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**Council for Trade in Goods**

**WORK PROGRAMME ON ELECTRONIC COMMERCE**

**REPORT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE COUNCIL FOR TRADE IN GOODS  
TO THE GENERAL COUNCIL**

As agreed by the Council for Trade in Goods (CTG) at its meeting of 3 and 4 July 2018, I hereby make, under my own responsibility as Chairperson, the following factual report to the General Council concerning the CTG meetings that took place on 23 and 26 March, and 3 and 4 July 2018.

Pursuant to the 2017 Ministerial Decision<sup>1</sup> instructing the General Council, *inter alia*, to hold periodic reviews of the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce (WPEC or WP) in its sessions of July and December 2018 and July 2019, based on the reports submitted by the WTO bodies entrusted with the implementation of the Work Programme, the Council for Trade in Goods placed the issue of the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce on the agenda of its meetings held on 23 and 26 March, and 3 and 4 July 2018. At these meetings, the Chair invited delegations to express their opinions and to make suggestions as to how to work on the preparation of the periodic review to be held in the General Council at its session of July 2018.

At the meeting of 23 and 26 March 2018, Chinese Taipei introduced two proposals<sup>2</sup>: one focused on cyberspace trade barriers and the other on how cyberspace "intrudes" on physical space, with a case study offered on 3D printing and the sharing economy. These documents led to a discussion among Members of a number of issues, including the challenges and opportunities created by E-Commerce for Micro, Small and Medium Size Enterprises (MSMEs), particularly in developing countries, as well as cross-border data flows, and cybersecurity.

With regard to the Work Programme itself, several delegations expressed the view that the Buenos Aires Decision had demonstrated Members' interest in and willingness to reinvigorate and continue work on E-Commerce, and to work in an engaged and constructive manner in the context of the WPEC discussions. In this vein, several delegations referred to the important contribution of E-Commerce to global economic growth and reiterated the need to continue exploring any possibility for further discussions on E-Commerce under the 1998 framework. Members referred to the opportunity provided by the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) to address some of the challenges arising from the increasing volume of parcels as a result of E-Commerce; the need for a proper sequencing of E-Commerce discussions, including on international principles, norms, and rules; as well as the need to recognize the existing digital divide.

China, supported by various Members, reiterated its proposal that a workshop on electronic commerce and trade in goods be organized<sup>3</sup> in 2018 under the aegis of the CTG. Since there was no opposition to this initiative, my predecessor had indicated that I, as Chair of the CTG, should hold consultations in this regard.

At the meeting of 3 and 4 July 2018, China, followed by Pakistan, reported on a "Workshop on E-Commerce for Development under the Multilateral Trading System", organized and sponsored by China, which had been held in Beijing from 8 to 21 May 2018, and which had been attended by 25 participants from 15 developing countries. They also referred to a follow-up seminar that had been organized by the Friends of E-Commerce for Development (FED), in Geneva, on 28 June 2018.

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<sup>1</sup> Document WT/L/1032.

<sup>2</sup> Documents JOB/CTG/12 and JOB/CTG/13.

<sup>3</sup> See document G/C/M/127, paragraph 19.9.

With respect to China's proposal to hold a workshop on electronic commerce and trade in goods under the auspices of the CTG, at the July meeting I briefed the Council on two informal rounds of consultations that I had held with delegations, including certain delegations acting also in their capacity as group coordinators, with the objective of exploring their preliminary views and suggestions with regard to themes, speakers, and dates, for any such proposed workshop.

Following my report to the Council, one delegation reiterated its support for a workshop in the context of the WTO and underscored that it represented an opportunity for Members to develop an appreciation of the work being done by other international organizations, such as at the WCO, the OECD, UNCTAD, and the UPU. Another delegation referred to additional possible elements to be considered when preparing the programme. One delegation expressed its readiness to work with others towards a workshop proposal that would lead to a relevant and interesting event, with broad scope. A view was expressed that other events had already been held that covered diverse E-Commerce topics, and that the proposed workshop would not introduce any new issues; in addition, this delegation considered that questions remained regarding the objective of the proposed workshop, as well as with regard to the process concerning its organization, which if it were to take place, should be Member-driven, and with consultations undertaken in an open-ended format. Some other delegations indicated that they were supportive of suggestions to hold workshops on E-Commerce with proposals developed in line with the WPEC.

It was agreed that I would continue the informal process of consultations on a possible workshop on electronic commerce and trade in goods.

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