

REPORT (1999) OF THE COMMITTEE OF PARTICIPANTS ON THE EXPANSION OF TRADE IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY PRODUCTS

1. The Committee of Participants on the Expansion of Trade in Information Technology Products, hereinafter referred to as the Committee, was established pursuant to the provisions of the Ministerial Declaration on Trade in Information Technology Products (WT/MIN(96)/16), hereafter referred to as the Ministerial Declaration, and the provisions for the Implementation of the Ministerial Declaration on Trade in Information Technology Products (G/L/160), in order to carry out the provisions of paragraphs 3, 5, 6 and 7 of the Annex to the Declaration.

2. Thus far, the Committee has held four formal meetings in 1999: on 24 February, 30 April¹, 6 July, and 28 September². The minutes of these meetings are contained in documents G/IT/M/16 to G/IT/M/19. It is foreseen that the Committee would hold one more formal meeting in November 1999. Ambassador R. Saborío Soto (Costa Rica) served as Chairman of the Committee until April 1999 replacing Mr. M. Harvey who was recalled to his capital. In April 1999, Mr. Y. Shiran (Israel) was elected Chairman of the Committee for 1999.

3. Membership in the Committee is open to representatives of all participants. The Committee's rules of procedure provide for observer status in the Committee for WTO Members which are not participants to the Ministerial Declaration and Governments that are observers to the Council for Trade in Goods. Requests for observer status by international intergovernmental organizations are considered on a case-by-case basis. Currently, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has been granted observer status, and the World Customs Organization (WCO) has been granted observer status to meetings where the issues of HS classification and HS amendments are included in the agenda.

4. The Committee addressed a number of issues during the year. The Committee has consistently reviewed the status of implementation, a summary of which is provided in document G/IT/1 and its revisions. It was noted that most participants had submitted the formal documentation for rectification and modification of their WTO schedules in order to incorporate the commitments arising from the Ministerial Declaration and most had been certified by the Director-General. A few were still awaiting the completion of domestic procedural requirements. It was also noted that those participants that were not yet WTO Members were implementing the concessions on an autonomous basis.

5. Pursuant to a provision contained in Attachment B of the Ministerial Declaration, participants conducted the review of the product description of monitors. There were no resulting decisions or changes to the product description.

¹ One agenda item carried forward to 19 May 1999 when the meeting was resumed.

² Two agenda items carried forward to 6 October and 13 October 1999 when the meeting was resumed.

6. Noting that much progress had been made on the issue of classifying information technology products in the previous year, the Committee agreed that work should continue on the subject. As a way forward, the Committee decided that the documentation concerning classification divergences be updated and that a meeting for customs experts be convened for one week in the autumn.

7. The Committee also consulted on non-tariff barriers relating to information technology products. The Australian delegation presented a work-programme for non-tariff measures. Noting the importance of sharing information on non-tariff measures, the Australian delegation also presented a "national experience" paper, and encouraged other participants to do so as well. It was agreed that the Secretariat would produce a document (G/IT/SPEC/Q1/25) compiling the results of the survey on standards.

8. The Committee approved the draft schedules of commitments submitted by Albania, Georgia, the Kyrgyz Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, and Mauritius. Thus, these countries became participants to the Ministerial Declaration, bringing the total number of participants to fifty. Additionally, the Committee approved the schedule of Croatia pursuant to a notification to the Secretariat confirming the date of implementation of their commitments.

9. The Committee noted that an Information Technology Symposium was held on 16 July 1999 with the participation of the private sector. The purpose of the symposium was to share information about the dynamism of information technology (IT) and its future, to explain the role of IT in promoting economic growth and development, and to highlight the value of the application of IT. A chairman's summary of the symposium, as well as the presentations of all the speakers are available on the WTO website.

10. The issue of the review of product coverage was placed on the agenda of the Committee's meetings during 1999 at the request of several delegations. No discussions took place on the matter, but the Chairman noted that delegations were continuing consultations on this matter and he encouraged delegations to continue their efforts.
