

**AGREEMENT ON TECHNICAL BARRIERS TO TRADE**

**ACCORD RELATIF AUX OBSTACLES TECHNIQUES AU COMMERCE**

**ACUERDO SOBRE OBSTÁCULOS TÉCNICOS AL COMERCIO**

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

ACCORD GÉNÉRAL SUR LES TARIFS DOUANIERS  
ET LE COMMERCE

ACUERDO GENERAL SOBRE ARANCELES  
ADUANEROS Y COMERCIO

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Geneva

## AGREEMENT ON TECHNICAL BARRIERS TO TRADE

### PREAMBLE

Having regard to the Multilateral Trade Negotiations, the Parties to the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (hereinafter referred to as "Parties" and "this Agreement");

Desiring to further the objectives of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (hereinafter referred to as "General Agreement" or "GATT");

Recognizing the important contribution that international standards and certification systems can make in this regard by improving efficiency of production and facilitating the conduct of international trade;

Desiring therefore to encourage the development of such international standards and certification systems;

Desiring however to ensure that technical regulations and standards, including packaging, marking and labelling requirements, and methods for certifying conformity with technical regulations and standards do not create unnecessary obstacles to international trade;

Recognizing that no country should be prevented from taking measures necessary to ensure the quality of its exports, or for the protection of human, animal or plant life or health, of the environment, or for the prevention of deceptive practices, subject to the requirement that they are not applied in a manner which would constitute a means of arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination between countries where the same conditions prevail or a disguised restriction on international trade;

Recognizing that no country should be prevented from taking measures necessary for the protection of its essential security interest;

Recognizing the contribution which international standardization can make to the transfer of technology from developed to developing countries;

Recognizing that developing countries may encounter special difficulties in the formulation and application of technical regulations and standards and methods for certifying conformity with technical regulations and standards, and desiring to assist them in their endeavours in this regard;

Hereby agree as follows:

#### Article 1 General provisions

1.1 General terms for standardization and certification shall normally have the meaning given to them by definitions adopted within the United Nations system and by international standardizing bodies taking into account their context and in the light of the object and purpose of this Agreement.

their stage of technological development, may hinder their ability to discharge fully their obligations under this Agreement. Parties, therefore, shall take this fact fully into account. Accordingly, with a view to ensuring that developing countries are able to comply with this Agreement, the Committee is enabled to grant upon request specified, time-limited exceptions in whole or in part from obligations under this Agreement. When considering such requests the Committee shall take into account the special problems, in the field of preparation and application of technical regulations, standards, test methods and certification systems and the special development and trade needs of the developing country, as well as its stage of technological development, which may hinder its ability to discharge fully its obligations under this Agreement. The Committee shall in particular, take into account the special problems of the least-developed countries.

- 12.9 During consultations, developed countries shall bear in mind the special difficulties experienced by developing countries in formulating and implementing standards and technical regulations and methods of ensuring conformity with those standards and technical regulations, and in their desire to assist developing countries with their efforts in this direction, developed countries shall take account of the special needs of the former in regard to financing, trade and development.
- 12.10 The Committee shall examine periodically the special and differential treatment as laid down in this Agreement, granted to developing countries, on national and international levels.

#### Institutions, consultation and dispute settlement

#### Article 13 The Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade

There shall be established under this Agreement:

- 13.1 A Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade composed of representatives from each of the Parties (hereinafter referred to as "the Committee"). The Committee shall elect its own Chairman and shall meet as necessary but no less than once a year for the purpose of affording Parties the opportunity of consulting on any matters relating to the operation of this Agreement or the furtherance of its objectives and shall carry out such responsibilities as assigned to it under this Agreement or by the Parties;
- 13.2 Working parties, technical expert groups, panels or other bodies as may be appropriate, which shall carry out such responsibilities as may be assigned to them by the Committee in accordance with the relevant provisions of this Agreement.
- 13.3 It is understood that unnecessary duplication should be avoided between the work under this Agreement and that of governments in other technical bodies, e.g. the Joint FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission. The Committee shall examine this problem with a view to minimizing such duplication.

Article 14 Consultation and dispute settlement

Consultation

- 14.1 Each Party shall afford sympathetic consideration to and adequate opportunity for prompt consultation regarding representations made by other Parties with respect to any matter affecting the operation of this Agreement.
- 14.2 If any Party considers that any benefit accruing to it, directly or indirectly, under this Agreement is being nullified or impaired, or that the attainment of any objective of this Agreement is being impeded, by another Party or Parties, and that its trade interests are significantly affected, the Party may make written representations or proposals to the other Party or Parties which it considers to be concerned. Any Party shall give sympathetic consideration to the representations or proposals made to it, with a view to reaching a satisfactory resolution of the matter.

Dispute settlement

- 14.3 It is the firm intention of Parties that all disputes under this Agreement shall be promptly and expeditiously settled, particularly in the case of perishable products.
- 14.4 If no solution has been reached after consultations under Article 14, paragraphs 1 and 2, the Committee shall meet at the request of any Party to the dispute within thirty days of receipt of such a request, to investigate the matter with a view to facilitating a mutually satisfactory solution.
- 14.5 In investigating the matter and in selecting, subject, inter alia, to the provisions of Article 14, paragraphs 9 and 14, the appropriate procedures the Committee shall take into account whether the issues in dispute relate to commercial policy considerations and/or to questions of a technical nature requiring detailed consideration by experts.
- 14.6 In the case of perishable products the Committee shall, in keeping with Article 14, paragraph 3, consider the matter in the most expeditious manner possible with a view to facilitating a mutually satisfactory solution within three months of the request for the Committee investigation.
- 14.7 It is understood that where disputes arise affecting products with a definite crop cycle of twelve months, every effort would be made by the Committee to deal with these disputes within a period of twelve months.
- 14.8 During any phase of a dispute settlement procedure including the earliest phase, competent bodies and experts in matters under consideration may be consulted and invited to attend the meetings of the Committee; appropriate information and assistance may be requested from such bodies and experts.

