# Basic telecommunications services: résults of the WTO negociations

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The Committee adopted the report drawn up under the consultation procedure proposing that Parliament approve the outcome of the World Trade Organisation negotiations on basic telecommunications services. The fourth GATT protocol was adopted in Geneva on 15 February 1997. It was signed by 69 of the 130 WTO member states, representing 95% of the world market in the telecommunications industry, which is valued at 600 billion dollars per annum. For the EU, ratification of the GATT agreement will mean that liberalisation of the internal telecoms market will be subject to the rules laid down by the WTO, which, however, has agreed to allow the rules to be implemented gradually for countries where the networks are small or not fully developed, i.e. Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Greece and Spain. The exclusion of the broadcasting sector from the agreement - despite resistance from the United States - means that EU Member States are not obliged to grant access to all programmes (especially in new areas such as video-on demand) supplied by other countries, such as the USA, which already accounts for 80% of the European broadcasting market. In conclusion, the committee drew attention to the following points: - the confused institutional arrangements in the foreign trade sphere, and the urgent need to amend the relevant legislation; - the need to . monitor implementation of the general principles laid down by the WTO; . assess the impact of the GATT agreements on developing countries and adopt special measures to ensure that they are not placed in an excessively difficult position; . consider the possible repercussions of the restrictions attached to the offers put forward by many countries (particularly the US) in a wide range of sectors, which have led to a blatant lack of reciprocity vis-à-vis the European Union; . clarify various aspects of the negotiations which remain rather unclear as far as broadcasting services are concerned.