

COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS

The majority of participants recognized the important contribution made by international trade to Canada's economic prosperity and to creating a more dynamic marketplace, with more consumer choice and competitive prices. The increasing importance of trade in services in the Canadian economy was often noted. The majority also agreed in principle with the need for a rules-based trading environment; there was less consensus, however, on the nature of those rules.

"The potential for private-sector participation and economic return to our province is very great. . . . I get a dozen e-mails per month from outside Canada soliciting our services. GATS rules should help us gain easier access

Some participants cautioned against blanket liberalization, noting difficult economic adjustments that resulted from adoption of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Agreement on Internal Trade. Other participants took care to distinguish between trade liberalization and deregulation, and urged government caution to ensure that Canadian interests were protected.

"Is anyone going into the GATS with a costing of what could be lost on the downside? An economic costing is required."

"Is liberalized trade always beneficial? In some industries, you need regulation to get the optimal low-cost results."

In general, participants expressed two types of concerns. The business community generally focussed on the roadblocks to success in other markets, and on rules that might have a negative impact on the performance of their industry or profession in the domestic market. The representatives of public interest groups were principally concerned about addressing the potential challenges posed by globalization and trade liberalization, by: preserving Canadian sovereignty and the right to regulate in the public interest; integrating trade policy objectives and broader social objectives; and increasing transparency in trade negotiations and the management of trade agreements.

ROADBLOCKS TO TRADE IN SERVICES

Some participants spoke of the potential value of the GATS in removing major obstacles to the export and import of services. Following are issues raised at many of the stakeholder sessions, usually by service exporters or representatives of business or professional associations.