

# GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

RESTRICTED

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Limited Distribution

CONTRACTING PARTIES

Thirteenth Session

## MEETINGS OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

### Organization of Business

#### Note by the Executive Secretary

During the course of the Review of the General Agreement at the Ninth Session, the CONTRACTING PARTIES considered the arrangements for the continuing administration of the Agreement. This review was based "on the consideration that the general objective should be to ensure that the administration of the General Agreement should be full, effective and continuous".

The CONTRACTING PARTIES recognized that a number of specific provisions of the General Agreement might require joint action to be taken at any time. In the second place, there was a need, which has become increasingly apparent, to continue to develop the procedures of the General Agreement so as to provide a more effective forum for co-operation and consultation on matters within the scope of the Agreement. And thirdly, it was recognized that the proved value of the regular sessions is enhanced, their duration lessened and the representation at them maintained at a high level if as much preliminary work as possible is done beforehand so that the CONTRACTING PARTIES may to a greater extent concentrate on major questions and on general issues of policy.<sup>1</sup>

In the light of these considerations, the CONTRACTING PARTIES established the Intersessional Committee to replace the Ad Hoc Committee on Agenda and Intersessional Business. In doing so, they emphasized that the success of the Committee would depend to a large extent on the willingness and ability of members of the Committee to ensure adequate representation.

Since the Review the need for ensuring full, effective and continuous administration of the General Agreement has been accentuated by various important developments in the field of trade policy. At the same time, it has become increasingly evident that the Intersessional Committee as at present constituted is not an effective mechanism for securing the objectives which the CONTRACTING PARTIES had in mind. The convening of the Committee at irregular intervals and at short notice presents serious problems for the members of the Committee in providing suitable representation and it also presents serious administrative problems for the secretariat in arranging the servicing of meetings. Moreover, except for a few matters of secondary importance, the CONTRACTING PARTIES have refused to delegate

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<sup>1</sup> BISD, Third Supplement, page 245.

powers of decision to the Intersessional Committee. One result of this has been that the Committee tends to deal in a somewhat perfunctory manner with its business, and to defer serious consideration of issues of substance until the annual session. Moreover, the representation at the meetings of the Committee has proved to be extremely uneven.

In these circumstances, and having regard particularly to developments since the Ninth Session, it is suggested that the CONTRACTING PARTIES should again consider this whole question at the Thirteenth Session. The following suggestions are made as a basis for such consideration:

1. The CONTRACTING PARTIES, instead of holding a single annual session, should hold three sessions in each year.
2. These three sessions should consist of two ordinary sessions of two weeks' duration, and an annual general session of three weeks' duration. The ordinary sessions should make final decisions as required on the matters before them. The annual general session, apart from taking action on such matters as have arisen since the preceding ordinary session, should concentrate on major questions and general issues of policy.
3. The three sessions should be spaced regularly through the year: the first being held in the last two weeks of March, the second in the second half of June<sup>1</sup> and the annual general session in the last week of October and the first two weeks of November.<sup>2</sup>
4. There should also be an agenda committee to meet for one or two days three weeks before the opening of the annual general session to finalize the provisional agenda and to examine the adequacy of the documentation available.

COMMENTS:

It is considered that an arrangement on these lines would not in fact involve any addition to the meeting time now required for the administration of the General Agreement, since it should be possible to eliminate intersessional meetings and also curtail the annual meeting from five or six weeks to three. If meetings were regularly scheduled, it would facilitate national representation by enabling contracting parties to plan their own work programmes in the light of known commitments for GATT meetings.

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<sup>1</sup> Subject to availability of accommodation; if accommodation is not available the session might be held in the first two weeks of July.

<sup>2</sup> Another possible date would be the last three weeks of November.

It is recognized that problems may be presented for countries situated at a distance from the headquarters of the GATT. On the other hand, if these contracting parties are expected to participate effectively in Intersessional Committee meetings, the same problem arises in an even more acute form since representation has to be provided at unscheduled times and at short notice. If the above proposals were accepted by the CONTRACTING PARTIES, it might be possible for the more distant countries to reconsider a suggestion made at the Ninth Session that they should appoint to Geneva or to one of the nearby European capitals, representatives of suitable calibre and with knowledge of and authority to speak on commercial policy questions within the field of the General Agreement. It may be that this suggestion in present circumstances, may have greater appeal to the governments concerned in view of the important developments in commercial policy which are taking place in the European area. Moreover, the appointment of such representatives would facilitate a degree of continuous consultation about commercial policy matters which it is one of the aims of the General Agreement to promote.