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## The Florence Agreement

In 1948 the policy-making body of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization decided to seek an international agreement to promote the flow of cultural and educational materials among nations. Representatives of 25 member states drafted an instrument for this purpose which was unanimously adopted at a meeting of the General Conference of UNESCO in Florence in July 1950. This Agreement on the Importation of Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Materials (commonly referred to as the Florence Agreement) became operative in 1952, when it had been ratified by ten member states.

The central feature of the agreement is that certain materials will be exempt from customs duties: books, documents, articles for the blind, and, if they are of an "educational, scientific or cultural character," works of art, visual and auditory materials, and scientific instruments or apparatus.

In October 1957 representatives of 52 nations attended a UNESCO meeting held to appraise the first five years of operation of the agreement. They concluded that the agreement was "a valuable and, on the whole, highly effective instrument" and recommended that all states "should apply it and in the most liberal manner."

The United States, although it has been a party to the negotiations since the beginning, has been slow to move toward adherence. Finally, on 24 June 1959, the U.S. became the 32nd nation to sign the agreement. This action was ratified by the Senate by a 76 to 14 vote on 23 February 1960.

But one last hurdle remains. Since the agreement proposes removal of tariffs, the enabling legislation must be introduced in the House of Representatives. A bill is now being prepared by the Executive branch (the delay is puzzling since the State Department might well have begun preparation of appropriate legislation last June) which should be ready for introduction in the House within the next few weeks.

In the House the bill will be assigned to the Ways and Means Committee. Those in favor of the bill—the American Council on Education, the American Council of Learned Societies, the American Library Association, the American Book Publishers Council, and the American Association of Physics Teachers—will continue to testify in its support. The only group opposed prior to Senate ratification was the Scientific Apparatus Makers Association, which feared that a liberal interpretation and administration of the agreement might damage their industry. This position seems unrealistic, but will doubtless be put forward again. The only instruments that will be duty-free are those that are purchased by educational and scientific research institutions, and then only if "instruments or apparatus of equivalent scientific value are not being manufactured in the country of importation." Thus, most scientific instruments will not qualify. Furthermore, to facilitate U.S. participation, a special reservation was added, stating in effect that if any product is being imported in such relatively increased quantities as to threaten serious injury to the industry producing competitive products, "the contracting State shall be free . . . to suspend in whole or in part, any obligation under the Agreement with respect to such product."

These provisions give adequate—some would say more than adequate—protection to our instrument makers. It is to be hoped that, in the rush to adjournment prior to the party conventions, this bill, which makes a small but significant contribution toward breaking down international barriers and (to quote President Eisenhower) creating "a world community of open societies," will not die in committee.—G.DuS.