SUBJECT: EUROPEAN CUSTOMS UNION - CONVENING OF SPECIAL SESSION

1. In my letter of 17 December 1956, reference III-1-12-4, I referred to the question of convening a special session of the contracting parties to consider, pursuant to Article XXIV, the proposed treaty establishing a common market between six European countries. The expectation that the treaty would be signed in January has not been fulfilled and it is not at present possible to give any firm indication when signature is likely to take place. It is now, however, expected that the signature will take place in mid-March. I have given further careful consideration to the timing of the special session, bearing in mind the importance, on the one hand, of prompt action by the contracting parties, and, on the other, of the need to afford contracting parties a reasonable opportunity to study the text of the treaty. As a result I have come to the conclusion that if the present expectation regarding signature is fulfilled, the special session should meet on 23 April. It is extremely difficult to forecast the time which will be needed for the session, but having regard to the importance and complexity of the question I think it would be prudent to envisage that the session would last for some three weeks.

2. In order to facilitate and, so far as possible, shorten the work of the session I consider that it would be desirable that there should be some preparatory work. With this in mind and also because of the complexity and importance of the whole matter, I consider it would be desirable for the intersessional committee to meet immediately after the signature of the treaty in order to reach final decisions as to the timing and arrangements for the special session, and also to consider what preparatory work should be undertaken and to instruct the secretariat accordingly.

3. It is impossible to predict precisely the date of the signature of the treaty and therefore to fix now a firm date for the intersessional committee meeting. The purpose of this airgram is to put contracting parties on notice to hold themselves ready for such a meeting around mid-March. A convening notice will be sent as soon as a firm date can be set. I hope that with this advance indication, contracting parties will find it possible to accept the convening of the meeting at very short notice.

SENT BY: Executive Secretary, GATT, Tel. address: ICITO GENEVA
4. I SUGGEST THAT THESE TWO MEETINGS BE CONCERNED EXCLUSIVELY WITH THE COMMON MARKET AND THAT THE VARIOUS MATTERS OUTSTANDING ON THE AGENDA OF THE INTERSESSIONAL COMMITTEE BE HELD OVER UNTIL JUNE UNLESS ANY PARTICULAR MATTER SHOULD BECOME SO URGENT AS TO REQUIRE EARLIER ATTENTION. THE ONLY SUCH MATTER I HAVE NOTICED AT THE MOMENT IS THAT OF THE MODIFICATION OF IMPORT RESTRICTIONS BY FINLAND WHICH WAS MENTIONED IN GATT/AIR/102 AND WHICH, I SUGGEST, SHOULD BE CONSIDERED BY THE COMMITTEE AT THEIR MEETING IN MARCH.

E. WYNDHAM WHITE