OECD GOVERNMENTS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PROFESSIONS
MEET TO DISCUSS LIBERALISATION OF TRADE IN PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Paris, 26th-27th September 1994

The OECD held an informal workshop on the issues involved in liberalising trade in professional services, a sector of growing economic importance especially within the OECD area. The meeting brought together for the first time policy officials from OECD Member countries, international organisations and representatives from the professions, including accountants, architects, engineers, lawyers and surveyors, coming from Europe, the United States, Japan and Australia/New Zealand. The workshop was chaired by Mr. Wolfgang Hantke, Head of the Office for Foreign Trade Law in the German Ministry of Economy and Chairman of the OECD’s Working Group on Foreign Direct Investment.

The results of the workshop will help determine where OECD can most usefully contribute to advancing liberalisation of trade and investment in professional services, in support of efforts in Geneva in the framework of the GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services). The workshop was also designed to be an informative and stimulating forum allowing participants to freely exchange views, and promoting a closer understanding between governments, the professions and international institutions.

The main issues considered were:

- key obstacles to international trade in professional services;
- efforts undertaken so far to reduce or eliminate such barriers;
- avenues for further liberalisation.

Government officials and professionals expressed satisfaction with their exceptional opportunity to meet, and agreed on the need to provide more transparency and analysis concerning this complex and highly regulated sector, where practices differ greatly from one country to another. There was emphasis on the importance of identifying protectionist barriers, whilst taking care to respect legitimate consumer-protecting regulations. It was agreed that the professions needed to be fully consulted as this work proceeds.
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