

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

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Negotiating Group on Basic Telecommunications

REPORT ON THE MEETING OF 28 FEBRUARY 1996

1. The Negotiating Group on Basic Telecommunications held its thirteenth meeting on 28 February 1996. The agenda for the meeting was contained in airgram WTO/AIR/258 of 30 January 1996.
2. Regarding requests for participation and observer status, the Chairman announced that Colombia and Thailand had taken decisions to join the negotiations as full participants. As a result, the number of full participants in the negotiations stood at thirty-six¹. Bolivia, Côte d'Ivoire and Myanmar were welcomed as observers to the NGBT, bringing the number of participants with observer status to twenty-seven². The Chairman thanked the delegations for their decisions and encouraged other governments participating as observers also to consider joining in the negotiations as full participants as soon as possible.
3. Under the agenda item on the introduction of draft offers, new offers were submitted and introduced by Israel, Brazil, Poland and Mauritius. This brought the total number of draft offers submitted by participants thus far to twenty-three.³ The United States submitted a revision to its draft offer, bringing the number of revised offers to four. Representatives of the Dominican Republic and Morocco indicated their intention to present draft offers, while the representatives of Mexico and Venezuela promised to provide improved offers shortly. The Chairman, thanked the delegations who are preparing draft offers as well as those who expressed their intention to provide improved offers and encouraged other governments to do the same.
4. The Chairman invited delegations to comment on the progress of bilateral negotiations held during the week with the participation of high-level officials. Participants gave mixed assessments of the progress of the bilateral negotiations. They recognized that positive developments were taking place in that negotiations were intensifying in terms of new draft offers being submitted and promises to provide improved revised offers. Nevertheless, most of them also expressed concern regarding the number of outstanding, new and revised offers, the need to increase the level of participation and the short time frame remaining to meet the deadline. Many participants also stressed the necessity to include additional commitments on regulatory principles to support market access commitments. One participant

¹Argentina, Australia, Barbados, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, 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, 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, Côte d'Ivoire, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Jamaica, Latvia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovenia, South Africa, Trinidad & Tobago, United Arab Emirates, and Uruguay.

³ Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, the European Communities and its Member States, Hong Kong, Hungary, Israel, Japan, Korea, Mauritius, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, the Philippines, Poland, Singapore, Slovak Republic, Switzerland, Turkey, the United States and Venezuela.

stressed the need to preserve the flexibility for countries to define their own regulatory framework. Another participant expressed disappointment that many developed countries had not submitted improved offers, but was encouraged by the intentions expressed by several countries to do so. One representative highlighted the need to address the means to assist developing countries to achieve universal service obligations and to facilitate an increased share in world trade in telecommunications services. It was also noted that the level and the scope of liberalization should reflect the Members' different levels of development. The Chairman reiterated the need to submit more draft and revised offers within the specified timetable, and recalled that offers with phased commitments, where it is not possible at this time to make full commitments, was an option available to participants.

5. Under the agenda item on outstanding technical and conceptual issues, the Chairman announced that issues related to regulatory principles would be discussed in an informal reflection group, restricted to full participants, on the basis of the reference paper distributed on 2 February. The results of these discussions would be reported to the next formal NGBT meeting in March. With respect to the issue of regulatory principles, he noted that one widely expressed view was to use the Reference Paper on regulatory principles as the basis for additional commitments to be made in participants' final schedules.

6. Under the agenda item on the review of participants' responses to the questionnaire on basic telecommunications, the representatives of Poland and Colombia introduced their responses. The Chairman thanked these delegations for their submissions and encouraged other participants and observers to respond to the questionnaire.

7. The Chairman announced that the next formal NGBT meeting was scheduled for the 22 of March and an informal meeting was tentatively scheduled on 19 March. He recalled that the scheduled dates for the April meetings were on the 17 and 25 April. In addition, the Chairman recalled the additional work remaining for the Group in the month of April, including the drafting of the Protocol, reviewing and finalizing the schedule of commitments, and finally, the drafting and approval of the Report to the Council in Trade in Services.