



**INFORMAL MEETING ON REGIONALIZATION IN THE MARGINS
OF THE SPS COMMITTEE OF JULY 2017**

PROPOSAL BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

The following communication, received on 6 April 2017, is being circulated at the request of the Delegation of the European Union.

1 BACKGROUND

1.1. Following an oral proposal of the European Union, the SPS Committee of 22-23 March 2017 decided to organise an informal meeting on regionalization in the margins of the SPS Committee of July 2017. The Committee also requested the European Union to put in writing its proposal for distribution to Members.

2 SCOPE OF THE MEETING

2.1. Article 6 of the SPS Agreement lays down the rules on the application of regionalization when setting SPS measures. Obligations are given both to importing and exporting countries. In 2008 the SPS Committee adopted guidelines¹ on the practical implementation of these rules. Several Members, including the European Union², have submitted documents to the Committee explaining the application of Article 6 in their territories.

2.2. The concept of regionalization is fundamental to ensure the safety of international trade in animal and plant products. All WTO Members are regularly or occasionally confronted with outbreaks of animal diseases and pests. Managing the consequences for trade of these outbreaks is therefore a matter of general interest. Recent WTO dispute cases have underlined the obligation of WTO members to apply the concept of regionalization and to seek to minimise the trade impact of a disease or pest outbreak in an exporting country - but there must also be assurances that regionalization measures are effective and reliable.

2.3. Although the concept of regionalization applies in both the animal and plant health sectors, it would probably be more useful and efficient to limit the scope of this session to just one of them, given the different expertise required in the veterinary and phytosanitary fields. For that reason, the informal meeting could usefully focus on contagious animal diseases.

2.4. Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), with current or recent outbreaks on three continents, is a topical example which provides a good illustration of the challenges faced by WTO Members when implementing regionalization. Some Members may want to present their recent experience with HPAI during the meeting.

¹ Guidelines to further the practical implementation of Article 6 of the Agreement on the application of sanitary and phytosanitary measures (G/SPS/48).

² G/SPS/GEN/1159.

3 OBJECTIVE OF THE MEETING

3.1. The informal meeting would provide an opportunity for WTO Members to increase their awareness of regionalization principles and learn from each other by sharing experiences about the challenges, as well as the benefits, of implementing regionalization in practice. This, in turn, should contribute to building confidence among trading partners when recognising or seeking recognition of their regionalization measures.

3.2. It is proposed that the meeting focus on animal diseases to discuss the implementation of the regionalization concept from the perspective of an importing as well as an exporting party.

3.3. In order for the meeting to be helpful the active participation from a broad range of Members would be important.

4 OUTLINE OF THE PROGRAMME

4.1. The meeting would consist of presentations by officials or experts from WTO, OIE and Member countries, followed by questions from Delegates. The meeting would conclude with a general discussion. It could be organised in three sessions as follows:

4.1 International rules and guidelines

- Provisions of the SPS Agreement on regionalization and relevant guidelines
- OIE standards on regionalization

4.2 Sharing of national experiences

- Experiences of Members as exporting countries in seeking recognition of their regionalization by importing countries
- Experiences of Members as importing countries in recognising regionalization of exporting countries

4.3 General discussion

5 NEXT STEPS

5.1. The European Union suggests that this proposal be circulated to all Members for their comments. At the same time, Members should be invited to signal their willingness to present their experiences in the informal meeting so that a draft programme can be prepared sufficiently in advance of the meeting.
