

THE CURRENT STATE OF NEGOTIATIONS

Current discussions: The WTO Council for Trade in Services in Special Session is debating procedural matters relating to Article IV (increasing the participation of developing countries) and Article XIX (the negotiation of specific commitments). These discussions are in addition to the work of the Council's subsidiary bodies on a range of issues to prepare for the negotiations.

The "Geneva Roadmap": The Council called for the submission of proposals on initial negotiating issues by the end of December 2000, and a stock-taking exercise in March 2001 to agree on modalities. To date, the GATS negotiations have focussed on the agreement process, rules and market access.

"Request/offer": The traditional method of conducting negotiations was described as bilateral discussion between countries, during which market access commitments are requested and offered, followed by the "multilateralization" of the resulting agreements. Other negotiating methods being promoted by certain countries for the GATS were also described, notably "clusters" and "model schedules." The cluster approach groups services together into a package for negotiation. The services in the bundle could be those required to provide effective services in a market — for example, electronic commerce services grouped together with telecommunications and parcel delivery services. Model schedules are intended to promote more consistency in market access commitments by articulating a "model" set of commitments in a specific service sector. This approach was used in earlier GATS negotiations.

Canada's GATS objectives

- Improve access to foreign markets for Canadian businesses.
- Improve the framework of rules to provide greater transparency and certainty.
- Safeguard Canada's sovereign right to pursue national policy objectives.

On individual service industry sectors, the specifics of Canada's GATS negotiating position remain to be defined, except for one item: **Our public health and public education systems will not be negotiated.** Further, the Government of Canada will not make any commitment that restricts our ability to achieve our cultural policy objectives until a new international instrument can be established designed specifically to safeguard the right of countries to promote and preserve their cultural diversity.