

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

RESTRICTED

TBT/W/83/Add.1*
27 June 1985

Special Distribution

Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6-10 MAY 1985

Addendum

ANNEX

THIRD MEETING ON PROCEDURES FOR INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Report presented by the Chairman on his own responsibility

1. The participants in the meeting on procedures for information exchange reported on recent developments in their respective countries relating to standards information programmes aimed at efficient servicing of the needs of national and foreign interested parties. Since the previous meeting on procedures for information exchange held in May 1983, enquiry points in several signatory countries had stepped up their information activities by establishing computerized data bases with retrieval facilities for bibliographic references to standards-related documents. Other data assembled by the enquiry points included collections of texts of regulations, reference books, catalogues and directories, based on national, foreign and international sources.
2. The participants noted that enquiry points in signatory countries had dealt with an increasing number of requests for information over the past years. Some participants gave details of domestic and foreign enquiries received by the enquiry points and of requests made to other parties. It was noted that direct requests by foreign business enterprises were increasing in several countries. In some cases this involved considerable extra work for the enquiry points. The meeting also discussed a proposal by the Nordic countries to include information on enquiries in the basic documents for the annual reviews of the Committee. The text of this proposal is being forwarded to the Committee for its adoption.
3. Participants heard accounts of the measures taken in signatory countries to give publicity to the facilities available in enquiry points and in particular of any new services such as the establishment of data base systems. Newsletters, press releases, daily trade bulletins and brochures were the media currently used. Information kits and advertising campaigns were addressed to government and local agencies, domestic manufacturers, exporters and trade associations. In addition, seminars and orientation programmes were organized for responsible officials in various domestic agencies.

* English only/anglais seulement/inglés solamente.

4. The participants heard submissions by a number of signatories outlining the procedures followed in their respective countries to determine which draft technical regulations should be notified. Some signatories notified all proposed technical regulations or certification systems and some others preferred to notify when in doubt. The general view was that the criteria established by the Committee were adequate for the time being for selecting which proposed technical regulations to notify (TBT/16/Rev.2, page 7). However, concern was expressed by some participants about the need to ensure the full co-operation of the responsible regulatory bodies with regard to the implementation of the notification obligations of the Agreement. In conclusions of the discussion on this point, the participants agreed to forward the text of a proposal to the Committee inviting Parties to supply information, respectively, on internal procedures used to gather information on proposed technical regulations and on those followed to determine which draft technical regulation should be notified. The text of this decision is before the Committee for its adoption.

5. With respect to the length of time allowed for comments, the majority of participants considered that the period of sixty days recommended by the Committee was adequate for making comments, given that any request for extension beyond the sixty day period was received favourably in most cases. The attention was drawn by one participant, however, to the difficulties that some countries might have in responding to notifications within that period. He proposed that the comment period should be extended beyond sixty days to take these difficulties into account, as the issue was not simply one of streamlining the implementation of existing procedures. Several participants expressed concern that the comment period indicated in many of the notifications was shorter than the recommended period. The meeting also considered a Swedish proposal on the length of time allowed for comments designed to avoid the operation of the existing procedures tending to automatically extend the period for comments whenever a party has an interest in a notification. In noting this concern, the meeting agreed that the matter might be taken up in the Committee at some stage, when delegations have had time to reflect on it.

6. The participants pursued the discussion held previously in the Committee on the subject of handling of comments. This matter was initially raised at the second meeting on procedures for information exchange. While noting that legislative constraints might not allow some Parties to give preliminary responses to comments, several participants emphasized that the handling of comments was an integral part of the notification system established under the Agreement and that any efforts for improving the relevant procedures would be welcome. The participants considered a Finnish proposal on this point, which will be presented to the Committee by Finland on behalf of the Nordic countries.

7. The participants addressed the problem of language barriers to the flow of information among Parties. Several participants informed the meeting that their national enquiry points had set up facilities for translation of foreign technical regulations and rules of certification systems which had been notified. These facilities had been created to assist interested parties in their countries, but their use could conceivably be extended. In this connection, the meeting discussed a proposal by the Philippines to the

effect that Parties in a position to do so should inform other Parties through the secretariat of any translation of documentation into one of the GATT working languages made or in the making, so as to enable the interested Parties to obtain such translations on mutually agreed terms. The participants expressed interest in this proposal and agreed to recommend that the Committee revert to it at an appropriate time with a view to reaching a decision on the matter.

8. Several participants took note that the provisions of the Agreement on technical assistance could usefully be implemented in the field of information exchange, and that this aspect could be addressed under the relevant procedures adopted by the Committee (TBT/M/17, Annex 2).

9. The observer from the ISO made a presentation describing the activities of INFCO and the organization of ISONET.