

# GENERAL AGREEMENT ON

## TARIFFS AND TRADE

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### IMPROVEMENTS TO THE GATT DISPUTE SETTLEMENT RULES AND PROCEDURES

Decision of 12 April 1989

Following the meetings of the Trade Negotiations Committee at Ministerial level in December 1988 and at the level of high officials in April 1989, the CONTRACTING PARTIES to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

Approve the improvements of the GATT dispute settlement rules and procedures set out below and their application on the basis set out in this Decision:

#### A. General Provisions

1. Contracting parties recognize that the dispute settlement system of GATT serves to preserve the rights and obligations of contracting parties under the General Agreement and to clarify the existing provisions of the General Agreement. It is a central element in providing security and predictability to the multilateral trading system.

2. Contracting parties agree that all solutions to matters formally raised under the GATT dispute settlement system under Articles XXII, XXIII and arbitration awards shall be consistent with the General Agreement and shall not nullify or impair benefits accruing to any contracting party under the General Agreement, nor impede the attainment of any objective of the General Agreement.

3. Contracting parties agree that the existing rules and procedures of the GATT in the field of dispute settlement shall continue. It is further agreed that the improvements set out below, which aim to ensure prompt and effective resolution of disputes to the benefit of all contracting parties, shall be applied on a trial basis from 1 May 1989 to the end of the Uruguay Round in respect of complaints brought during that period under Article XXII or XXIII; it is also agreed to keep the application of these improvements under review during the remainder of the Round and to decide on their adoption before the end of the Round; to continue negotiations with the aim of further improving and strengthening the GATT dispute settlement system taking into account the experience gained in the application of these improvements.

4. All the points set out in this Decision shall be applied without prejudice to any provision on special and differential treatment for developing contracting parties in the existing instruments on dispute settlement including the CONTRACTING PARTIES' Decision of 5 April 1966 (BISD 14S/18).

B. Notification

Mutually agreed solutions to matters formally raised under GATT Articles XXII and XXIII, as well as arbitration awards within GATT, must be notified to the Council where any contracting party may raise any point relating thereto.

C. Consultations

1. If a request is made under Article XXII:1 or XXIII:1, the contracting party to which the request is made shall, unless otherwise mutually agreed, reply to the request within ten days after its receipt and shall enter into consultations in good faith within a period of no more than thirty days from the date of the request, with a view to reaching a mutually satisfactory solution. If the contracting party does not respond within ten days, or does not enter into consultations within a period of no more than thirty days, or a period otherwise mutually agreed, from the date of the request, then the contracting party that requested the holding of consultations may proceed directly to request the establishment of a panel or a working party.

2. If the consultations under Article XXII:1 or XXIII:1 fail to settle a dispute within sixty days after the request for consultations, the complaining party may request the establishment of a panel or a working party under Article XXIII:2. The complaining party may request a panel or a working party during the sixty-day period if the parties jointly consider that consultations have failed to settle the dispute.

3. Requests for consultations under Article XXII:1 or XXIII:1 shall be notified to the Council by the party which requests consultations. Any request for consultations shall be submitted in writing and shall give the reasons for the request.

4. In cases of urgency, including those which concern perishable goods en route, parties shall enter into consultations within a period of no more than ten days from the date of the request. If the consultations have failed to settle the dispute within a period of thirty days after the request, the complaining party may request the establishment of a panel or a working party.

#### D. Good Offices, Conciliation, Mediation

1. Good offices, conciliation and mediation are procedures that are undertaken voluntarily if the parties to the dispute so agree. They may be requested at any time by any party to a dispute. They may begin at any time and be terminated at any time. Once terminated, the complaining party can then proceed with a request for the establishment of a panel or a working party under Article XXIII:2. When good offices, conciliation or mediation are entered into within sixty days of a request for consultations, the complaining party must allow a period of sixty days from the date of the request for consultations before requesting the establishment of a panel or working party. The complaining party may request a panel or a working party during the sixty days if the parties to the dispute jointly consider that the good offices, conciliation or mediation process has failed to settle the dispute.

2. If the parties to a dispute agree, procedures for good offices, conciliation or mediation may continue while the panel or working party process proceeds.

3. The Director-General may, acting in an ex officio capacity, offer his good offices, conciliation or mediation with the view to assisting contracting parties to settle a dispute.

#### E. Arbitration

1. Expeditious arbitration within GATT as an alternative means of dispute settlement can facilitate the solution of certain disputes that concern issues that are clearly defined by both parties.

