

Council for Trade in Services

WTO PROGRAMME ON ELECTRONIC COMMERCE

Oral Report by the Chairman of the Council for Trade in Services to the General Council on Electronic Commerce

At its meeting of 6 October, the Council for Trade in Services discussed the work programme on electronic commerce in response to the invitation of the General Council to pick up the work on this issue where it had been left off, to identify cross-sectoral issues and to report back to the General Council in December.

The Council's discussion on 6 October took as its starting-point the progress report which it had made to the General Council on 27 July 1999 (S/L/74). It was the general view that this report was still an accurate reflection of the thinking of Members on the subject, and that there was no need to re-open or repeat what was said in it. The progress report had identified a number of issues as requiring further work, and Members were fully resolved to pursue these issues, but it was pointed out that they were complex matters which would require careful consideration and that it would not be possible to deal with them in substance before December.

In response to the request of the General Council that the Services Council should seek to identify cross-sectoral issues arising in electronic commerce, there was no dissent from the view expressed by several delegations that matters related to development were of a cross-cutting nature. However, views differed as to the nature of certain other subjects, including customs duties, the classification of certain electronically-delivered products and certain competition issues, which were mentioned as possible cross-cutting issues relevant to the work of other WTO bodies, such as the Councils for TRIPS and Goods and the CTD, as well as the Services Council: the view was expressed that these issues were primarily related to services. Some delegations indicated that they wished to give more thought to the question of what in fact constituted a cross-cutting issue, while others expressed the hope that the General Council might be able to offer guidance on this.

At the conclusion of this discussion, the Council agreed that the Chairman should make an oral report to the General Council, on his own responsibility, and that Members would be informed of the content of this report before it was made. The report was therefore presented at the meeting of the Services Council on 1 December 2000.
