

TRADE/CEFACT/1998/CRP.4
13 March 1998

WTO TRADE FACILITATION SYMPOSIUM

Geneva, 9-10 March 1998

SOURCE: the secretariat
STATUS: contribution
ACTION: for discussion at the March 1998 CEFACT Session, agenda item 9

WTO Trade Facilitation Symposium, Geneva, 9-10 March 1998

An important Symposium on Trade Facilitation was organized by WTO on 9-10 March in Geneva. Leading corporations and industry groups presented the practical problems which traders face when moving goods across borders. In addition, a number of non-governmental organizations representing trade and transport explained their role in international trade. The intergovernmental organizations including UN/ECE, UN/ESCAP, UNCTAD, ITC, WCO, IMF, the World Bank and WTO described their activities in the field of facilitating and simplifying trade.

The Symposium referred to the WTO Singapore Ministerial Declaration of 1996 to "undertake exploratory and analytical work drawing on the work of other relevant international organizations, on the simplification of trade procedures in order to assess the scope for WTO rules in this area".

Exploratory work already carried out by WTO included a background paper on work achieved in the area of trade facilitation by other organizations including UN/ECE. The Symposium was aiming at providing a deeper understanding of the nature of administrative barriers, with the objective of identifying main areas where traders face obstacles when moving goods across borders, and providing an interface between the practical level and the trade policy level.

In addressing the Symposium, the WTO Director-General, Mr. Ruggiero, declared that as the classical trade barriers - tariffs and quantitative restrictions - have reached the lowest levels ever as a result of the Uruguay Round, attention had turned to costs resulting from documentation requirements, procedural delays, and lack of transparency and predictability in the application of governments rules and regulations.

Representatives from trade and industry confirmed in their presentations the practical problems encountered by parties involved in international trade. At the same time, the inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations described their ongoing activities aiming at facilitating international trade transactions.

WTO concluded by stating that a variety of problems were still to be solved in international trade, but the symposium was providing a basis for future analytical work on trade facilitation.

The UN/ECE/CEFACT was well represented at the Symposium by a number of Vice-Chair persons and experts, and an exhibition booth. In addition, two presentations were delivered by the Chairman of CEFACT, Mr. Martre, and by the Director of the Trade Division, Dr. Cosgrove-Sacks, which were well received by the delegates.

Mr. Martre focused on CEFACT as an international private/public sector partnership and explained how the private and public sector worked together in CEFACT; he covered CEFACT's activities and described how the private sector was benefiting from its work.

Dr. Carol Cosgrove-Sacks introduced CEFACT and made the following three concrete proposals as to how WTO and the UN/ECE could collaborate in the area of Trade Facilitation.

- CEFACT could function as the expert body to whom requests for standards or procedural solutions should be addressed;
- CEFACT Recommendations should be endorsed and embedded in the WTO legal framework;
- CEFACT's trade facilitation recommendations should be included in the WTO Trade Policy Review Mechanism.

Delegations may consult the full text of the UN/ECE presentations, which are available as CRP's.