

Brief on the WTO Negotiating Group meeting on Trade Facilitation  
on 13 and 14 June 2005

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The WTO Trade Facilitation Negotiating Group Meeting was held in Geneva on 13-14 June 2005. The WCO Secretariat was invited to attend the meeting together with the Secretariats of IMF, OECD, UNCTAD and World Bank.

The WTO Secretariat presented a compilation of proposals tabled to-date. This will be updated to reflect any further submissions. This is perhaps the most important document tabled so far in the process. The broad headings set out could well be those that form the basis of any agreement negotiated. The paper is thematic and includes S&D, and Capacity Building references. One delegation suggested that future negotiations be linked to the topics identified. Others requested a clear link to the relevant GATT article. The WTO Secretariat noted that some of the proposals were cross cutting and as such were applicable to one or more articles.

10 new papers were presented. The contents reflect the commonality of members interests (nothing new, mainly a repeat of the contents of previous papers). EC presented a comprehensive paper on aspects of article VIII, proposing, inter alia, the abolition of PSI.

Several positive references to WCO instruments: Checklists, Time Release Study, Immediate Release Guidelines, Customs Data Model, Revised Kyoto Convention, and Risk Assessment. One referred favorably to WCO Capacity Building initiatives especially the Diagnostic Framework.

The importance of S&D and Capacity Building to the eventual acceptance was highlighted during an informal session on Capacity Building. There was some suggestion that the WTO should take ownership and co-ordination of relevant capacity building. The practical implementation of such a scheme was not teased out but an ad-hoc committee to include representatives of International Organizations was among the means mentioned. One delegation on behalf of core group welcomed the more structured agenda which allows for detailed, if informal, discussion on S&D and Capacity Building.

The Meeting was well attended with some indication that at least in the case of national Customs administrations of developing countries and LDCs are having an input at national level. Several representatives of developing countries were well briefed on Customs matters. Others, mainly developed countries do not seem to be so briefed.

One delegation on behalf of the LDCs emphasized the relationship of all aspects of annex D not only the clarification of the three articles but S&D and Capacity Building and the support and assistance implicit for the latter.

The WCO Secretariat gave a brief resume of the development of the Diagnostic Framework (review process, essential elements of Capacity Building, Strategy, and Framework), and offered, if at any time in the future the WTO wished to have more detail, that a presentation could be organized.

The WCO was invited to the next meeting on 25-26 July, together with other international organizations.