The sixteenth session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which opened at Geneva on 16 May 1960 concluded its work on 4 June.

In the sphere of regional economic integration a detailed examination of the Stockholm Treaty establishing the European Free Trade Area among seven European countries was undertaken during the session. The examination was not completed and some questions remain open for further discussion. A start was made with the examination of the Montevideo Treaty which will establish a free-trade area among seven countries of Latin America, and the examination will be resumed in due course. The Commission of the European Economic Community presented a report on recent developments within the Community in the economic, trade and social spheres.

Further advances were marked in the GATT Programme for Trade Expansion. Arrangements were completed for the Tariff Conference which will open at Geneva on 1 September 1960 and which will continue in 1961. The examination of the difficult problem of international trade in agricultural and food products was taken a stage further. Good progress was reported in identifying and examining the obstacles which face the less-developed countries in expanding their export markets.

New and encouraging evidence became available on the continuing trend towards the removal of restrictions on imports, previously maintained for reasons of balance-of-payments difficulties, and the question as to the best procedures to be adopted for dealing with residual restrictions, after a country has emerged from balance-of-payments difficulties, was raised.

Regarding market disruption, namely the problem created by sharp increases of imports from low cost producers into established markets, it was decided to create a working group to begin a thorough examination of this question and to report to the seventeenth session.

During the session two countries, namely Portugal and Spain, announced their intention to undertake negotiations in the Tariff Conference in 1961, with a view to full accession to GATT subsequently. At the present time there are thirty-seven full members of GATT and five countries with an associate status.
Finally, in order to strengthen the GATT in view of the broadening role of the General Agreement in world trade, it was decided to appoint a Council to deal with urgent work which may arise between the sessions of the GATT, as well as to supervise the work of subsidiary bodies established by the CONTRACTING PARTIES to GATT. In his concluding remarks the Chairman stated, "We have taken long overdue decisions for strengthening our Organization to meet the multifarious tasks confronting it. The decision to appoint a Council will not only improve the effectiveness of the work of the CONTRACTING PARTIES, but will be a clear sign to the world that the CONTRACTING PARTIES are determined to face up to the new responsibilities which fall upon them as a consequence of the development in international trade. Equally important is the authority we have given to the Executive Secretary to proceed with a strengthening of the secretariat which is at present clearly inadequately staffed."

The statement by the Chairman of the CONTRACTING PARTIES, Mr. E. P. Barbosa da Silva, Brazil, at the close of the sixteenth session, 4 June 1960, is given in Press Release GATT/502.

The seventeenth session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES will open at Geneva on 31 October 1960.

The GATT Tariff Conference will open at Geneva on 1 September 1960.

A detailed Survey of the Session will be made available shortly in Press Release GATT/504.