Technical issues

14.9 If no mutually satisfactory solution has been reached under the procedures of Article 14, paragraph 4 within three months of the request for the Committee investigation, upon the request of any Party to the dispute who considers the issues to relate to questions of a technical nature the Committee shall establish a technical expert group and direct it to:

examine the matter;

consult with the Parties to the dispute and give full opportunity for them to develop a mutually satisfactory solution;

make a statement concerning the facts of the matter; and

make such findings as will assist the Committee in making recommendations or giving rulings on the matter, including inter alia, and if appropriate, findings concerning the detailed scientific judgments involved, whether the measure was necessary for the protection of human, animal or plant life or health, and whether a legitimate scientific judgment is involved.

14.10 Technical expert groups shall be governed by the procedures of Annex 2.

14.11 The time required by the technical expert group considering questions of a technical nature will vary with the particular case. The technical expert group should aim to deliver its findings to the Committee within six months from the date the technical issue was referred to it, unless extended by mutual agreement between the Parties to the dispute.

14.12 Reports should set out the rationale behind any findings that they make.

14.13 If no mutually satisfactory solution has been reached after completion of the procedures in this Article, and any Party to the dispute requests a panel, the Committee shall establish a panel which shall operate under the provisions of Article 14, paragraphs 15 to 18.

Panel proceedings

14.14 If no mutually satisfactory solution has been reached under the procedures of Article 14, paragraph 4 within three months of the request for the Committee investigation and the procedures of Article 14, paragraphs 9 to 13 have not been invoked, the Committee shall, upon request of any Party to the dispute, establish a panel.

14.15 When a panel is established, the Committee shall direct it to:

examine the matter;

consult with Parties to the dispute and give full opportunity for them to develop a mutually satisfactory solution;

make a statement concerning the facts of the matter as they relate to the application of provisions of this Agreement and make such findings as will assist the Committee in making recommendations or giving rulings on the matter.

- 14.16 Panels shall be governed by the procedures in Annex 3.
- 14.17 Panels shall use the report of any technical expert group established under Article 14 paragraph 9 as the basis for its consideration of issues that involve questions of a technical nature.
- 14.18 The time required by panels will vary with the particular case. They should aim to deliver their findings, and where appropriate, recommendations to the Committee without undue delay, normally within a period of four months from the date that the panel was established.

#### Enforcement

- 14.19 After the investigation is complete or after the report of a technical expert group, working group, panel or other body is presented to the Committee, the Committee shall give the matter prompt consideration. With respect to panel reports, the Committee shall take appropriate action normally within thirty days of receipt of the report, unless extended by the Committee, including:
- a statement concerning the facts of the matter; or
  - recommendations to one or more Parties; or
  - any other ruling which it deems appropriate.
- 14.20 If a Party to which recommendations are addressed considers itself unable to implement them, it should promptly furnish reasons in writing to the Committee. In that event the Committee shall consider what further action may be appropriate.
- 14.21 If the Committee considers that the circumstances are serious enough to justify such action, it may authorize one or more Parties to suspend, in respect of any other Party, the application of such obligations under this Agreement as it determines to be appropriate in the circumstances. In this respect, the Committee may, inter alia, authorize the suspension of the application of obligations, including those in Articles 5 to 9, in order to restore mutual economic advantage and balance of rights and obligations.
- 14.22 The Committee shall keep under surveillance any matter on which it has made recommendations or given rulings.

Other provisions relating to dispute settlement

Procedures

14.23 If disputes arise between Parties relating to rights and obligations of this Agreement, Parties should complete the dispute settlement procedures under this Agreement before availing themselves of any rights which they have under the GATT. Parties recognize that, in any case so referred to the CONTRACTING PARTIES, any finding, recommendation or ruling pursuant to Article 14, paragraphs 9 to 18 may be taken into account by the CONTRACTING PARTIES, to the extent they relate to matters involving equivalent rights and obligations under the General Agreement. When Parties resort to GATT Article XXIII, a determination under that Article shall be based on GATT provisions only.

Levels of obligation

14.24 The dispute settlement provisions set out above can be invoked in cases where a Party considers that another Party has not achieved satisfactory results under Articles 3, 4, 6, 8 and 9 and its trade interests are significantly affected. In this respect, such results shall be equivalent to those envisaged in Articles 2, 5 and 7 as if the body in question were a Party.

Processes and production methods

14.25 The dispute settlement procedures set out above can be invoked in cases where a Party considers that obligations under this Agreement are being circumvented by the drafting of requirements in terms of processes and production methods rather than in terms of characteristics of products.

Retroactivity

14.26 To the extent that a Party considers that technical regulations, standards, methods for assuring conformity with technical regulations or standards, or certification systems which exist at the time of entry into force of this Agreement are not consistent with the provisions of this Agreement, such regulations, standards, methods and systems shall be subject to the provisions in Articles 13 and 14 of this Agreement, in so far as they are applicable.

Final provisions

Article 15 Final provisions

Acceptance and accession

15.1 This Agreement shall be open for acceptance by signature or otherwise, by governments contracting parties to the GATT, and by the European Economic Community.