

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

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FRENCH PLAN FOR A REDUCTION OF TARIFF LEVELS

Declaration by the Benelux Governments

The following communication was received by the Executive Secretary on 22 July 1954:

"The Governments of the Benelux countries, having examined the proposal for the reduction of customs tariffs prepared under the auspices of the CONTRACTING PARTIES to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, consider that the time has come to make known their attitude in this matter.

"Having discussed the matter in accordance with the convention establishing the Customs Union between Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, these governments have agreed on a common policy at a meeting of their Committee of Ministers held at Brussels on 20 July 1954.

"The Benelux countries consider that the plan proposed in the report of the Intersessional Working Party represents a considerable improvement on the present practice of GATT and that it would decisively help in the advancement of international trade. Considering moreover that the realization of its aims would open new possibilities for the progressive reduction of customs tariffs in the future, they have decided to notify the Executive Secretary of the CONTRACTING PARTIES of their readiness in principle to accept the plan.

"The Benelux countries are consequently prepared to participate in a conference convened on the basis of the principles formulated in the report, provided, however, that all contracting parties to the GATT, or at least the most important among them are whole-heartedly prepared to do the same.

"Further, it is the opinion of the Benelux countries that the application of the plan for the reduction of customs tariffs should not only formally exclude the establishment or intensification by contracting parties of measures capable of nullifying its effects, but should also imply a general effort directed towards the progressive abolition of obstacles to international trade. These principles should be adopted in the review of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

"The Governments of the Benelux countries also express the wish that the countries that have followed so far a protective customs policy should make a more determined effort towards the liberation of their imports in accordance with the aims of the plan.

"While the Governments of the Benelux countries have deemed it opportune to give their agreement in principle to the plan prepared by GATT, they nevertheless realize how important it may be to supplement it on a number of technical points. They therefore reserve the right to submit proposals on technical points should they wish to do so.

"If the collaboration of other countries in the application of the plan should prove insufficient, or if the solution of questions still pending should weaken the scope and effects of the proposal, the Benelux countries, whose customs tariffs have been brought down to a relatively low level, would have to reconsider their commercial policy, especially in tariff matters, and would submit such other proposals as they would deem fit in defence of their interests.

"In this connection, it may be useful to record that the total trade of the three Benelux countries is the third most important in the world."