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1 ARTICLE 27

1.1 Text of Article 27

Article 27

Responsibilities of the Secretariat

1. The Secretariat shall have the responsibility of assisting panels, especially on the legal, historical and procedural aspects of the matters dealt with, and of providing secretarial and technical support.
2. While the Secretariat assists Members in respect of dispute settlement at their request, there may also be a need to provide additional legal advice and assistance in respect of dispute settlement to developing country Members. To this end, the Secretariat shall make available a qualified legal expert from the WTO technical cooperation services to any developing country Member which so requests. This expert shall assist the developing country Member in a manner ensuring the continued impartiality of the Secretariat.
3. The Secretariat shall conduct special training courses for interested Members concerning these dispute settlement procedures and practices so as to enable Members' experts to be better informed in this regard.

1.2 Article 27.1

1. At the DSB meetings on 25 June 2012, 17 December 2012 and 26 March 2014, the Chairman, at the request of several delegations, invited the Director of the Legal Affairs Division to make a report to Members on progress in the initiative to create an on-line application which would serve as a (i) a secure electronic registry for filing and serving dispute settlement documents on line; (ii) central electronic storage facility for all dispute settlement records; and (iii) a research facility for Members and the Secretariat to search for dispute settlement information.¹ Progress was reported with respect to all three elements of the project. At the DSB meeting on 17 December 2012, progress was also reported with respect to cataloguing and scanning of old dispute settlement records that will be uploaded into the storage and research facility.² The WTO launched a pilot project for electronic filing through the new application in July 2015. Since then, parties have been filing their documents electronically in on-going disputes either in parallel to paper filing or as the official filing of the documents. The WTO keeps Members apprised of developments in the project informally and provides regular training for delegates on how to use the application. The scanning and cataloguing of old dispute settlement records has been completed, however work remains in terms of uploading the information into the application and providing a high-quality search facility for dispute settlement data.

1.3 Article 27.2

2. The WTO Secretariat has, since the conclusion of the Uruguay Round, provided legal advice in accordance with the requirement in Article 27.2 to any developing country Member which requests it in the event of that Member being involved in the dispute settlement process. The Institute for

¹ [WT/DSB/M318](#), Section 5; [WT/DSB/M/327](#), Section 9; and [WT/DSB/M/343](#), Section 10.

² [WT/DSB/61](#), para. 5.1.

Training and Technical Cooperation, a division in the WTO Secretariat, presently engages, on a contractual part-time basis, two independent consultants for this purpose.³

3. The Advisory Centre on WTO Law (ACWL⁴) was established in 2001 as an organisation independent of the WTO. Article 2.1 of the *Agreement Establishing the Advisory Centre on WTO Law*⁵ provides that the purpose of the Centre is to provide legal training, support and advice on WTO law and dispute settlement procedures to developing countries, in particular to the least developed among them, and to countries with economies in transition. Article 2.2 provides that the Centre shall, *inter alia*, provide legal advice on WTO law and provide support to parties and third parties in WTO dispute settlement proceedings.

1.4 Article 27.3

4. Detailed information on all of the WTO Secretariat's training courses, including courses concerning dispute settlement procedures and practices, is available at www.wto.org.

Current as of: September 2022

³ [WT/COMTD/W/227/Rev.1](#), p. 32; [WT/COMTD/W/235](#), pp. 31 and 40.

⁴ www.acwl.ch.

⁵ www.acwl.ch/download/basic_documents/agreement_establishing_the_ACWL/Agreement_estab_ACWL.pdf.