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Réduction des tarifs douaniers

Proposition de recommandation

Commission des questions économiques et du développement

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A. Draft Recommendation

The Assembly,

1. Taking note of the fact that the Trade Agreements Extension Act signed by the President of the United States on 21st June, 1955 authorizes the Executive to reduce American customs tariffs by 15 % over a period of three years and to reduce to 50 % ad valorem rates which are at present above that level;
2. Considering that the Governments of a large number of Member States of the Council of Europe have of recent years made it clear that they could only envisage a further reduction in their own customs tariffs if the United States were to do the same;
3. Considering, moreover, that within the O. E. E. C. a certain number of member countries of that organisation have announce that they would be unable to pursue their policy with regard to the removal of quantitative restrictions so long as a further effort were not made in relation to customs tariffs, Recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite the Member States :
 - a. to make the maximum use of the possibilities offered by a general Tariff Conference within the framework of G. A. T. T., in order to bring about effective reductions in the incidence of their tariffs on intra-European trade;
 - b. to conduct their negotiations on the basis of the methods set out in the Plan for a Low Tariff Club and in the GATT Plan for reducing the inequalities between tariffs in Europe.

B. Explanatory Memorandum

1.

The problem of lowering customs tariffs is one of those to which the Consultative Assembly has given careful attention from the beginning of its proceedings. Numerous debates were devoted to this subject and a plan adopted for the automatic lowering of customs dues which, under the name of "Low Tariff Club " aroused widespread interest.

The fresh efforts which are to be made next January at a Tariff Conference convened by G. A. T. T. to initiate further negotiations for the lowering of tariffs seem likely to fasten the attention of the Consultative Assembly once again on this important question.

Brief history

As stated above, in 1951 the Consultative Assembly laid down the guiding principles of a policy to be followed by European States with a view to reducing customs tariffs. The text, which contained a set of standards designed to make the desired reduction possible, was widely distributed under the name of a plan for a " Low Tariff Club ", and was the subject of detailed study by G. A. T. T.

During their seventh session the Contracting Parties to the General Agreement entrusted a highly qualified group of experts with the task of undertaking a technical examination of the proposals contained in the Plan. The report of this group of experts was transmitted to the Council of Europe (Doc. SG (53) 4).

The Committee on Economic Questions kept in touch with the endeavours made by G. A. T. T. and other international organisations to reduce customs barriers. During their sixth session the Contracting Parties to the General Agreement had before them a plan for reducing tariffs which was presented by the French Minister for Finance, M. Pflimlin, on behalf of the French Government.

In the course of the year 1953, the Pflimlin Plan, also known as the French Plan, and the plan for a " Low Tariff Club were again examined by a special committee . of experts, appointed by G. A. T. T. The result was a new plan for lowering tariffs which, while embracing some of the essential principles contained in the plan for a " Low Tariff Club " was to a large extent based upon ideas contained in the proposals submitted by M. Pflimlin. The new plan, presented to the Contracting Parties during their eighth session, was subsequently transmitted to the Governments, who were required to communicate their views on it during the year 1954.

Revision of the General Agreement was the keynote of the ninth session of the Contracting Parties. Efforts were made to include in the new text of the Agreement provisions which would have aimed at putting into practice the proposals contained in the GATT Plan, while making negotiation for the lowering of tariffs obligatory under the terms of the new Agreement.

After the Conference for Revision of the Agreement, and since no appreciable result had been reached with regard to implementing the GATT Plan, the Contracting Parties decided upon the creation of a new Working Party for the lowering of customs barriers, and entrusted it with the task of :

- a. making a general study of ways and means of lowering the general level of tariffs ;
- b. examining the various Plans for reduction submitted to the Contracting Parties (GATT Plan, " Low Tariff Club ", etc.);
- c. recommending to the Contracting Parties the convening of a general Tariff Conference as soon as the Committee judged progress possible in this field.

Convening of a Tariff Conference in January, 1956

The Contracting Parties had decided that the first meeting of the Working Party should be held " when the Chairman of the Contracting Parties deemed it opportune ".

The approval by Congress of the " Trade Agreements Extension Act ", which came into force on 21st June last, and which authorises the President of the United States to reduce American customs tariffs by 15 % in three years and to cut down to 50 % ad valorem all the dues which at present exceed this figure, seemed to the Chairman of the Contracting Parties to satisfy the preliminary conditions for the convening of the Working Party.

At its first meeting, on 29th June, 1955, the Working Party was informed by the representative of the United States that the periods required by the legislation and practice of his country rendered it necessary to open the tariff negotiations at the beginning of 1956.

As a result the American Delegation considered that there was not enough time to undertake fresh studies of plans for tariff reductions on a multilateral basis, and, this being so, the American proposal to reduce customs tariffs by 15 % could only be put into practice by reverting to bilateral negotiations.

The majority of the members of the Working Party had expressed their preference for the application of multilateral methods for lowering tariffs, such as those provided for in the GATT Plan. But the representatives of two Governments made it clear that they were not in a position to participate in negotiations on such a basis.

Most members of the Committee, on the other hand, considered that the application of the rules of bilateral negotiations observed during previous tariff negotiations (Geneva, Annecy, Torquay) would not allow any important objectives to be attained.

At a meeting of the Working Party in September last, a compromise formula was found and a new set of rules adopted, whereby the 15 % reduction of American tariffs would, as far as possible, be followed by a general reduction of European tariffs, distributed as uniformly as possible over all sectors concerned with intra-European trade.

The draft Recommendation of the Committee on Economic Questions

At a time when important new endeavours were being made to bring about a general lowering of customs tariffs, the Committee on Economic Questions deemed it necessary to draw the attention of the Assembly to this problem once again, so that the latter might recommend the Committee of Ministers to invite Member States, in the words of the draft Recommendation:

" (a) to make the maximum use of the possibilities offered by a general Tariff Conference within the framework of G. A. T. T. in order to bring about effective reductions in the incidence of their tariffs on intra-European trade ;

(b) to conduct their negotiations on the basis of the methods set out in the plan for a Low Tariff Club and in the GATT plan for reducing the inequalities between tariffs in Europe. "

After careful examination of the draft Recommendation presented by M. Struye ([Doc. 347](#)), the Committee agreed that this proposal was in accordance with the policy which it has constantly pursued in this matter and arose out of the same concern which had induced it to submit to the Assembly the enclosed draft Recommendation. In its general scope the latter also covers the field which was dealt with in the text presented by M. Struye.