



HARMONIZED SYSTEM
COMMITTEE

-
26th Session
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NC0313E1

O. Eng.

Brussels, 29 September 2000.

THE USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY TO SPEED UP DECISIONS
BY THE HARMONIZED SYSTEM COMMITTEE

(Item III.4 on Agenda)

I. BACKGROUND

1. During the last Council Sessions (July 2000), in response to a question from the Brazilian Director General, the Director of Tariff and Trade Affairs noted that the Harmonized System Committee and the Secretariat had streamlined procedures and cut back on paperwork to the extent that the Committee's longstanding backlog of classification questions had virtually been cleared up.
2. Nevertheless, in an age when product cycles are counted in months and no longer years – in the age of the Internet and highly sophisticated information technology – it still normally takes six months to one year and sometimes longer to come to decisions which are vitally important to the international trade community.
3. For that reason, the Director proposed that the Committee should begin a discussion on how to further streamline working methods – including the possibility of so-called virtual meetings – and how to better use the information technology available to do its work.

II. SECRETARIAT COMMENTS

4. Of course, as the Chairman of the Harmonized System Committee noted during the Council Sessions, one way to expedite the work of the Committee is for administrations to bring all of the relevant information concerning a question to the attention of the Committee well in advance of any meeting scheduled to discuss that issue. Thus timely provision of information by administrations and the Secretariat may be the best means of ensuring the timely resolution of problems.
5. At the same time, there are some issues that might not need to be submitted to the Secretariat or the Committee if there were better and more user-friendly dissemination of information to administrations of past decisions of the Committee and advice of the Secretariat. In this connection, the Secretariat is contemplating publication of its rulings database on the Members WCO Website.

File No. 2822

6. The Secretariat is also contemplating the possibility of creating a “virtual classification forum” on the Website or via the Customs Enforcement Network (CEN). This would allow our Members to ask questions via the Internet and any Member as well as the Secretariat could provide views with regard to the issue.
7. In the Secretariat’s opinion such an informal exchange of information may reduce the number of classification questions which ultimately wind up before the Committee.
8. The use of the Internet may also allow for “virtual meetings” which could make it possible to hold certain working groups electronically. The Secretariat is now exploring the technology necessary for such “meetings”. We expect to report in greater detail on the possibilities at the next session of the Committee.
9. It should be stressed that all of these means of communication would be in addition to the normal means of communication (mail, telephone, fax, e-mail, website) currently used by the Secretariat.

III. CONCLUSION

10. For now, we would merely ask the Committee to take note of the fact that all of these options are being explored and to request administrations to submit any ideas or suggestions they might have for expediting the work of the Committee and the Secretariat, particularly with a view to the greater and more effective use of modern information technology.
