

Council for Trade in Goods
Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade
Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures
Committee on Market Access
Committee on Agriculture
Committee on Trade Facilitation

Original: Spanish

FUNCTIONING OF THE CTG AND ITS SUBSIDIARY BODIES

COMMUNICATION FROM ARGENTINA, ECUADOR AND PARAGUAY

The following communication, dated 22 February 2023, is being circulated at the request of the delegations of Argentina, Ecuador and Paraguay.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. At the formal meeting of the Council for Trade in Goods (CTG) of 24-25 November 2022, Members requested the Secretariat to prepare a document to assist them in comparing the information that had been provided by the Chairpersons of the CTG's subsidiary bodies in the reports concerning the current functioning of their Committees.

1.2. At the informal meeting of the CTG on 31 January 2023, the Secretariat presented document G/C/W/824 containing a comparison matrix based on the reports submitted by the 14 subsidiary bodies and the CTG on their functioning.

1.3. This document, circulated under multiple symbols to the CTG and some of its subsidiary bodies, proposes a joint work plan suggesting some elements that could be applied horizontally without affecting the functioning and particularities of each subsidiary body, and, at the same time, identifies other possible actions that could be analysed within the framework of each subsidiary body before reporting to the CTG on the feasibility of adopting common good practices.

1.4. The practices identified could then be adopted, where appropriate, by the CTG and all its subsidiary bodies.

2 CHALLENGES FOR THE FUNCTIONING OF THE CTG AND ITS SUBSIDIARY BODIES

2.1. The increasing number of formal and informal meetings within the CTG, together with the amount of information they generate on a wide variety of topics, represents a challenge for all delegations, but in particular for small delegations with limited human resources.

2.2. These challenges hinder the work of delegations, thus hampering progress on issues in what is a consensus-based organization. The main challenges identified include the following:

- Difficulty in preparing and actively participating in meetings, as well as in ensuring adequate follow-up;
- Lack of detailed knowledge of the regular work of each Committee;
- Disparity regarding document format and content, deadlines and operational processes;

- Disparity in the use of digital tools and dispersed databases;
- Difficulty in identifying counterparts, accessing statements and following up on trade concerns and other relevant WTO documents.

In order to address these challenges, the following areas of action are proposed for consideration:

3 PLANNING MEETINGS

3.1. The increasing number of meetings within the framework of the CTG and its subsidiary bodies makes it difficult for small delegations to properly follow and actively participate in them.

- a. Annual planning facilitates the scheduling, preparation and appropriate sequencing of meetings.
- b. Possibility of setting up an automatic alert mechanism linked to the calendar of meetings and other deadlines (notifications, agenda closure, etc.).

4 ASSISTANCE TO DELEGATES

4.1. Assistance to Geneva- and capital-based delegates attending meetings, in particular with regard to operational matters concerning the regular work of the Committees, is of great importance. It is therefore proposed that consideration be given to the good practices of some Committees and to adapting them so that they are accessible to both Geneva- and capital-based delegates.

- a. The CTG and its subsidiary bodies could request the Secretariat to develop a written manual on how they function, similar to that currently used by the SPS Committee*, covering their regular activities, commitments and notification processes, and the digital tools at their disposal.
- b. In addition, each Committee could organize, prior to the first formal meeting of each year, an introductory session in hybrid format for interested Geneva- and capital-based delegates.

5 FORMAL MEETINGS

5.1. Documents – The comparative matrix prepared by the Secretariat shows a wide disparity in the use of documents, their content and the deadlines for their submission. This is understandable given the fact that the work of each Committee evolves independently. It is, however, desirable to align these disparate practices.

- a. With the Secretariat's assistance, the CTG could develop a general style manual based on the documents currently prepared by its subsidiary bodies.
- b. This manual should include good practices already implemented by some Committees, such as the use of annotated agendas with indications of the topics to be discussed or the circulation of communications shortly after meetings setting out established time frames, the topics agreed, etc.
- c. Once finalized, the manual should be reviewed by the CTG and its subsidiary bodies in order to identify possible adjustments to current practices.

