

Committee on Specific Commitments

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REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON SPECIFIC COMMITMENTS TO THE COUNCIL FOR TRADE IN SERVICES

1. The Committee on Specific Commitments has held three formal meetings in 1998. In its first formal meeting held on 2 April 1998, it elected Mr Juan A. Marchetti of Argentina as its Chairman. Informal consultations on the finalization of the procedures for the implementation of GATS Article XXI (Modification of Schedules) have also been conducted by the Chairman of the Committee, with a view to their completion before the end of 1998. The formal discussions of the Committee focused on three items: classification issues, the institution of a system of electronically consolidated and updated schedules and the possible revision of the scheduling guidelines.
2. As far as classification issues are concerned the activities of the Committee were threefold. First the Committee examined the structure of the ongoing revision of the Central Products Classification, which is the nomenclature established by the UN Statistical Commission, in order to appreciate its possible relevance for the Committee's future work. The Secretariat produced detailed structural and qualitative studies of the changes brought about by the revised CPC in a number of service sectors: energy, construction, distribution, tourism, transport, research and development, real estate, rental and leasing, business services, computer and related services, professional services other business services, agricultural, mining and manufacturing services. It also heard the views of the UN Statistical Division and the "Voorburg Group", the collective authors of this new classification.
3. On this basis the Committee concluded that a global conversion to this new classification would be inappropriate at this stage but that the new classification could help to resolve the individual problems of classification which may be identified by delegations in the future. It was also agreed that the question of "ad hoc" classifications, that is of classifications collectively agreed which depart from the CPC, as in financial services, basic telecommunications and maritime transport, should be kept on the agenda as another possible means of resolving problems of classification.
4. Secondly the Committee began discussion of the question of the definition and treatment of new services. There was broad agreement that this was more a question of classification than of coverage and that a pragmatic approach, based on concrete elements identified during of the Exchange of Information Programme of the Council, was needed.
5. Thirdly the Committee, in accordance with a mandate given by the Council for Trade in Services, began the examination of the points on classification raised during the Exchange of Information Programme, on the basis of a compilation of these points drawn up by the Secretariat and of working documents submitted by delegations.

6. The Committee approved in principle the establishment of a system of electronically consolidated and updated schedules of commitments. It was agreed that these electronic schedules would not have legal status, since their format would differ from the treaty copies, though their substantive content would be the same. The Committee also considered the calendar, budget, format, circulation, prices and verification procedure applicable to this project. It agreed in particular that the outcome of this work should be published and sold to the general public in a CD-Rom format and that the elaboration of a CD-ROM version was a priority as compared to an online version.

7. The Committee also considered the possible need to review the scheduling guidelines and examined several contributions by Members on this topic. The Chairman invited delegations to come forward with issues and questions they might wish to raise in this regard.
