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Page: 1/2

Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade

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THEMATIC SESSION TO ENHANCE UNDERSTANDING OF INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

TENTH TRIENNIAL REVIEW

Proposal from the Russian Federation

The following submission, dated 24 April 2024, is being circulated at the request of the delegation of the Russian Federation.

1 BACKGROUND

1.1. International standards is an important element of the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (Agreement). According to Articles 2.4, 5.4, and Paragraph F of Annex 3 of the Agreement, international standards shall normally be used as a basis for technical regulations, conformity assessment procedures and standards. Harmonization with international standards facilitates global trade and reduces costs for industries. Articles 2.6, 5.5 and Paragraph G of Annex 3 of the Agreement require Members' participation in international standardization activities, with a view to harmonizing technical regulations, conformity assessment procedures and standards on as wide a basis as possible. During the second triennial review, the Committee adopted the decision on principles and procedures that should be observed when international standards, guides and recommendations are elaborated (the Six Principles). The principles are the following: transparency, openness, impartiality and consensus, effectiveness and relevance, coherence, development dimension. In light of the above and given the WTO jurisprudence, compliance with the Six Principles by an international standardizing body is a prerequisite for the body to adopt relevant international standards in the meaning of the Agreement.

1.2. In this context, it is vital for WTO Members to understand in detail procedures employed by international standardizing bodies to ensure implementation of the Six Principles as these procedures affect directly scope of rights and obligations of WTO Members.

1.3. Deeper understanding of principles and procedures in place can lead to greater Members' participation in international standardization activities hence improving operationalization of Articles 2.6, 5.5 and Paragraph G of Annex 3 of the Agreement and contributing to achievement of the goals of the Agreement.

2 PROPOSAL

2.1. The Russian Federation proposes holding a thematic session to enhance understanding of procedures and principles of international standards development with a view to:

- a. better understanding of WTO provisions, practice and jurisprudence related to international standards;
- b. enhance Members' knowledge of principles and procedures in international standardizing bodies for setting standards;

- c. improve operationalization of Articles 2.4, 5.4, and Paragraph F of Annex 3 of the Agreement;
- d. enhance effective implementation of Articles 2.6, 5.5 and Paragraph G of Annex 3 of the Agreement.

2.2. Topics and areas of focus could include:

- a. how international standardizing bodies ensure implementation of each of the Six Principles adopted by the Committee;
- b. ways to follow and participate in international standards development;
- c. Members' experience to increase awareness among national stakeholders on the international standards being prepared to operationalize Members' rights set forth in Article 2.6, 5.5 and Paragraph G of Annex 3 of the Agreement;
- d. Members' experience on making domestic voice heard in international standardizing bodies.

2.3. Possible speakers may represent WTO Secretariat, ISO, IEC, Codex Alimentarius Commission, entities of the UN system, International Organization of Vine and Wine and other organizations, including domestic standard setting ones.

2.4. Benefits for Members: increase awareness of the relevant provisions of the Agreement, Committee decision and related jurisprudence, improve knowledge of international standardizing bodies' work, enhance understanding on how to make the voice heard during the process of international standards development, support harmonization of technical regulations, conformity assessment procedures and standards.

2.5. Proposed thematic session can also be viewed as an element of capacity building. It can also boost Members' interest and encourage them to participate more actively in the work of international standardizing bodies therefore contributing to fuller effect of the goals of the Agreement.

2.6. Previous event¹ that focused horizontally on international standards – rather than on the work of a specific international standardizing body – was held online during COVID-19 pandemic in October 2020 commemorating 20 years of adoption of the Six Principles. However, that event was not part of the TBT Committee week and was relatively brief. Each speaker had only 5 minutes briefly addressing Six Principles altogether. Suggested thematic session will enable us to dive deeper into the topic of international standard setting. This particular thematic session can mark the 25 years anniversary – a silver jubilee – of the adoption of the Six Principles by the Committee.

¹ https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/tbt_e/tbt_six_principles_e.htm