2. Resort to arbitration shall be subject to mutual agreement of the parties which shall agree on the procedures to be followed. Agreements to resort to arbitration shall be notified to all contracting parties sufficiently in advance of the actual commencement of the arbitration process.

3. Other contracting parties may become party to an arbitration proceeding upon the agreement of the parties which have agreed to have recourse to arbitration. The parties to the proceeding shall agree to abide by the arbitration award.

#### F. Panel and Working Party Procedures

##### (a) Establishment of a Panel or a Working Party

The request for a panel or a working party shall be made in writing. It shall indicate whether consultations were held, and provide a brief summary of the factual and legal basis of the complaint sufficient to present the problem clearly. In case the

applicant requests the establishment of a panel or a working party with other than standard terms of reference, the written request shall include the proposed text of special terms of reference. If the complaining party so requests, a decision to establish a panel or working party shall be taken at the latest at the Council meeting following that at which the request first appeared as an item on the Council's regular agenda, unless at that meeting the Council decides otherwise.\*

(b) Standard Terms of Reference

1. Panels shall have the following terms of reference unless the parties to the dispute agree otherwise within twenty days from the establishment of the panel:

"To examine, in the light of the relevant GATT provisions, the matter referred to the CONTRACTING PARTIES by (name of contracting party) in document L/... and to make such findings as will assist the CONTRACTING PARTIES in making the recommendations or in giving the rulings provided for in Article XXIII:2".

2. In establishing a panel, the Council may authorize its Chairman to draw up the terms of reference of the panel in consultation with the parties subject to the provisions of the preceding paragraph. The terms of reference thus drawn up shall be circulated to all contracting parties. If other than standard terms of reference are agreed upon, any contracting party may raise any point relating thereto in the Council.

(c) Composition of Panels

1. Contracting parties shall undertake, as a general rule, to permit their representatives to serve as panel members.

2. Panels shall be composed of well-qualified governmental and/or non-governmental individuals.

3. The roster of non-governmental panelists shall be expanded and improved. To this end, contracting parties may nominate individuals to serve on panels and shall provide relevant information on their nominee's knowledge of international trade and of the GATT.

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\*References to the Council, made in this paragraph as well as in the following paragraphs, are without prejudice to the competence of the CONTRACTING PARTIES, for which the Council is empowered to act in accordance with normal GATT practice (BISD 26S/215).

4. Panels shall be composed of three members unless the parties to the dispute agree, within ten days from the establishment of the panel, to a panel composed of five members.

5. If there is no agreement on the members within twenty days from the establishment of a panel, at the request of either party, the Director-General, in consultation with the Chairman of the Council, shall form the panel by appointing the panelists whom he considers most appropriate, after consulting both parties. The Director-General shall inform the contracting parties of the composition of the panel thus formed no later than ten days from the date he receives such a request.

(d) Procedures for Multiple Complainants

1. Where more than one contracting party requests the establishment of a panel related to the same matter, a single panel may be established to examine these complaints taking into account the rights of all parties concerned. A single panel should be established to examine such complaints whenever feasible.

2. The single panel will organize its examination and present its findings to the Council so that the rights which the parties to the dispute would have enjoyed had separate panels examined the complaints are in no way impaired. If one of the parties to the dispute so requests, the panel will submit separate reports on the dispute concerned. The written submissions by each of the complainants will be made available to the other complainants, and each complainant will have the right to be present when one of the other complainants presents its view to the panel.

3. If more than one panel is established to examine the complaints related to the same matter, to the greatest extent possible the same persons shall serve as panelists on each of the separate panels and the timetable for the panel process in such disputes shall be harmonized.

(e) Third Contracting Parties

1. The interests of the parties to a dispute and those of other contracting parties shall be fully taken into account during the panel process.

2. Any third contracting party having a substantial interest in a matter before a panel, and having notified this to the Council, shall have an opportunity to be heard by the panel and to make written submissions to the panel. These submissions shall also be given to the parties to the dispute and shall be reflected in the panel report.

3. At the request of the third contracting party, the panel may grant the third contracting party access to the written submissions to the panel by those parties to the dispute which have agreed to the disclosure of their respective submission to the third contracting party.

