

REPORT (1998) OF THE COMMITTEE ON MARKET ACCESS

1. The Committee on Market Access held four formal meetings in 1998: on 26 March, 18 June, 22 September and 27 November 1998. The minutes of these meetings are contained in documents G/MA/M/13 to G/MA/M/16. 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, both for the introduction of HS96 changes and for the transposition of schedules into the Harmonized System are contained in document G/MA/59 and G/MA/60¹.
2. At its meeting of 18 June 1998 the Committee took note of the nomination of Mr. Ole Lundby of Norway as Chairman of the Committee for the current year and elected him by acclamation. On 22 September, the Committee agreed not to elect a Vice-Chairperson during the present term, without however creating any precedent for the election of a Vice-Chairperson for the Committee in the future.
3. 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 presently concern 37 Members were, by successive decisions by the General Council, extended until 30 April 1999 (see doc. WT/L/281). In addition to these waivers four Members obtained an extension until 30 April 1999 of their waivers in connection with the transposition of their pre-Uruguay Round schedules into the Harmonized System.
4. At its meeting of 27 November 1998 the Committee took note of the status of quantitative restriction notifications contained in document G/MA/NTM/QR/1/Add.5. In addition, the Committee was informed that the Quantitative Restrictions database had been moved from mainframe computer tapes to a PC database.
5. As concerns the submission of the required documentation related to the introduction of HS96 changes in the respective WTO schedules of concessions on goods, the Committee noted that as of 27 November 1998, out of the 37 Members under waivers nine of them had not yet submitted the required documentation, and the submissions of 29 members, whether they had requested an extension or not, remained pending due to ongoing consultations and/or negotiations. Since the last report, seven submission have been approved and certified.
6. A communication on trade in pharmaceutical products was circulated on 13 November 1998 in document G/MA/W/18 informing the Committee Members of the successful completion of the second revision of the pharmaceutical products covered by the understanding.
7. With reference to the modalities and operation of the Integrated Data Base, the Committee examined the status of IDB submissions at its meetings of 26 March, 18 June, 22 September and 27 November 1998 on the basis of documents G/MA/IDB/2, G/MA/IDB/2/Rev.1, G/MA/IDB/2/Rev.2

¹ By reference to paragraph 7 of document G/MA/60, refer to paragraph 10 below.

and G/MA/IDB/2/Rev.3. At the meetings of 26 March, 18 June and 22 September, several Members stressed the need for all Members to supply this data in order to fulfil their notification obligations. It was further noted that technical assistance was available to assist Members in the submission of data to the IDB. As of 27 November 1998, 40 Members and three acceding countries had provided IDB submissions.

8. At the meeting of 26 March 1998, the Committee examined document G/MA/IDB/W/3/Rev.1, which described the modalities of a technical assistance programme for the IDB. At the meeting of 22 September 1998, the Secretariat presented an oral report on the technical assistance activities that had been carried out thus far.

9. At the meeting of 27 November 1998, the Committee was informed that a letter had been sent by the Chairman to the delegations that had not yet provided their IDB submissions, to seek clarification on the problems they were facing in this regard, and on their possible requirements for technical assistance. Members concerned have been requested to reply by 29 January 1999.

10. At the meetings of 26 March and 18 June 1998, the Committee considered matters concerning the dissemination of the information contained in the IDB, on the basis of informal papers prepared by the Secretariat, dated 16 March (Job No. 1483) and 28 May 1998 (Job No. 1483/Rev.1) respectively. At the meeting of 22 September 1998, on the basis of the revised note dated 18 September 1998 (Job No. 1483/Rev.2), the Committee adopted, in the absence of one delegation that had expressed its opposition at previous meetings, the proposals for dissemination of the IDB, as described in the document prepared by the Secretariat, which would be issued as an addendum to G/MA/IDB/1/Rev.1. Many Members expressed serious concerns on elements of the proposals that were adopted; these concerns are reflected in the minutes of the meeting (G/MA/M/16). It was agreed that the Chairman would conduct open-ended informal consultations to address the matter.

11. With respect to the preparation of consolidated loose-leaf schedules on goods, at the meeting of 26 March 1998, the Committee examined an informal note by the Secretariat dated 16 March 1998 (Job No. 1484). The note described potential means of establishing a database of Members' consolidated tariff concessions. The database would be established as a working tool without implications as to the legal status of the information contained therein, but would accurately reflect Members' concessions. Delegations observed that such a database could be a very useful and important tool for the future activities of the Committee and Members. Delegations supported the idea of carrying out a pilot project for the schedule of one Member. The pilot project would provide a basis for estimating the resources that might be required to establish the database for all Members. It would also permit the identification of problems that might be encountered and would help to determine the extent of Members' involvement in the exercise. At the meetings of 22 September and 27 November 1998, the Secretariat presented oral reports on the status of the pilot project.

12. At the meeting of 27 November 1998, the Secretariat also provided details concerning a technical co-operation project to be carried out to achieve a consolidated tariff schedules data base. An informal paper dated 27 November 1998 outlining the work to be done under this project was circulated to delegations. The Secretariat would prepare the information for developing countries and, in parallel, developed countries would prepare their consolidated tariff schedules, according to the electronic format developed by the Secretariat. The project would be funded through special contributions to the technical cooperation programme. The project would be carried out within a timeframe of one year and the information contained in the database would be made available to all Members at the same time.
