

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

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Negotiating Group on Basic Telecommunications

REPORT ON THE MEETING OF 26 APRIL 1996

1. The Negotiating Group on Basic Telecommunications held its sixteenth meeting on 26 April 1996. The agenda for the meeting was contained in airgram WTO/AIR/316 of 19 April 1996.
2. The Chairman noted that Pakistan and Côte d'Ivoire had announced their intention to become a full participant in the negotiations. With this addition, the number of full participants in the negotiations rose to thirty-nine¹ while the number of participants with observer status stood at twenty-four².
3. Under the agenda item on presentation of the latest offers and revisions of offers, the Chairman announced that Côte d'Ivoire, Iceland, India and Pakistan had submitted draft offers bringing the total number of draft offers submitted by participants thus far to thirty-three.³ In addition, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Israel, Poland, Thailand and Venezuela had submitted revisions to their draft offers. An m.f.n. exemption list on basic telecommunications was submitted by India. These delegations were afforded the opportunity to introduce their new and revised draft offers. Also, Colombia announced that it would be submitting an offer very shortly. Australia said that its Government intended to submit a revision binding elements of planned liberalization. Hungary, Norway and Switzerland announced that their forthcoming revisions would include additional commitments based on the Reference Paper. The Chairman welcomed these developments, thanked the delegations for their submissions and reminded delegations that a response to the questionnaire on basic telecommunications had recently been circulated by Thailand.

¹ Argentina, Australia, Barbados, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, the European Communities and their Member States (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom), Hong Kong, Hungary, Iceland, India, Israel, Japan, Korea, Mauritius, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Singapore, Slovak Republic, Switzerland, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, the United States and Venezuela.

² Bolivia, Bulgaria, Brunei Darussalam, the Republic of China, Chinese Taipei, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Jamaica, Latvia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Panama, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovenia, South Africa, Trinidad & Tobago, United Arab Emirates, and Uruguay.

³ Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Côte d'Ivoire, Czech Republic, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, the European Communities and its Member States, Hong Kong, Hungary, Iceland, India, Israel, Japan, Korea, Mauritius, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Singapore, Slovak Republic, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, the United States and Venezuela.

4. The Chairman invited delegations to exchange views on the results thus far of the negotiations. In their assessments, a number of delegations observed that substantial progress had been made in the submission of offers and that important obstacles had been addressed within the context on work on regulatory principles. However, many noted that although the quantity of offers was encouraging there still remained room for improvement in the quality of offers. Some indicated that the results were not yet of sufficient quality to yield a success for the negotiations and urged participants to continue in their efforts to improve offers. It was also noted that more offers concerning additional commitments of regulatory principles were needed. Some delegations also cautioned against possible moves to reconsider and withdraw commitments relating to international services, saying that such moves could pose a serious threat to concluding the negotiations. In this vein, one delegation urged that participants should take into consideration the differing stages of development of telecom reforms in evaluating the results.

5. Under the agenda item on consideration of the draft Protocol and the draft Decision of the Council, the Chairman invited delegations to propose comments or drafting points. No changes to the draft Decision were proposed. Regarding the draft Protocol, one delegation suggested that there should be a shorter period of time between acceptance and the date of entry into force of the Protocol and proposed a date of 30 November 1997 as the deadline for acceptance while maintaining the date of 1 January 1998 for entry into force. The question was raised whether the text of the Annex on Negotiations on Basic Telecommunications meant that m.f.n. exemption lists could be submitted at any time up until entry into force of the Protocol and whether it might be desirable to consider adding an element to the Protocol to clarify that the extent of participants' m.f.n. exemptions should be made known by the conclusion of negotiations. One delegation noted that it was unlikely to be able to submit an offer by 30 April, but would want to ensure that, if it were in a position to submit an offer prior to the entry into force of the Protocol, its ability to also submit an m.f.n. exemption was preserved. The Chairman noted the concerns expressed and indicated that they would be kept under consideration.

6. Regarding consideration of the draft final report of the negotiating group, the Chairman requested comments. One delegation observed that it was considering what group might be assigned to monitor telecommunications-related issues in the period of time between the conclusion of the negotiations and the entry into force of the results and that it might make specific suggestions at a later time. No other comments or suggestions were made on the draft final report.

7. No issues were raised under other business. The Chairman reminded delegations that the next and final meeting of the Group would take place on 30 April and would be followed by a session of the Council for Trade in Services.