

ARTICLE XIX, SECTION 5

Designation of Participants to Provide Currency

REVIEW OF RULES FOR DESIGNATION AND METHOD OF CALCULATING DESIGNATION AMOUNTS*

The Executive Directors approve the summary and conclusions set out [below] on the understanding that if during the first year after a participant receives an allocation for the first time, designation would bring the participant close to the acceptance limit, the staff will take steps to moderate the rate at which the limit is approached.

*Decision No. 6209-(79/124) S
July 24, 1979*

Summary and Conclusions

1. The designation system has a key role in guaranteeing the usability of the SDR. However, provided that the SDR is regarded as an attractive reserve asset, participants may make less use of their SDR holdings in transactions with designation and may rely more on transactions and operations by agreement between participants, as well as payments to the Fund. The volume of transactions with designation would then depend mainly on the extent to which the Fund transfers SDRs to purchasing members that use the SDRs to obtain foreign exchange in transactions with designation.

2. The general structure of the more important provisions relating to designation is as follows:

(a) The major principles of designation are contained in Article XIX, Section 5. A participant whose balance of payments and

*See also Decision No. 6273-(79/158) G/S, September 14, 1979, on page 272.

gross reserve position is sufficiently strong shall be subject to designation; and the Fund shall designate these participants "in such manner as will promote over time a balanced distribution of holdings of special drawing rights among them." These principles can be supplemented by other principles that the Fund may adopt at any time.

(b) To promote a balanced distribution of SDR holdings, the Fund implements the rules for designation in Schedule F. These rules embody the so-called "excess holdings" principle, which aims to promote over time equality in participants' "excess holding ratios," i.e., their holdings of SDRs in excess of their net cumulative allocations as a proportion of their gold and foreign exchange holdings. The rules for designation can be reviewed at any time and changed, if necessary, by a decision of the Executive Board taken by a majority of votes cast.

3. The following conclusions are suggested as regards the principles on which the calculation of the designation amounts is based.

(a) The choice of "excess holdings" rather than total holdings of SDRs tends to concentrate designation on net users of SDRs to restore their holdings to the level of their allocations. The alternative "holdings" principle would tend to shift the incidence of designation away from participants that have used SDRs to those that have relatively large holdings of gold and foreign exchange. The latter approach may become more suitable as the attractiveness of the SDR increases, but it is not recommended at this time.

(b) Participants' gold and foreign exchange holdings are used as a basis for harmonizing excess holdings of SDRs, consistent with the approach that the staff has suggested for preparing the operational budgets. An alternative technique would be to distribute amounts of designation on the basis of participants' unused acceptance obligations in relation to their allocations. It would seem preferable, however, not to divorce the designation amounts from participants' reserve holdings as these are considered to be the best available measure of the ability of participants to provide currency when designated by the Fund.

(c) The speed at which the harmonization of ratios proceeds depends importantly on the particular method adopted for calculating designation amounts for individual participants. The present method has promoted harmonization at a moderate pace, striking a balance between the objective of restoring the holdings of net users of SDRs and the desire to maintain a fairly broad list of participants for designation. The method has the advantage of flexibility and has been adjusted successfully from time to time to meet changing circumstances.

4. Under the Articles of Agreement, the amount of SDRs a participant can be required to accept in designation is restricted to the point where its excess holdings are twice its allocation, i.e., the acceptance limit. For certain participants, this limit is reached rather more rapidly than for others because their reserves are very large in relation to their SDR allocations. While it would be possible to conceive of arrangements that would slow down the approach to the acceptance limit, the staff's view is that such action is neither necessary nor desirable.

5. The method of executing designation plans is established for each quarterly period at the time the plan is adopted by the Executive Board. It is proposed that this procedure be continued. The approach generally followed in the execution of designation plans has been to designate participants in broad proportion to the maximum amounts for which they are included in the plan, while avoiding undue fragmentation of individual transactions. From time to time exceptions may be proposed, such as have been agreed by the Executive Board in the past when circumstances warranted. If during the quarterly period covered by a designation plan a proposal is pending with the Executive Board for the exclusion of a participant from designation, further designation of the participant concerned would be avoided to the extent practicable.

6. Over more than nine years of actual experience, the designation mechanism has functioned satisfactorily. Actual designations have borne out the general emphasis that was expected to result from the "excess holdings" principle. About four fifths of total designation has been directed to participants whose holdings of SDRs were below their allocations as a result of prior uses. At the same time, a wide

range of both developed and less developed countries has been called upon to provide currency in the designation process.

7. The major volume of transactions with designation over the last two and a half years has resulted from transfers of SDRs to participants making purchases from the General Resources Account; these participants have generally used the SDRs in transactions with designation, although a not insignificant proportion has been retained by the recipients, mainly to meet the reconstitution obligation or to make payments to the Fund.

8. In the future, the attractiveness of the SDR, and the increasing scope for transactions and operations by agreement, may reduce the use of SDRs from participants' own holdings in transactions with designation. However, with the Fund receiving approximately SDR 5 billion as a result of quota increases under the Seventh Review, there is likely to be a continuing volume of transactions with designation as a result of transfers of SDRs by the Fund to members making purchases, as a way of channeling SDRs back into participants' reserves.

9. In the light of the generally satisfactory experience with the designation system, the staff does not feel it necessary to propose any changes in the present principles and procedures for designation.