

# INFORMATION

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS  
AND TRADE  
ACCORD GÉNÉRAL SUR LES TARIFS  
DOUANIERS ET LE COMMERCE

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GATT/40/5

## WHO NEGOTIATES IN GATT - AND HOW?

There are essentially two kinds of GATT negotiation. One aims at establishing new rules or implementing old ones. The other seeks to reduce specific trade barriers. Sometimes the two overlap. Negotiations can take place as independent processes or linked to others in the form of major trade rounds.

Always, the negotiating is done by the contracting parties themselves. there is no executive body in GATT which can impose liberal trade policies or judgements on commercial practices. Generally, there is no voting in GATT bodies. Everything has to be agreed by consensus in order, among other things, for GATT decisions to have maximum political viability.

This approach to negotiations - the consensus decision in which not everyone may be in wholehearted agreement but, at least, nobody is actually objecting - makes them sometimes long and even tortuous. It is easy for outside observers - sometimes delegates themselves - to lose patience with the process. But when the results come, they have a far greater weight than had they been achieved much earlier through an artificial majority vote. The GATT is a pragmatic and realistic institution.

Who does the negotiating? For the most part, they are diplomats based in Geneva. Some may be career foreign-service officers, others are likely to be economic and trade-policy specialists from the relevant government departments. Naturally, they do not work independently. Negotiating objectives and strategies are usually worked out in capitals which have to

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be kept in constant touch with developments. Sometimes experts in particular fields travel to Geneva to cover specific negotiations. The faces that appear for agriculture talks are quite different from those for civil aircraft negotiations.

In the capitals themselves, policies evolve through the activities of national parliaments, inputs from businessmen, lawyers, lobbyists, and, ultimately, through decisions by ministers. As trade negotiations become more complex, governments increasingly rely on the views of industry.

In Geneva, the negotiations are conducted in committees composed, normally, of delegates from all interested contracting parties, although, in the case of the Uruguay Round, the net is spread rather wider. The chairmen are usually selected from among the delegates but are sometimes brought in from outside.

Negotiating bodies are serviced by the GATT secretariat. The secretariat, which has some 350 staff and is based in Geneva, helps to analyse and bring together proposals, provides background information and facilitates the search for solutions, particularly when negotiations falter.

Any negotiation appears to stumble from crisis to crisis, from failure to failure, until the day the deal is done. Trade negotiation is an art and a form of confrontation. It works best when real differences are at their most obvious - that is when compromise can take place. There are no good guys and no bad guys: just countries seeking to take a rational, long-term view of their economic interests - and to get a good deal for their businessmen.

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