

Working Party on Professional Services

REPORT OF THE WORKING PARTY ON PROFESSIONAL SERVICES TO THE COUNCIL FOR TRADE IN SERVICES

1. The WPPS has held eleven formal, and several informal, meetings in the period December 1997 to December 1998. Minutes of the formal meetings are contained in WPPS documents M/14 through M/24. Discussions of the WPPS have focused on the development of multilateral disciplines on domestic regulation in the accountancy sector, together with the issue of the legal form for their adoption.
 2. As a result of discussions and comments in the context of WPPS meetings, the Secretariat was asked to prepare several revisions of the informal Note, *Disciplines on Domestic Regulation in the Accountancy Sector* – the tenth revision was dated 17 July 1998. Discussion on the text of the disciplines on accountancy was substantially concluded at the WPPS meeting of 29 July 1998, except for one outstanding reservation. At the meeting of 4 December Members reached a consensus on the disciplines.
 3. The WPPS addressed the question of the legal form which the accountancy disciplines might take. The following options were discussed: an Annex to the GATS; additional commitments to be scheduled by Members; and a decision by the Council to adopt the text of the disciplines with the intention to make them legally binding at a later stage. Members supported the option of a Council Decision. A draft decision was adopted *ad referendum* on 4 December.
 4. Members discussed issues relating to the relationship between the disciplines on accountancy developed under Article VI:4 and other provisions of the GATS, in particular Articles XVI (market access) and XVII (national treatment). It was noted that the new disciplines on accountancy must not overlap with other provisions already existing in the GATS so as to avoid legal uncertainty.
 5. The issue of the future work of the WPPS was discussed. The Working Party agreed to continue its work pursuant to its terms of reference; in doing so it shall aim to develop general disciplines for professional services while retaining the possibility to develop or revise sectoral disciplines including accountancy, taking into account any decisions which may be taken in the Council regarding work on Article VI:4. The expansion of the Mutual Recognition Guidelines for accountancy to accommodate other professional services sectors was also suggested as a possible element of the future work of the WPPS.
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