

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

G/L/486
2 October 2001

(01-4708)

REPORT (2001) OF THE COMMITTEE ON MARKET ACCESS

1. The Committee on Market Access held three formal meetings (21 March, 15 June¹, and 26 September 2001) and eleven informal meetings (2 February, 26 February, 16 March, 19 March (2), 15 May, 21 May, 8 June, 11 June, 4 July, and 24 September 2001) thus far this year. It is foreseen that an additional formal and informal meeting will be held later this year. The minutes of the formal meetings are contained in documents G/MA/M/28 to G/MA/M/30². In addition, two periodic reports giving an overview of the issues discussed in the Committee and providing factual information related to the requests for waivers and waiver extensions, both for the introduction of HS96 changes and for the transposition of schedules into the Harmonized System are contained in documents G/MA/112 and G/MA/113.

2. At its meeting of 21 March 2001, the Committee took note of the nomination of Mr. Yair Shiran (Israel) as Chairman of the Committee for the current year and elected him by acclamation. At that meeting, the Committee elected as Vice-Chairperson for the current year, Mrs. Lourdes Berrig (Philippines). After the departure of Mr. Shiran from Geneva in July 2001, the Vice-Chairperson has served as Chairperson of the Committee.

I. WAIVERS AND SUBMISSION OF HS96 DOCUMENTATION

3. As concerned 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 its meetings of 21 March, 15 June and 26 September 2001 on the basis of updated documents prepared by the Secretariat.

4. 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 presently concern 19 Members and have been extended by successive decisions of the General Council until 30 April 2002 (WT/L/400). At the Committee's meeting of 21 March 2001, certain delegations indicated that they were not prepared to accept another extension of the waiver this time, but wished to revert to the practice of individual decisions for waivers and waiver extensions in the future. Certain other Members preferred to continue the existing practice of grouping the waivers into one decision. In a compromise reached at the time, Members agreed to one last waiver, on a collective basis, for a period of one year. This would not prejudice the rights of any Member requesting a waiver on an individual basis thereafter.

5. As concerned the submission of the required documentation related to the introduction of HS96 changes in the respective WTO schedules of concessions on goods, as of 26 September, the submissions of 21 Members, whether they had requested an extension of waivers or not, remained pending due to ongoing consultations and/or negotiations. Two Members under waiver had not yet submitted the required documentation.

¹ One agenda item carried forward to 27 June 2001 when the meeting was resumed

² Currently in the process of being issued.

6. In continuing with the practice established in the previous year, the Committee agreed to hold informal meetings dedicated to the review of the HS96 situation based on the informal list prepared by the Secretariat. These meetings were held on 21 May and 24 September 2001.

7. The Committee also took note that there were three Members under waiver for the transposition of their schedules into the Harmonized System.

II. HS2002

8. Continuing with its work from 2000, the Committee continued to address the issue of HS2002 during the year, especially focusing on the WTO procedures. A number of informal meetings were held to work on new procedures for this process. At its meeting of 27 June 2001, the Committee agreed on the proposed procedures and forwarded them to the Council for Trade in Goods and the General Council for ultimate adoption. The General Council approved the procedures at its meeting of 18 July 2001 in document WT/L/407. To date, there have been no HS2002 submissions.

III. INTEGRATED DATA BASE

9. With reference to the modalities and operation of the Integrated Data Base, the Committee examined the status of IDB submissions at its meetings of 21 March, 15 June and 26 September 2001 on the basis of documents G/MA/IDB/2/Rev.10 to 12. As of 26 September 2001, 85 Members and 6 acceding countries had provided IDB submissions.

10. Following agreement in the Committee on a programme for a "Multilateral Appraisal of the Operation of the IDB and Related Technical Assistance Activities" on 18 December 2000, the Committee commenced with work in this area. In this respect, there were four meetings held, based on regional groupings, on 19 March, 15 May, 11 June, and 4 July 2001 with the Secretariat preparing background notes for each meeting. Also, as was agreed, a Secretariat document summarizing the outcome of the four meetings was circulated in G/MA/IDB/W/12. The Committee further discussed the outcome of these meetings in an informal meeting on 24 September 2001 and at the formal meeting of 26 September 2001, and examined ways to improve IDB submissions and technical assistance activities.

11. The Committee was updated periodically by the Secretariat on the status of processing of IDB submissions, the status of software development, use of IDB information, information obtained from the Trade Policy Review Division, IDB reporting tools, IDB internet analysis facility, and the technical assistance activities that had been carried out.

IV. CONSOLIDATED TARIFF SCHEDULES (CTS) DATABASE

12. At its meetings of 21 March, 15 June and 26 September 2001, the Committee was updated on the status of the consolidated tariff schedules database by the Secretariat. This included the status of the Members' files, software developments, and analytical facilities.

13. As concerned the files in the database, the Secretariat had processed the tariff concessions of 114 Members, and the agricultural commitments for those Members where it was applicable. These files were sent to Members for their approval. As of 26 September, there were still three Members who required additional time for approval, or who were in the process of sending in comments on the submissions; and one file remained pending for technical reasons.

14. In addition to the files processed by the Secretariat, there were eleven³ WTO Members who committed to processing their schedules themselves. As of 26 September, there were ten Members who had submitted tariff concessions, and nine⁴ who had similarly done so for agricultural commitments. However, there were still two tariff and two agricultural submissions that were still in draft form, one tariff submission that was in preliminary form, one agricultural submission was only partially complete, and two submissions for agricultural commitments remained outstanding.

V. OTHER ACTIVITIES

15. At its meeting of 21 March 2001, the Committee took note of the Chairman's summary as concerned the outcome of the Tariff Seminar which was held on 20 March 2001. The Committee also took note of the tariff information available in the Secretariat as contained in document G/MA/TAR/3/Rev.6.

16. As concerned the notifications of quantitative restrictions, the Committee agreed to follow the procedures as outlined in document G/MA/NTM/QR/W/1 in order to accommodate items when difficulties were encountered in entering the information in the database. The Committee also conducted its review of notifications under the Decision on Reverse Notification of Non-Tariff Measures on the basis of document G/MA/NTM/W/3/Rev.1.

17. At its meeting of 15 June 2001, the Committee took note of the information in document G/MA/W/23/Rev.1 as concerned the situation of schedules of WTO Members.

³ Including Switzerland for agricultural commitments only.

⁴ Including one partial submission.