5.2. Minutes/reports - As with other documents, there are certain stylistic disparities that could be aligned to make the drafting process more efficient, thus reducing the time it takes to prepare such texts.

* G/C/W/824 – (footnote 3)

- a. The subsidiary bodies could conduct an analysis of possible improvements with a view to streamlining the process.

6 INFORMAL MEETINGS

6.1. Informal meetings should, wherever possible, except for minutes/reports, use the same documents and timelines as formal meetings.

6.2. With regard to the reports of these informal meetings, Chairpersons - with the Secretariat's assistance - should ensure that the written report is submitted sufficiently in advance of the formal meeting to allow for appropriate feedback from Members.

7 THEMATIC SESSIONS

7.1. Depending on the particularities of each body, thematic sessions can be very useful for examining in greater detail certain topics relevant to the work of the Committees and the disciplines covered by the Agreements.

- a. Encourage the subsidiary bodies to hold such sessions within the framework of their formal meetings, where deemed appropriate by Members.

8 DIGITAL TOOLS

8.1. E-Registration - The E-Registration tool is extremely useful for identifying Geneva-based delegates and the issues they are responsible for, and should be progressively used by the CTG and its subsidiary bodies to identify email recipients. The system nevertheless requires some minor modifications to adapt its use to capital-based delegates.

- a. Consider extending the option of selecting Committees to capital-based delegates.
- b. Consider including an option for receiving emails from the CTG and its subsidiary bodies. This would allow Committee secretariats to have an automatic list of authorized and updated email addresses, both for capitals and Geneva, under the responsibility of the coordinators of each Member country delegation.
- c. If these actions are feasible in the system, a gradual transition from independent mailing lists could be suggested.

8.2. The eAgenda tool and other similar platforms - Tools such as eAgenda and Ag-IMS are very useful for delegations as they make it possible to prepare more effectively for meetings and to obtain a more or less accurate transcript of Members' statements, especially, but not exclusively, with regard to specific trade concerns. It has also been shown that Committees using such tools require on average relatively less time for the preparation of minutes.

- a. Suggest to all subsidiary bodies not currently using these tools that they analyse the feasibility of implementing them, in accordance with the nature of their work.
- b. The use of eAgenda does not replace the minutes/reports of the Committees, but would facilitate, *inter alia*, the preparation of meetings and delegates' informal consultations, as well as the work of the Secretariat.

8.3. Online submission of notifications - This option facilitates the submission of notifications and improves their consistency.

- a. Suggest to all subsidiary bodies without online notification systems that they analyse the feasibility of using this type of tool.

8.4. WTO Trade Concerns Database - The trade concerns of three Committees are currently included in the Database.

- a. Suggest to the CTG and its subsidiary bodies that analyse trade concerns to study the feasibility of including them in the database.
 - b. Consider, together with the Secretariat, mechanisms to link related trade concerns raised in the CTG and its subsidiary bodies with a view to facilitating their follow-up.
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CHALLENGES	AREAS OF ACTION	SUGGESTIONS
Preparation, participation and proper follow-up in respect of meetings	Planning meetings	Annual planning (3.1.a)
		Automatic alert mechanism (3.1.b)
Lack of detailed knowledge of the regular work of the CTG and its subsidiary bodies	Assistance to delegates	Written manual on functioning (4.1.a)
		Introductory sessions (4.1.b)
Disparity in the formats and content of documents, deadlines and operational processes.	Formal meetings	Style manual (5.1)
	Informal meetings	Minutes/reports - possible improvements (5.2)
		Alignment with formal meetings (6.1)
Thematic sessions	Circulation of written report sufficiently in advance (6.2)	
Identifying counterparts, accessing statements and following up on trade concerns and other relevant WTO documents.	Digital tools	Encourage their use within the framework of formal meetings (7.1)
		E-Registration: review, adjustments and widespread use (8.1)
		eAgenda and similar: analysis of possible implementation (8.2)
		Online notifications: analysis of possible implementation (8.3)
		STCs: analysis of possible inclusion and linkage in the database (8.4)