

# GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

RESTRICTED

MDF/17/Add.6  
9 April 1986

Special Distribution

---

## SERVICES

### SUMMARY OF INFORMATION MADE AVAILABLE BY RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS<sup>1</sup>

#### Note by the Secretariat

#### Addendum

#### INTERGOVERNMENTAL BUREAU FOR INFORMATICS (IBI)

The Intergovernmental Bureau for Informatics (IBI) was created under the auspices of the United Nations and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) by an International Convention on the basis of which it went into operation as an independent organization from November 1961.

IBI is charged with (1) promoting the development and application of informatics disciplines, (2) collecting, analyzing and evaluating knowledge and information relating to informatics, (3) promoting the exchange of experience and the transfer of techniques in the field of informatics, (4) furnishing assistance as may be requested by governments and international organizations, (5) disseminating knowledge, information and experience in the field of informatics, (6) supplying its member States with facilities for training and education in informatics, (7) advising, promoting and, where required, recommending action of a national and international nature concerning inter alia (a) the adoption of national and international policies for informatics, (b) the adoption of improved methods of administration by means of informatics, (c) the improvement of education in and through informatics, (d) research, studies and development programmes contributing to the scope of IBI.

States which are members either of the United Nations or of one of the specialized agencies of the United Nations can be members of IBI by becoming parties to its Convention. The governing bodies of IBI comprise a general assembly and an executive council. At present, the following countries are parties to the Convention: Argentina, Benin, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chile, Congo, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, Gabon, Ghana, Guyana, Guinea, Haiti, Iraq, Italy, Ivory Coast, Jordan, Lebanon, Liberia, Madagascar, Mexico, Morocco, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Panama, Sao Tomé, Senegal, Spain, Swaziland, Syria, Togo, Tunisia, Venezuela, Zaire.

---

<sup>1</sup>The information presented in this note is drawn from the documentation on IBI available in the secretariat.

In June 1980, IBI organized the first Conference on Transborder Data Flow (TDF) Policies, which provided the opportunity, according to IBI, for directing the attention of the international community and of the informatics and communication authorities of developing countries to a topic which until then had been the prerogative of the experts and the concern of the industrialized countries. The objective behind the Conference was to work towards a better understanding of the subject and to foster its discussion.

A Second World Conference on Transborder Data Flow Policies was convened in Rome in June 1984. Fifty-six countries were represented, as well as thirty-two governmental, intergovernmental and other agencies. The conference addressed the implications, domestically and internationally, of the rapid increase in the flow of data across national boundaries, consequent upon major changes in information technology in the past twenty years.

According to IBI report TDF 260, an important stream of thought that emerged during the conference was the danger of an over-ambitious approach to tackling the problems of TDF, whether in IBI, other agencies or in home countries. The nature, scope, variety and novelty of the problems posed defied quick universal solutions. Although the conference did not have a specific mandate to chart an action programme, it presented conclusions concerning IBI's future activities, the main elements of which are summarized below:

IBI should consider:

- (a) convening a Committee of Reflection on Informatics and TDF Policies to examine a long-term strategy of general issues and trends in TDF.
- (b) inviting countries from all regions of the world to provide ideas and recommendations on the most urgent issues of TDF policies, while avoiding duplication of the work being done by other international agencies.
- (c) initiating a programme to sensitize appropriate personnel in developing countries concerning TDF issues. This programme should be closely co-ordinated with the work proposed in (b). It should help to provide appropriate expertise to developing countries in respect of international negotiations on these and related matters.
- (d) taking initiatives, in particular in co-operation with the ITU, to support the development of telematics and informatics infrastructures in developing countries, especially by encouraging efforts in regional co-operation in the establishment of data banks and information services with appropriate training support.
- (e) convening a Third Conference on TDF Policies.

Another outcome of the 1984 Second World Conference was the creation of an IBI International Consultative Commission for TDF Development which held its first meeting in Rome on 18-20 September 1985. The mandate of the Commission is to consider the implications of TDF for economic development, and to organize a Third World Conference at which its report will be

submitted. Four working groups study different aspects of TDF and will report their findings to the Commission at the end of 1986. The subjects studied are (1) TDF and development, (2) international information protection measures, (3) sectorial and regional approaches and issues, and (4) technical standards and financial problems.

IBI carries out actions within the wide sector of human resource development in the field of informatics. The basic objective is to promote and develop the endogenous capacities of member countries with regard to training in informatics and to carry out direct actions by providing financial assistance to training in the form of fellowships. Specifically, IBI advises member countries on the drafting and implementation of training policies and plans, supports the creation of training structures and develops and runs training and updating courses. Financial aid to training is provided by the Joint Fellowship Funds, which is run by IBI. The application of informatics to education is divided into three main areas: management of the education process, use of the computer as a dictionary or archive, and "computer assisted instruction".

The technical assistance that IBI lends its member countries is developed following three modalities: (1) technical, special purpose or multiple missions whereby IBI intervenes through its own professional staff or through sending contracted experts as advisers; (2) co-operation programmes, lasting one or two years, carried out on the basis of an agreement signed between a member country and IBI; and (3) joint action programmes which consist in the simultaneous computerization of the priority areas of a country's civil service. As such actions require funds complementary to those directly contributed by IBI, the programmes are carried out for the benefit of a country with IBI support and additional aid from a third country. These programmes last five years and are intended for the less developed countries.

IBI also promotes the implementation of informatics technology transfer projects in conditions favourable to developing countries. Basically this transfer is carried out on two levels: vertical and horizontal, which corresponds to two successive stages of implementation. Firstly, the transfer is vertical (from a developed country to a developing country); at this stage all the problems of adaptation to a completely different environment, culture and needs must be resolved. Subsequently, through IBI, technological transfer in a horizontal direction can be carried out with IBI making available to other member countries the experience gained. At this stage, IBI may effect such a transfer either at national level (between two countries) or at regional level (between the country receiving the project and a set of other countries). In addition, the positive reply of the member countries to this formula and the growing number of requests for projects to be carried out has led IBI to devote particular attention to all activities referring to the implementation of this type of project and to try to increase the number of countries which could benefit from these initiatives, through seeking out financing sources external to IBI.

In addition, the IBI Technology Department is entrusted with carrying out activities such as the monitoring of the developments in informatics technology, the analysis of possibilities of introducing new informatics technologies and of creating basic support infrastructures for its development within member countries, and the provision of technical evaluation elements for technological transfer and updating projects carried out by IBI.

IBI carries out actions for analyzing the possibilities of accessing technological information (agreements, promotion of dedicated networks, promotion of distributed data bases for monitoring technology etc.) tailored to the conditions of informatics development in member countries.

IBI also operates several regional centres (one in Spain, one in Mexico and new ones opening in Dakar and Lagos), whose authorities are devoted to pedagogical orientation involving advising national informatics authorities.

Another activity of IBI is the dissemination of information on informatics among member countries through different mechanisms intended to facilitate access to this information, in particular the AIDS database created and run by IBI.

Finally, one of IBI's responsibilities, in addition to linking scientific and technical/political aspects with decision-making, is the establishment of appropriate fora where the developing countries in particular are able to express their points of view. Making recommendations is one of the ways in which IBI acts in international life and in co-operation. These recommendations, backed by the authority of the Conferences, support the decisions taken by the governing bodies.