(f) Time Devoted to Various Phases of a Panel

1. Panel procedures should provide sufficient flexibility so as to ensure high-quality panel reports, while not unduly delaying the panel process.
2. Panels shall follow the Suggested Working Procedures found in the July 1985 note of the Office of Legal Affairs unless the members of the panel agree otherwise after consulting the parties to the dispute. After consulting the parties, the panel members shall, as soon as practicable and whenever possible within one week after the composition and terms of reference of the panel have been agreed upon, fix the timetable for the panel process at least until its first substantive meeting.
3. In determining the timetable for the panel process, the panel shall provide sufficient time for the parties to the dispute to prepare their submissions.
4. Each party to the dispute shall deposit its written submissions with the Secretariat for immediate transmission to the panel and to the other party or parties to the dispute. The complaining party shall submit its first submission in advance of the responding party's first submission unless the panel decides, in fixing the timetable referred to in the second paragraph of this section and after consultations with the parties to the dispute, that the parties should submit their first submissions simultaneously. When there are sequential arrangements for the deposit of first submissions, the panel shall establish a firm time period for receipt of the responding party's submission. Any subsequent written submissions shall be submitted simultaneously.
5. In order to make the procedures more efficient, the period in which the panel shall conduct its examination, from the time the composition and terms of reference of the panel have been agreed upon to the time when the final report is provided to the parties to the dispute, shall, as a general rule, not exceed six months. In cases of urgency, including those relating to perishable goods, the panel shall aim to provide its report to the parties within three months.
6. When the panel considers that it cannot provide its report within six months, or within three months in cases of urgency, it shall inform the Council in writing of the reasons for the delay together with an estimate of the period within which it will submit its report. In no case should the period from the establishment of the panel to the submission of the report to the contracting parties exceed nine months.

7. In the context of consultations involving a measure taken by a developing contracting party, the parties may agree to extend the periods established in paragraphs 2 and 4 of Section C. If, after the relevant period has elapsed, the parties cannot agree that the consultations have concluded, the Chairman of the Council shall decide, after consultation with the parties, whether to extend the relevant period and, if so, for how long. In addition, in examining a complaint against a developing contracting party, the panel shall accord sufficient time for the developing contracting party to prepare and present its argumentation. The provisions of paragraph 4 of Section C are not affected by any action pursuant to this paragraph.

#### G. Adoption of Panel Reports

1. In order to provide sufficient time for the members of the Council to consider panel reports, the reports shall not be considered for adoption by the Council until thirty days after they have been issued to the contracting parties.

2. Contracting parties having objections to panel reports shall give written reasons to explain their objections for circulation at least ten days prior to the Council meeting at which the panel report will be considered.

3. The parties to a dispute shall have the right to participate fully in the consideration of the panel report by the Council, and their views shall be fully recorded. The practice of adopting panel reports by consensus shall be continued, without prejudice to the GATT provisions on decision-making which remain applicable. However, the delaying of the process of dispute settlement shall be avoided.

4. The period from the request under Article XXII:1 or Article XXIII:1 until the Council takes a decision on the panel report shall not, unless agreed to by the parties, exceed fifteen months. The provisions of this paragraph shall not affect the provisions of paragraph 6 of Section F(f).

#### H. Technical Assistance

1. While the Secretariat assists contracting parties 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 contracting parties. To this end, the Secretariat shall make available a qualified legal expert within the Technical Co-operation Division to any developing contracting party which so requests. This expert shall assist the developing contracting party in a manner ensuring the continued impartiality of the Secretariat.

2. The Secretariat shall conduct special training courses for interested contracting parties concerning GATT dispute settlement procedures and practices so as to enable contracting parties' experts to be better informed in this regard.

I. Surveillance of Implementation of Recommendations and Rulings

1. Prompt compliance with recommendations or rulings of the CONTRACTING PARTIES under Article XXIII is essential in order to ensure effective resolution of disputes to the benefit of all contracting parties.

2. The contracting party concerned shall inform the Council of its intentions in respect of implementation of the recommendations or rulings. If it is impracticable to comply immediately with the recommendations or rulings, the contracting party concerned shall have a reasonable period of time in which to do so.

3. The Council shall monitor the implementation of recommendations or rulings adopted under Article XXIII:2. The issue of implementation of the recommendations or rulings may be raised at the Council by any contracting party at any time following their adoption. Unless the Council decides otherwise, the issue of implementation of the recommendations or rulings shall be on the agenda of the Council meeting after six months following their adoption and shall remain on the Council's agenda until the issue is resolved. At least ten days prior to each such Council meeting, the contracting party concerned shall provide the Council with a status report in writing of its progress in the implementation of the panel recommendations or rulings.

4. In cases brought by developing contracting parties, the Council shall consider what further action it might take which would be appropriate to the circumstances, in conformity with paragraphs 21 and 23 of the 1979 Understanding regarding Notification, Consultation, Dispute Settlement and Surveillance (BISD 26S/214).