

MEMORANDUM

1 January 1962

TO: All Professional Staff Members
FROM: Executive Secretary
SUBJECT: Correspondence Procedures

1. You will find attached a circular on new correspondence procedures, together with copies of "Instructions to Secretaries on Correspondence and Registry Procedures" and the "Secretarial Handbook" which are issued to all secretarial staff.
2. The new procedures are the outcome of a long and careful study based on expert advice. They are geared to the particular needs and requirements of the secretariat, and I am confident that they will greatly improve our operation. They will be implemented as from 1 January 1962.
3. Their efficiency, of course, will have to be tested in practice, and this can only be done by strict adherence to the rules laid down. I therefore count on the full co-operation of all officers in making these new procedures a success.

GATT Office Circular N° 89

CORRESPONDENCE PROCEDURES

1. The purpose of this circular is to describe the procedures for handling GATT correspondence from reception to despatch and final disposition. Further details of routine handling, including the handling of files by Registry, and full details of the form and layout of all types of correspondence, grammar, punctuation, etc. are dealt with in a separate circular "Instructions to Secretaries on Correspondence and Registry Procedures" and the annex thereto entitled "Secretarial Handbook".

2. For the purpose of classification, recording, filing, routing and final disposition, correspondence is to be considered as falling into two distinct classes, namely centrally controlled correspondence and non-centrally controlled correspondence.

3. (a) Centrally controlled correspondence

- (i) This is the important material which, in principle, covers all communications dealing with policy, procedural and technical subjects of all kinds, and all other subject material which must at all times be readily available centrally for immediate action or future reference. It is classified by subject, recorded and filed centrally by Registry before release for action or information;
- (ii) if an officer receives centrally controlled correspondence which he considers has not been put on the correct Registry file, he should return the file, with suitable instructions to the Registry, for the immediate reclassification of the correspondence concerned;
- (iii) as the exact position of centrally controlled correspondence on the file is recorded by Registry, it must never be removed from its recorded position except by Registry staff.

(b) Non-centrally controlled correspondence

- (i) This material is of a non-policy character related to certain aspects of such matters as accounting, finance, personnel, budget, statistical returns, purely "working papers", requests for publications, printed matter etc. and also includes material which, after perusal or action, has no further reference or other value. Such material cannot be centrally filed by subject and is not recorded by Registry on receipt. It is to be filed or otherwise disposed of in the division or service which handles the material;
- (ii) should Registry circulate correspondence as non-centrally controlled and the receiving officer feels it should be centrally controlled he should return it to the Registry, with a note, for necessary action.

4. Incoming correspondence

- (a) All communications which are addressed to the organization, to one of its divisions or services or to any staff member by name or title are received in Registry without prior examination by any other staff members. Registry will pre-sort the unopened mail and transmit to the staff member, or division or service concerned, that which can be clearly identified as personal or private mail, or non-centrally controlled material. All other material is opened by Registry;
- (b) subject to instructions which the Deputy Executive Secretary may from time to time give regarding the routing of correspondence dealing with policy matters (except those of a purely administrative or financial character) all correspondence, whether centrally controlled or not, will be routed to the Head of division or service most competent to initiate, or to initiate and conclude final action, regardless of to whom the correspondence is addressed.

5. Action in divisions and services on incoming correspondence

The division or service to which any communication is first routed is specifically responsible for:

- (a) taking action if it is within its competence or authority;
- (b) bringing it to the attention of other divisions or services, if necessary;
- (c) ensuring that, whenever a communication deals with a question of policy or importance, the office of the Executive Secretary is promptly informed of the contents of the communication. Having done this, the division or service concerned should, in the case of a communication which will ultimately require final action or signature in the office of the Executive Secretary, undertake all necessary preparatory work within its competence in connexion with the communication, including suggestions for possible action or, where applicable, the preparation of a draft reply for consideration in the office of the Executive Secretary;
- (d) making a clear indication on all correspondence that it has passed through the division or service concerned, before sending it on to another division or service, or returning it to Registry.

6. Outgoing correspondence

(a) Promptness of answer

Communications should be answered promptly but, if any delay is anticipated, an interim acknowledgement is to be sent giving the approximate date when a full answer may be expected;

(b) Oral replies

When a communication is answered orally or when discussions take place which result in an oral decision, a suitable memorandum is to be prepared for the appropriate file, either Registry or non-central file;

(c) Languages

Outgoing letters to delegations or governments will be written in their official working language. When it is considered desirable for reasons of courtesy, however, a letter may be written in a language other than that indicated in the list of official addresses, and if an incoming letter is written in a working language other than the official language, reply must be made in the language of the incoming letter.

(d) Content (of answers)

In principle, no outgoing letter should deal with more than one subject; multi-subject letters cause unnecessary filing problems. If, however, an incoming letter deals with more than one filing subject and it is not practicable to write a separate reply for each subject, sufficient copies of the reply must be prepared for the subject files concerned.

