

COMMUNICATION FROM COLOMBIA¹

Telecommunications Services

The following communication has been received from the delegation of Colombia with the request that it be circulated to Members of the Council for Trade in Services.

1. Telecommunications form part of the basic infrastructure of the economy. Broad coverage, together with the efficient provision of the service using modern technologies, are key elements in the productivity of the economy and in the reduction of the digital divide in the developing countries.

2. With the introduction of competition and the deregulation of the sector, this industry has undergone a considerable transformation resulting in a much broader provision of services, technological innovation, improvements in the quality of services and a reduction in rates for the final user.

3. In Colombia the liberalization of telecommunications services has been a gradual process occurring in response to the economic and institutional realities of the country.

4. The radio spectrum is a scarce resource whose administration is the responsibility of the competent national authorities under the terms of the Radio Regulations. Consequently, Colombia has not made commitments for market access on the basis of the availability of the spectrum, since it understands that the management of the spectrum is not a measure that can be included in the Schedules of Specific Commitments.

PROPOSAL

5. Many developing countries have carried out an autonomous liberalization of both the basic and the value-added telecommunications services. For many developing countries, WTO scheduling of free market access in the telecommunications sector, especially through commercial presence, could be furthered if better conditions of market access were granted to other sectors of interest to such developing countries.

6. The liberalization of trade in telecommunications services should be accompanied by a policy directed towards extending the coverage of the basic services and access to information networks whose quality, capacity and cost meet the needs of the users. In this connection, the barriers of access

¹ Colombia reserves the right to amend this proposal at any time. This communication should not be interpreted as an offer by Colombia in the current negotiations.

to the Internet should be eliminated, including the high costs incurred by national Internet Service Providers for connection to the international networks.

7. The concept of a universal telecommunications service should not only be concerned with coverage, but also with satisfactory connectivity in terms of users' needs.

8. The additional commitments (reference paper) undertaken by a large number of Members in the Schedules of Specific Commitments of the Fourth Protocol to the General Agreement on Trade in Services represent a very important advance as regards binding disciplines in telecommunications. Accordingly, Colombia proposes that some principles of the reference paper, such as competition safeguards, universal service, the public availability of the procedures for interconnections negotiation, transparency of the interconnection arrangements, the public availability of licensing criteria, and the allocation and use of scarce resources should form part of the Annex on telecommunications. It should also be recognized that the proper actors in the trade in telecommunications services are the operators who are duly authorized in accordance with each Member's national regulations.

9. Members shall seek to eliminate exemptions to the most-favoured-nation treatment.
