

# WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

RESTRICTED

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Committee on Regional Trade Agreements  
Twelfth Session

## NOTE ON THE MEETING OF 14 JULY 1997

Chairman: Mr. John Weekes (Canada)

### **A. Adoption of the Agenda**

1. The Twelfth Session of the Committee on Regional Trade Agreements (CRTA) was convened in Airgram WTO/AIR/633.

2. Items were introduced by the representative of Norway and by the Chairman for consideration under "Other Business".

3. The following agenda was adopted:

A. Adoption of the Agenda

B. Examination of Regional Trade Agreements: Enlargement of the European Communities (Accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden)

C. Other Business

**B. Examination of Regional Trade Agreements: Enlargement of the European Communities (Accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden)**

4. The report on this examination is being circulated as a separate document.

### **C. Other Business**

5. The representative of Norway said that, given the mandate of the Committee to consider the systemic implications of regional trade agreements for the multilateral trading system, it would be very useful for the Committee to have a regularly updated list of notified RTAs currently in force. Such a list should be comprehensive, in that it should comprise trade agreements notified to all relevant WTO bodies. This was a matter of transparency and would give the Committee an overview of existing regional initiatives and a better basis on which to assess the relationship between regional initiatives and the multilateral trading system. He said that this intervention was for information purposes only and that he would suggest that the Committee revert to this proposal the next time the Committee dealt with the systemic aspect of its terms of reference.

6. The representative of Korea supported the suggestion made by the delegation of Norway and wished to add a request. During the last Session, Members had received a paper from the Secretariat on the state of play of the examination of notified RTAs. Perhaps the Secretariat could consolidate that list with the list suggested by the representative of Norway so that delegations might have a clearer picture of notified RTAs.

7. The Chairman acknowledged the usefulness of this suggestion but pointed out that there was a difference between the list of notified agreements to be examined by the Committee and the more comprehensive list of all notified agreements currently in force. He proposed that the Committee revert to this matter at its next meeting, and he thanked the delegation of Norway for indicating its intention to introduce this proposal, thus giving Members the opportunity to reflect on it. Turning to the proposed meeting schedule (dated 17 June), he noted that in the June meeting of the Committee, Mr. Harbinson had emphasized that the schedule should remain flexible. Since no delegation had raised any specific problem with the proposed programme, he inferred that there were no objections to the suggested format for the work over the coming months. If that was the case, he intended to contact the parties to the regional trade agreements coming under examination by the Committee to ascertain the format and timing availability of required information. He would also make other appropriate arrangements with a view to identifying the presiding officer for each of these examinations. In that regard, he wanted to inform the Committee that he had begun to hold consultations and would continue in that vein to determine replacements for the two vice-chairmen who had left Geneva, i.e. Ambassador L. Willems (Belgium) and Ambassador J. Ravaloson (Madagascar). He would eventually take these discussions into a fully open informal meeting to ensure that the names which emerged were ones that would be satisfactory, before formally proposing them. He had already received some suggestions and would welcome additional ones from delegations.

8. The representative of Argentina said that the calendar should remain flexible to take account of situations that might arise. He had noticed that some of the dates scheduled for the meetings of this Committee coincided with those of other WTO bodies. For delegations such as his, which were unable to attend two meetings simultaneously, this had posed a problem. He requested that such scheduling conflicts be avoided when possible. The Chairman recognised that this was an important issue which had been brought up in a variety of WTO bodies, including the General Council. He urged the Secretariat to try to ensure that such conflicts be avoided whenever possible when planning meetings.

9. The representative of Switzerland said that he shared the concerns expressed regarding scheduling conflicts. He suggested that one way to facilitate this would be effectively to eliminate the backlog. With reference to the finalisation of examinations at the conclusions stage, the exercise had been started for at least one agreement, but there were a few other examinations for which the factual examination had been concluded as well. His delegation looked forward to informal consultations on possible conclusions and hoped that the necessary drafts would be made available in September to enable progress in this regard.

10. The Chairman welcomed the intervention by the representative of Switzerland. One of the Committee's objectives was to try to make progress on the backlog, and it was clear that a number of important contributions had been made in terms of improving the procedures for addressing it. The Committee had indeed made significant progress in the examination of a number of agreements and had completed, in essence, the factual part of these examinations. However, the conclusions aspect of these agreements remained to be done. With respect to the examination of the NAFTA, there had been some discussion on the nature of the conclusions. The Committee should try to complete the examination process, including the conclusions, on as many agreements as possible in the remaining months of this year.

11. The representative of Japan noted that, regarding the schedule of meetings, the elimination of the backlog was important. But the preparation of conclusions was linked to systemic issues, so his delegation wondered if time to discuss systemic issues might be allocated in each CRTA meeting. His delegation would also be interested in receiving a list of non-notified RTAs, in addition to the list of notified RTAs.

12. The Chairman reminded the Committee of his intention to convene an informal consultation that afternoon. The objective of the informal session would be to consider the structure of future systemic work and the procedure for tackling the emerging systemic agenda.

13. The Committee took note of the comments made.