The GATT, in a further extension of its activities for the benefit of the less-developed countries, announces the coming into operation of its new trade information and trade promotion advisory service.

The provision of such a service was decided upon during the twenty-first session of the Contracting Parties in March this year. The new GATT centre, which will provide these services, will be situated at the GATT secretariat, Geneva.

The services of the centre will be available to all interested less-developed and developed countries, irrespective of whether or not they have acceded to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

The extension of the GATT's work into this field was given impetus by the Conclusions adopted at the Ministerial meeting in May 1963.

The centre will be built up step by step, under the guidance of a special Expert Group and under the supervision of the Contracting Parties in order to ensure that it will achieve its primary objective of assisting the less-developed countries in their efforts to expand their export trade. During the initial stage of operations, the centre will perform the following functions:

(a) establishment of a "documents centre" and operation of a "clearing house for trade information" - "trade information" being understood in its broadest sense, relating not only to information on commercial policy matters (such as tariffs, quantitative restrictions, trade regulations, etc.) but also to market intelligence and market research etc. The centre will be of assistance to exporters in making the necessary contacts with trade organizations and importers in the importing countries, either through the GATT service, or through the national liaison arrangements being established in connexion with the coming into operation of the centre.

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(b) provision of a "correspondence answering service", pertaining to the different subjects referred to above. This service should be particularly useful in enabling exporters in less-developed countries to direct their enquiries to one central agency to obtain answers to their enquiries with a minimum of delay;

(c) publication of a "Register of Sources of Trade Information", in a form designed to take into account the special needs of the less-developed countries in regard to such information;

(d) publication of a bi-monthly, and later, monthly, trade news bulletin. The bulletin will serve inter alia as a means of acquainting importing countries with the products which the less-developed countries are now, and will in the future be, in a position to supply, and will also inform exporters in less-developed countries of market openings for their products in foreign markets;

(e) preparation, in collaboration with national trade promotion services, of a manual on the operation of efficient export promotion services. The manual will collate the experience of national trade promotion services;

(f) the centre will arrange for, and will provide, training facilities in export promotion. This training will be provided (i) within the framework of the service itself; (ii) in the context of the established GATT in-service training programme for officials from less-developed countries; and (iii) through facilities to be provided by national governments and trade promotion agencies.

The question of additional publications and of any further extension of services to be provided by the centre, particularly in relation to marketing and production techniques, will be considered towards the end of 1964 by the special Group of Experts composed of representatives from less-developed and industrialized countries.

The work of the centre will be closely linked to the work of the contracting parties under the expanded programme of development plan and trade and aid studies. In accordance with the Ministerial mandate, the studies are aimed inter alia at obtaining a clear analysis of export potential, market prospects and any action that may be required to overcome obstacles to development and to an expansion of the export earnings of the less-developed countries which the studies reveal.
The programme adopted for the studies consists of three major parts: (i) a general survey of the overall economic situation and examination of trends in development, designed to permit the Contracting Parties to base their work on an accurate assessment of the current situation; (ii) the carrying out, over a period of approximately two years, of detailed studies of development plans and trade and aid relationships, in respect of some twenty less-developed countries; (iii) assessment, from time to time, with assistance from experts, as appropriate, of trends in trade and development, affecting products of special export interest to the less-developed countries.

Obviously, the studies are not intended as an academic exercise, but are designed to provide background documentation and findings on which the Contracting Parties can base their operations. One of the main purposes of the studies is to ensure that, once the export potential is developed in the developing countries, their efforts aimed at the expansion of exports will not be frustrated by various restrictive measures in importing countries. Another important aim of the studies is to assist the developing countries to obtain quick and reliable information about the trends of planning in other less-developed countries and about trade prospects and opportunities, and thus be of assistance to them in drawing up and implementing their development plans.

So far, twelve less-developed countries have been selected for priority study.