GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

CONTRACTING PARTIES
Twenty-Third Session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIRST MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 24 March 1966, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. J.A. LACARTE (Uruguay)

Subjects discussed: 1. Adoption of Agenda 2. Report by the Council of Representatives

Opening address by the Chairman

The CHAIRMAN noted the growing membership of the GATT and the fact that certain important trading countries were now seeking full accession which, he said, indicated the confidence of the trading community in the General Agreement as a basis for national and international commercial policies. The foremost preoccupation at the session would be the Kennedy Round in which a great deal of the necessary preparatory work had been completed. What was now needed was the political will to get down to concrete negotiations; time was running out. Although it could not be claimed that the Kennedy Round would, of itself, solve all their development problems, there could be no doubt that failure to achieve its objectives would represent the loss of a perhaps unique opportunity for developing countries. Whilst it was too early to expect major results from the implementation of the new Part IV on Trade and Development, it was important that contracting parties, particularly those with major responsibilities in world trade, should translate their legal obligations under Part IV into concrete measures. In certain areas of its work, the Committee on Trade and Development had already achieved encouraging progress, notably as regards trade between developing countries. In its future activities, this Committee could be expected to bring about further liberalization of access for the exports of developing countries; the Committee, particularly through its development study programme, and the International Trade Centre, which had got off to a good start, were the means by which the CONTRACTING PARTIES were taking international action to solve other export problems of developing countries.
Two particularly important items on the agenda of the session, with far-reaching trade ramifications, were the Australian request for a waiver to grant preferences to manufactures and semi-manufactured products of less-developed countries and the report of the Cotton Textiles Committee on the review of the Long-Term Arrangement. The CONTRACTING PARTIES would also be considering a number of new arrangements for regional integration, and, whilst the benefits that such arrangements brought to the economies of those countries participating in them and to world trade generally were to be welcomed, account had to be taken of the fact that the trade of third countries could be adversely affected. The CONTRACTING PARTIES should therefore maintain a balance between the encouragement of regional integration and the safeguarding of the expansion of world trade on a multilateral basis. Trade in agricultural products continued to pose complex problems, not only in the Kennedy Round but also in connexion with other items on the session agenda. Agricultural exporters could not be expected to be satisfied with a world trading system whose benefits were more marked in the industrial than in the agricultural sector. The problems were intricate, but it was to be hoped that developed countries would take into account the interests of exporters to their markets when formulating their agricultural policies. The General Agreement itself and the rules governing the Kennedy Round contained criteria for the achievement of liberalization of trade in this important sector. (The full text of the Chairman's opening address has been distributed in press release GATT/952.)

1. Adoption of agenda (L/2558/Add.1-5)

The CHAIRMAN, referring to item 30 "Definitive Application of the GATT" and to item 31 "Accession of Switzerland", pointed out that, at its meeting in the previous week, the Council had decided to recommend that these two items be included on the agenda for the session, but on the understanding that they should be brought forward for consideration only if it appeared that the proposals discussed in the Council and recorded in its report had sufficient support to bring positive results.

The agenda proposed in documents L/2558/Add.1-5 was adopted.


Mr. N.V. SKAK-NIELSEN (Denmark), the Chairman of the Council of Representatives introduced its report (L/2607 and Corr.1). The Council had met on a number of occasions to deal with items of importance to contracting parties requiring urgent attention and, in view of the increasing volume and significance of its work, had decided to prepare a full report on its activities. This report showed, he suggested, the value of the Council both in dealing with trade problems which arose intersessionally and in respect of the general smooth administration of the
General Agreement. It had been decided to hold an extended meeting of the Council in advance of the session to carry out preparatory work for the session and thus make possible a reduction of the duration of the session by some two weeks. This reduction had enabled governments to send senior officials for the whole duration of the session and rendered it possible for the CONTRACTING PARTIES to concentrate on the major problems of their agenda.

In adopting Section A of the report, the CONTRACTING PARTIES would be endorsing the action taken by the Council on the matters which had been brought before it during the year; and, in adopting Section B, they would be disposing of a number of items which appeared on their agenda. Sections C and D constituted, in effect, an annotated agenda for the session. Wherever possible, the Council had put forward recommendations for consideration under the relevant agenda items. The Council hoped that its activities would meet with the approval of the CONTRACTING PARTIES and, in particular, that the preparatory work it had done on the session agenda items would facilitate the tasks of the CONTRACTING PARTIES during the session.

The fact that a growing number of countries had opened offices in Geneva meant that there were greater opportunities for contracting parties to deal with urgent matters intersessionally through the Council. However, the effectiveness of the Council, particularly in carrying out preparatory work for sessions, depended upon its members being provided with relevant documentation at a sufficiently early date.

At the suggestion of the CHAIRMAN, it was agreed that consideration of the report be deferred until the next meeting of the CONTRACTING PARTIES.

The meeting adjourned at 3.45 p.m.