8 April, 24 June, 29 September and 2 December. The minutes of these meetings are contained in documents G/MA/M/8 to G/MA/M/12.

2. At its meeting of 3 March 1997, the Committee elected Mr. Moha Ouali Tagma of Morocco as Chairman for 1997. At its meeting of 8 April 1997, the Committee elected Mrs. Simona Valceanu of Romania as Vice-Chairperson.

3. The Committee decided to grant observer status to the ACP Group, FAO, ITCB, Inter-American Development Bank, UNCTAD and WCO. In the case of IMF and World Bank, the Committee took note that observer status had already been granted by virtue of the agreements concluded with these organizations.

4. As concerns the introduction on 1 January 1996 of the changes to the nomenclature of the Harmonized System and the submission of documentation related to these changes the Committee examined the situation at every meeting on the basis of updated documents prepared by the Secretariat. On 13 December 1995 several Members were granted individual waivers, for operational reasons grouped into one single decision, for the introduction of HS96 changes into their schedules. These waivers which concern presently thirty-eight countries and the European Communities were, by successive decisions by the General Council, extended until 30 April 1998.¹ In addition to these HS96 waivers four Members obtained an extension until 30 April 1998 of their waivers in connection with the transposition of their pre-Uruguay Round schedules into the Harmonized System.

5. At the meeting of 29 September 1997 some Members reiterated their concern about the repeated extension of waivers due to reservations made without specifying the reasons on the documentation of certain Members, and which prevented the certification of the proposed changes. In this connection, the Chairman of the Council for Trade in Goods held informal consultations which resulted in an understanding that in the short term, Members should pursue the work on the verification and certification of HS96 documentation without delay. With a view to assisting interested Members, the Secretariat would transpose the available HS96 documentation onto electronic media in a standard database system. As concerns the long term, a number of important issues were raised which could lead to changes or amendments to the decisions currently in force. This work was continuing in the framework of the Council for Trade in Goods.

6. At its meeting of 2 December, the Committee noted that according to document G/MA/TAR/2/Rev.12 there were 38 HS96 submissions, only three of which had been finalized and thereby certified. Of the 39 Members currently covered by waivers, there were

¹See document WT/L/243.

eight Members that had not yet submitted the necessary documentation. The Committee noted that delegations were making strong efforts to solve the pending issues.

7. With regard to the Decision on Notification Procedures for Quantitative Restrictions adopted by the Council for Trade in Goods in December 1995, the Committee adopted at its meeting of 24 June 1997 a format for the submission of notifications of quantitative restrictions. The approved format was circulated in document G/MA/NTM/QR/2 dated 10 July 1997.

8. At its meeting of 29 September 1997 the Committee took note of the status of quantitative restriction notifications contained in document G/MA/NTM/QR/1/Add.4. In this context, several delegations pointed out the need to define more clearly the scope of the notification requirement for quantitative restrictions and suggested that this matter be included in the work programme of the Committee for 1998. One delegation was of the view that, as the format and content for the submissions had been agreed just five months ago by the Committee, it was his opinion that the format should not be changed again. Therefore, in his view, there was no need at this stage for further clarification.

9. At its meeting on 24 June 1997, the Committee agreed, as outlined in document G/MA/IDB/1/Rev.1, to the restructuring of the existing Integrated Data Base (IDB) from a mainframe environment to a Personal Computer (PC)-based system, which would utilize new technology to improve the operation of the IDB. In addition to the operational changes outlined in G/MA/IDB/1/Rev.1, the Committee sought to lay down a solid basis for the transmission of the information required for the functioning of the PC IDB. In this connection, the Committee forwarded a draft Decision on the Supply of Information to the PC IDB to the Council for Trade in Goods, and then to the General Council for adoption. This Decision was formally adopted by the General Council at its meeting of 18 July 1997 (WT/L/225).

10. At its meetings of 29 September and 2 December, the Committee examined the progress of the implementation of the decision on the Integrated Data Base and took note of the status of submission of the required data. At its December meeting, the Committee agreed, as outlined in document G/MA/IDB/1/Rev.1/Add.1², on the deadlines for supplying IDB submissions. For the first submission, the deadline for supplying 1996 tariffs and imports and 1997 tariffs would be 30 December 1997. In view of inherent difficulties that may be associated with the filing of a first submission, it was agreed that some limited flexibility with this timing could be envisaged. For subsequent submissions, the deadlines for submission of tariffs of the current year and of imports of the previous year would be 30 March and 30 September respectively. For Members who do not base their tariff on a calendar year, it was agreed that the deadlines could be adjusted to take into account the dates when the national tariff comes into force. The Committee also agreed on the format of a report to be circulated on a regular basis which would summarize the status of IDB submissions received by the Secretariat. The Committee agreed to grant access to the IDB to countries which are in the process of accession to the WTO, as outlined in document G/MA/IDB/1/Rev.1/Add.1². Access would be granted on the condition that they themselves have already provided the information required for the IDB, in conformity with the agreed-upon deadlines and as described in G/MA/IDB/1/Rev.1.

11. At its meeting of 2 December 1997, the Committee examined document G/MA/IDB/W/3 which was put forward to initiate discussion on technical assistance for the IDB. It was agreed to continue discussing this issue with a view to further elaborating the modalities of technical assistance for the IDB.

² In preparation.