

# GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

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Consultative Group of Eighteen  
Sixteenth Meeting  
14-16 October 1981

## PROPOSED MINISTERIAL MEETING: PROCEDURAL ARRANGEMENTS

### Note by the Secretariat

1. At its fifteenth meeting in June 1981, the Group agreed that "it would be useful to consider at the political level the overall condition of the trading system. There was broad agreement that to this end it would be appropriate for the GATT CONTRACTING PARTIES to envisage convening a ministerial meeting during 1982". The Group also agreed to pursue its discussion on this subject at its next meeting, "with a view to facilitating the task of the CONTRACTING PARTIES". (GATT/1291, paragraph 3).

2. The Thirty Seventh Session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES will be held in the week beginning 23 November 1981. It seems appropriate, therefore, that the Group should decide at its present meeting on such recommendations regarding the proposed ministerial meeting as it may wish to make to assist the CONTRACTING PARTIES in taking a decision on this matter. A separate secretariat note (CG.18/W/61) discusses background issues relating to the proposed ministerial meeting. The present note is confined to more procedural issues: the composition and status of the proposed meeting; the date, duration and place; and arrangements for preparing the meeting.

#### Composition and status

3. The options available, as regards the composition and status of a ministerial meeting called by the CONTRACTING PARTIES would appear to be:

- (a) a meeting open to all governments;
- (b) a meeting open to all contracting parties with certain other governments invited;
- (c) an ad hoc meeting of contracting parties;
- (d) a Session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES. This option would permit attendance of the governments and organizations which have observer status at Sessions: this includes all countries applying the GATT de facto, as well as a number of other governments. It would of course be open to governments which do not at present have observer status to request such status.

4. A choice between these options cannot be entirely divorced from a judgement on the substance of the proposed ministerial meeting. Discussion in the fifteenth meeting of the Consultative Group suggested, however, that most members saw the proposed meeting as

providing an opportunity for the CONTRACTING PARTIES to take stock of the condition of the GATT trading system and to provide political direction to GATT's work. It would thus seem logical to envisage the ministerial meeting taking place within the context of GATT itself, and in the form of a Session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES. Such a Session would naturally focus its attention on GATT's direct concerns. It would have the authority to take decisions that would be immediately effective in the GATT context. The established arrangements for observers would permit all governments taking an interest in developments in GATT to attend. Established and comprehensive arrangements also exist for attendance of observers from intergovernmental organizations.

#### Date of the meeting

5. The Group has already agreed that in any event "adequate preparation for such a meeting would be essential" (GATT/1291, paragraph 3). From consultations with delegations, it appears to the secretariat that there is a widespread view that such preparations would require more than the three or four months that would be effectively available if the meeting took place in the first half of 1982. If, as suggested in paragraph 4, the meeting took the form of a Session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES, it could appropriately be called at the normal time for such sessions i.e. in late November 1982.

#### Duration of the meeting

6. On the basis of a general debate, which would require two to three days, and perhaps one day for examination and adoption of any decisions, the ministerial meeting might be expected to last three to four days.

#### Place of the meeting

7. For reasons of budget and convenience, almost all GATT meetings have been held in Geneva. The secretariat has ascertained that, at least in late November 1982, suitable conference accommodation would be available in the International Conference Centre.

#### Preparations for the meeting

8. While the Group may wish to make suggestions to the forthcoming Session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES concerning the scope and broad aims of the proposed ministerial meeting, it is clear that detailed preparation can take place only after a decision to convene the meeting is taken. Since such preparations should be open to all governments participating in the meeting, the nature of the preparatory body would depend on the status of the meeting itself.

Preparation of a meeting within the framework of GATT, such as a Session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES, would normally be the responsibility of the Council of Representatives, which in turn might decide to delegate it to an existing or ad hoc body.

9. The preparatory body will have to consider at an early stage the agenda and the nature of the documentation to be submitted to Ministers.

10. Discussions in the Committee on Trade and Development, in the CG.18 and in other GATT fora could assist in the preparation of the meeting.