

GATT/1490

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GATT MEMBERSHIP REACHES NINETY-NINE

There are now ninety-nine contracting parties to the GATT - membership having moved up from ninety-six in the past few weeks with the accession of Tunisia, Venezuela and Bolivia.

A further eight countries are negotiating membership in various working parties: Algeria, Bulgaria, China, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nepal and Paraguay. Costa Rica is in the process of ratifying its GATT accession terms and may become the 100th contracting party in the coming weeks.

The new contracting parties:

Tunisia became a full contracting party on 19 August (it provisionally acceded to the GATT in November 1959). It signed its Protocol of Accession to the GATT on 27 April 1990. At the GATT Council meeting in February 1990, Tunisia reported that it was implementing a national economic restructuring programme in the face of low commodity prices, difficult market-access conditions, declining export receipts and a heavy debt burden. The economic reforms under this programme were in line with the spirit and letter of the General Agreement. Tunisia agreed to bind more than 900 tariff headings at levels ranging from 17 to 52 per cent. In addition, it undertook to abolish import licenses or other quantitative restrictions on many products.

Venezuela acceded to the GATT on 31 August. It signed its Protocol of Accession to the GATT on 1 August 1990. The GATT Council adopted the report of the Working Party on the Accession of Venezuela in July 1990. At the meeting, Venezuela assured GATT members of its commitment to contribute to the strengthening of the multilateral trading system. While Venezuela had been flexible in the accession negotiations, it had consistently maintained a stand reflecting its status as a developing country. Venezuela had lowered its tariff rates from levels as high as 135 per cent to a current 50 per cent. Upon accession, it pledged to bind its entire tariff schedule at a ceiling rate of 50 per cent which would be lowered, after two years, to 40 per cent.

Bolivia became a GATT member on 8 September. It signed its Protocol of Accession to the GATT on 4 August 1989, the GATT Council having adopted the report of the Working Party on the Accession of Bolivia in July 1989. The Bolivian government described its forthcoming accession to the General Agreement as an "act of faith" in the multilateral trading system and in the GATT. Bolivia undertook to bind its whole tariff schedule at a ceiling level of 40 per cent.