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GUIDELINES FOR RELATIONS BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS AND PARLIAMENTS ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE ISSUES

adopted by consensus on 12 September 2008

The purpose of the adoption of guidelines for relations between governments and parliaments in international trade issues is to provide all the national parliaments with the opportunity to scrutinise and have an influence on governments' trade policy. These guidelines apply to international trade negotiations in the broader sense, i.e. both to multilateral and bilateral frameworks. It is up to each parliament to decide the extent to which the guidelines should be implemented.

Three elements in relations between government and parliament can be pointed out which will help to ensure that the national parliaments gain an influence on trade policy.

These three elements are the quantity and quality of information to the parliament, the timing of information exchange, and finally the opportunities that the parliament has to use the information it has received to gain an influence on trade policy.

The following basic principles can be recommended on the basis of the above:

- The parliament shall receive relevant information on trade initiatives from the government in good time so that the parliament has an opportunity to take them into consideration before decisions are made;
- The parliament shall have a real opportunity to use the information received to gain an influence on its own country's trade policy;
- The parliament shall have an opportunity to follow up on its government's decisions.

Recommendations on general guidelines

The following general guidelines can be recommended on the basis of the basic principles above:

1. A country's government should ensure that the parliament has easy access to all information regarding legislation and other trade initiatives as soon as it becomes available. This rule should apply to all international trade negotiations;

2. The government should provide the original documents and prepare easily accessible, clearly worded material on draft trade agreement, legislation, etc., for the parliaments;
3. Opportunities should be provided for meetings with ministers in the parliamentary Committees well in advance of international trade meetings such as the WTO meetings but also of regional or bilateral trade negotiations. The government should give an up-to-date account of the current position and its attitude to the different proposals at such meetings;
4. The parliament should be informed by the government well in advance as regards positions in the negotiations and decisions to be made at international trade organisations. Regarding the WTO, this concerns particularly ordinary meetings of the WTO General Council, WTO Ministerial Conferences, and, if necessary, meetings of WTO Negotiating Committees or Groups. The parliaments should also subsequently be informed of any new decision;
5. Members of parliament specialising in international trade should be included, as a matter of rule, in their country's official national delegations to international trade events including WTO Ministerial Conferences.