

Committee on Specific Commitments

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. The minutes of these meetings appear in documents S/CSC/M/5, 6 and 7. In its first formal meeting held on 2 April 1998, it elected Mr Juan A. Marchetti of Argentina as its Chairman. Six 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. 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 twofold. 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 difficult 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. Subsequently 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. It was agreed that, at each meeting of the Committee dedicated to classification, the Secretariat would produce an informal document listing and updating the suggestions and solutions proposed by Members with regard to the various sectors.
5. 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 examples identified during of the Exchange of Information Programme of the Council, was needed.

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. The Committee also considered the calendar, budget, format, circulation, prices and verification procedure applicable to this project and the possibility of assigning dates to these commitments. 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, in view of the budgetary constraints, the elaboration of a CD-ROM version was a priority as compared to an online version.

7. On scheduling guidelines the Committee requested the Secretariat to produce, as a basis for a future collective reading of the guidelines, an informal and technical document on scheduling problems emerging from the guidelines themselves and from their implementation.
