

Brief on the WTO Negotiating Group meeting on Trade Facilitation
on 22 and 23 March 2005

Toni Matsudaira

The WTO held a Trade Facilitation Negotiating Group meeting at its premises from 22 to 23 March 2005. The Secretariat attended the meeting together with the Secretariats of IMF, OECD, UNCTAD and World Bank. There were over 200 delegates; some Customs attachés stationed in Brussels attended the meeting.

Ten proposals were tabled in addition to nine having been submitted to the previous meeting, which were on GATT Article X (transparency; impartiality; and appeals) and Article VIII (fees and formalities): Japan and Mongolia (fees, least trade restrictive formalities, requirements and controls, border agency co-ordination, etc.), Korea (least trade restrictive formalities, requirements and controls, border agency co-ordination, standard processing time, etc.), Australia and Canada (monetary security), Canada (border agency co-ordination), Uganda and US (monetary security, prohibition of consularization, fees), NZ (prior comments, objective criteria for tariff classification, etc.), Chinese Taipei (fees), China (publication of information, enquiry point, prior consultation).

It was followed by the comments and Q&As on these proposals. Some delegations asked clarification on the words used in the proposals and questioned the linkage between the proposed issues and the negotiation mandates. In addition, many developing countries stressed the importance of S&D, implementation capacity linked to the commitments, and support to the capacity building.

The Secretariat introduced the Time Release Study and briefed the state of art of the Time Release Study Software which was being developed in co-operation with the World Bank and under the final check by the WCO.

The World Bank briefed its project to support the negotiations which comprised of three components: establishment of national co-ordination mechanism; analyses on the proposals; and communication between Geneva and the capital. It would conduct some pilot projects, e.g., Jamaica in April; Uganda and Sri Lanka in May. It announced that the project would have full support and participation of the WCO.

The next meeting would be held on 2-3 May; the WCO was invited together with the other international organizations.