CONSULAR FORMALITIES

Abolition of Consular Invoices and Visas in 1956

Note by Executive Secretary

On 7 November 1952 the CONTRACTING PARTIES recommended that contracting parties which require consular invoices and consular visas for commercial invoices, certificates of origin, manifests, etc. should abolish these requirements by 31 December 1956, and that meanwhile the consular fees charged for such documents should be reduced (BISD, 1st S. pp. 25 and 101). Further the CONTRACTING PARTIES invited these governments to submit annual reports on the steps taken towards the abolition of consular formalities.

The reports received in 1954 were reviewed by the Technical Group on Customs Administration at the Ninth Session, and the situation then existing was described in the report published in the Third Supplement, page 91. Since then the United States has announced the elimination of all requirements for consular certification of invoices covering imported merchandise.

There are fourteen contracting parties which impose consular formalities in the country of export in connexion with goods destined for importation. Four of these, Ceylon, Greece, Indonesia and Sweden maintain certain formalities in very special circumstances and, of these, Ceylon has reported that arrangements have been made to abolish the formalities by the end of 1956. Those maintained by France are more extensive, but some steps were taken in February 1955 towards their abolition. Turkey requires a consular visa for all imports at contractual rates of duty. Eight contracting parties in Central and South America, require consular formalities for a large part or the whole of their trade. Some of these have reported that the necessary steps to bring about the abolition of formalities are under consideration, while others have indicated that the fees collected by their Consulates are an important element in their fiscal system and they do not see the possibility of abolishing them.

Since only one year remains until the expiry of the time-limit fixed by the CONTRACTING PARTIES in their Recommendation of November 1952, the CONTRACTING PARTIES may wish to examine the practical difficulties which some contracting parties find in complying with that Recommendation and to give assistance and advice to those contracting parties in finding solutions for their difficulties.