(e) Airgrams

Airgrams are despatched by fastest airmail. They are to be used for all urgent communications when it is considered that any ordinary documents would not receive sufficiently rapid handling at point of destination. They are prepared on form in the same manner as a cable except that "cablese" is not to be used. Airgrams drafted in a division or service are to be forwarded to the office of the Executive Secretary for perusal before despatch.

(f) Cables, telegrams and radio messages

These are to be used only for the most urgent messages and must be authorized by a Head of division or service, on the understanding that the rules applicable to signing in paragraphs 7(a) and (b) and the procedure for clearance of correspondence in paragraph 8(a) apply equally in this case.

7. Signing of correspondence

- (a) Communications, including communications to heads of permanent delegations in Geneva or to liaison officers with the secretariat, involving policy or commitments on the part of the Executive Secretary, or expressing his views, will be signed by the Executive Secretary or by his Deputy.

- (b) Irrespective of their substance, official communications to Ministers of Foreign Affairs or to governmental Ministers, the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Heads of specialized agencies and other international organizations will be signed by the Executive Secretary or in his absence by his Deputy on his behalf.
- (c) If both the Executive Secretary and Deputy Executive Secretary are absent and the matter is urgent, correspondence should be signed on their behalf by the Head of division or service most closely concerned with the subject of the correspondence. In such cases the words "for the Executive Secretary" or "for the Deputy Executive Secretary" will be typed just below the end of the text followed by the name of the officer actually signing and his official title.
- (d) Where the subject matter of communications does not come within the compass of (a) or (b) above and falls completely within the competence of a division or service, such correspondence should be signed by the Head of the division or service concerned, or in his absence by his deputy.
- (e) Purely routine correspondence of a non-policy nature on technical or administrative matters addressed to government officials and officials of other organizations may be signed by secretariat officers of a comparable seniority handling the subject.

8. Clearance of outgoing correspondence

- (a) A Head of division or service is responsible for seeing that, before it is signed, all outgoing correspondence has been cleared with the Heads of other divisions or services, whenever their responsibility is involved, and, if necessary, with the office of the Executive Secretary;
- (b) the official yellow file copies of all outgoing correspondence whether letter, airgram, cable or note verbale include two series of boxes at the foot of the form. In one of these, marked "approved by", should be indicated the names of the officers who have to see the reply before it is despatched, and the officer dictating the reply must instruct the secretary to insert in the box the names of the officers concerned; no correspondence can be despatched until each of the officers indicated in the box has cleared the reply. In the other box is to be inserted the names of officers who should see the reply after despatch of the original, and Registry will circulate the yellow file copies of all despatched controlled correspondence in accordance with the instructions of the originating officer as indicated in the box.

9. Despatch

Material for despatch should reach the Registry as early in the day as possible. Material arriving late in the afternoon runs the risk of being held up until next working day. This is especially important on Fridays. The latest safe time for material to reach Registry is 5 p.m.

- (a) When a reply is made to a communication on a Registry file, the signed communication and copies and the file should be sent together to Registry;
- (b) no communication of any kind can be despatched at the expense of the organization, except on official business;
- (c) correspondence for despatch must be sent to Registry unsealed and accompanied by the appropriate record copies. Sealed mail will be opened and returned to the writer;
- (d) letters for European countries are automatically sent by airmail. Letters for other countries will normally be sent by airmail unless the contents do not warrant the extra expense;
- (e) airgrams are always despatched by the fastest postal means possible;
- (f) telegrams are registered and despatched on receipt in Registry.

10. Handling of Registry files

For the purpose of easy tracing and quick reference all centrally controlled correspondence is recorded to its exact position within the Registry file. Correspondence must, therefore, never be removed from files except by Registry staff (see also paragraph 3(a)(iii)).

- (a) When a Registry file has to be sent to another division, the new address must be indicated on the file cover front and a "File Transfer Slip" be completed and sent to Registry. A supply of these slips is to be found in all Registry files;
- (b) so that Registry files can be kept fully up to date and properly serviced, they should be returned to Registry immediately action has been completed. If requested, Registry will send them back after servicing;
- (c) if officials are dealing with correspondence to which they expect an answer within a given time, they should indicate to Registry that they wish to have the file returned to them at a specified date;

- (d) in principle, Registry does not file serially numbered GATT documents. Registry will, however place such documents in Registry files upon request from the appropriate officer and providing the document is an integral part of the subject of the file.

11. Correspondence Officer

An officer in the office of the Executive Secretary will be designated to check the form, consistency and protocol in regard to correspondence to governments, heads of international organizations, etc. This check will be performed by scrutiny of copies of correspondence after despatch with a view to bringing discrepancies to the attention of the staff member(s) concerned. Officers are urged to consult the Correspondence Officer when they have any doubts as to the correct form of address to be used in formal communications. The office of the Executive Secretary will keep an up to date list of addresses of liaison officers, etc. etc.

12. Technical classification

- (a) Any problems or queries arising in regard to technical classification of material should in the first instance be referred by the Chief Registry Clerk to the officer handling the subject;
- (b) if such problems cannot be settled satisfactorily in this way the matter should be referred to the office of the Executive Secretary for a ruling.