

Negotiating Group on Market Access

NEGOTIATING GROUP ON MARKET ACCESS

Report by the Chairman to the Trade Negotiations Committee

I. STATUS OF WORK

1. Following the Cancún Ministerial Conference, the Negotiating Group on Market Access met for the first time on 29-31 March 2004, and took up the following agenda items: Election of Chairperson; organization of work; and date of the next meeting. Apart from a brief formal meeting held on 29 March and another one on 31 March, the intervening time was left for delegations to consult among themselves.

2. Concerning discussions under the agenda items:

(a) On "Election of Chairperson", the Negotiating Group confirmed the understanding reached by the General Council at its meeting of 11 February 2004, and elected me Stefán H. Jóhannesson, Ambassador of Iceland, as Chairman of the Negotiating Group on Market Access.

(b) On "Organization of work", I reported on the consultations I had been conducting on how best the Negotiating Group could resume its work. It was evident from the discussions that delegations were eager to restart work. Moreover, there appeared to be broad agreement that the Group should try to reach a framework on modalities before end of July 2004. It was also clear that all the work done pre- and post-Cancún relating to NAMA should be used for this purpose. On the practical arrangements of this meeting where the major part of the three days was reserved for direct contacts between delegations, I explained that it was my belief that more active dialogue between delegations was required to reach a common understanding of the various elements of the NAMA modalities on which divergences existed.

3. Following my report, the meeting was suspended and time was given to delegations to meet and consult among themselves.

4. I understand that such contacts did take place on a bilateral and plurilateral basis. Additionally, open-ended informal consultations were organized and chaired by certain Members based on the following themes:

- (1) Overall goals
- (2) Formula and related technical elements
- (3) Sectorial tariff component
- (4) NTBs
- (5) Flexibility (S&D)
- (6) Specific concerns of Members on the texts currently under consideration

5. When the Negotiating Group reconvened on 31 March, an opportunity was provided to delegations to report on any consultations undertaken. This was done in order to ensure transparency in the process. Following this exercise of stocktaking, the representative of Trinidad and Tobago, made a statement on behalf of the ACP Group, in which he introduced their paper circulated in document TN/MA/W/47.

6. Before closing the meeting, I drew Members' attention to document TN/MA/W/46 and Add.1 which contained a compilation of non-tariff barrier (NTB) notifications received pursuant to the new format which was sent to delegations by fax on 8 September 2003. I urged all Members to make their NTB notification and in particular to indicate how they wished to see such barriers addressed in the context of the negotiations.

7. Regarding future meetings of the Group, I informed Members that meetings had been scheduled for 10-12 May and 9-11 June. A third meeting was also planned for July, but dates had yet to be finalized.

II. OUTSTANDING ISSUES

8. The main outstanding issue continues to be the balance between the level of ambition and flexibility in the negotiating modalities on tariffs. In the area of non-tariff barriers, the Group still remains at the initial stages of its work.

III. FUTURE WORK

9. The Group will be working to reach a framework on modalities before the end of July 2004.
