

Negotiating Group on Market Access

NEGOTIATING GROUP ON MARKET ACCESS

Report by the Chairman, Ambassador Girard, to the Trade Negotiations Committee

I. STATUS OF WORK

1. Since its last meeting on 2-3 December 2002 (an oral report of this meeting was provided to the TNC at its meeting of 4-6 December 2002), the Negotiating Group met once on 19-21 February 2003. It was a very substantive three-day meeting with the first day dedicated to the discussion of papers submitted by participants since the Group's last meeting. There was a very interactive session with many questions raised and many comments made regarding these papers.

2. As provided for in the "Programme of Meetings for the Negotiations on Market Access for Non-Agricultural Products" (TN/MA/3), an "Overview of Proposals Submitted" (TN/MA/6) was prepared for participants at this meeting. The overview listed eighteen issues pertaining to modalities for the negotiations on tariffs which had been identified. The question of newly acceded Members and LDCs was also addressed in the paper. In addition I had circulated an illustrative list of questions on each of the 20 items (JOB(03)/27) with a view to stimulating discussions. The discussion which ensued was focussed and assisted in clarifying points of divergence and convergence on the various issues. It was agreed that the overview paper would be updated to take account of the corrections indicated by participants at the meeting as well as any additional proposals on modalities submitted before 14 March 2003. As not all the issues could be discussed at this meeting, the Group is expected to return to the remaining items at the next meeting as well as revisit some issues on which a further exchange of views would be useful.

3. The Group held a very substantive discussion on non-tariff barriers (NTBs) based on lists of NTBs¹ notified by participants pursuant to a request I had addressed to them. Additionally, another very useful input to the debate was ideas or proposals on modalities for the negotiations on NTBs which were put forward by certain participants. The discussion on this part of the Group's mandate was more focussed than at any other time and in this respect progress was made. The importance of taking account of special and differential treatment in any proposal on modalities for negotiations on NTBs was also stressed. In view of the fact that the target date for agreement on modalities for negotiations on tariffs and NTBs was 31 May 2003, the Group agreed that any additional proposal on modalities for negotiations on NTBs should be made before 14 March 2003.

4. The Secretariat introduced its paper on "Formula Approaches to Tariff Negotiations" (TN/MA/S/3/Rev.1/Add.1) which demonstrated on a hypothetical tariff profile and to the extent possible the effects of the various proposed formulas. Additionally, a technical assistance workshop by the Secretariat was conducted on 21 February 2003 to provide more explanations on this paper.

5. Based on the Secretariat document entitled "Current Data Availability in the Integrated Data Base" (TN/MA/S/9), the Group noted that gaps still existed in the WTO tariff and trade data base. I

¹ These notifications were compiled in an advance copy of document TN/MA/W/25.

recalled that in my letter sent in October 2002 I had requested more timely submissions of tariff and import data to the IDB and had suggested to Members to authorize the Secretariat to source official data from other international agencies until they themselves could report directly to the Secretariat. Unfortunately, responses to this letter have been very limited. I drew the attention of participants to the fact that not having comparable data in the IDB would seriously affect the capacity of those Members to participate in the negotiations and to make full use of the tools and assistance offered by the Secretariat. In this regard, I urged delegations to respond positively to my request.

II. OUTSTANDING ISSUES

6. Further submissions are expected from participants concerning proposals on modalities for negotiations on tariffs as well as NTBs by 14 March 2003.

III. FUTURE WORK

7. The Group will pursue its work on a possible outline of modalities for the negotiations on tariffs and NTBs at its meeting scheduled for 14-16 April 2003, with due emphasis on NTBs, with a view to reaching an agreement on such modalities by 31 May 2003.
