



BACKGROUND

Trade in Services Agreement, or TISA, negotiations began in early 2013 following twelve months of discussions between a group of WTO Members on options for progressing services trade liberalisation in line with the directive given by WTO Ministers at the 8th WTO Ministerial Conference in 2011 to explore new negotiating approaches.¹ The objective of the TISA negotiators is to negotiate an agreement which is compatible with the WTO General Agreement on Trade in Services, will attract broad participation, and will support and feed back into multilateral trade negotiations.

Since discussions began, the number of TISA participants has expanded from 16 to 23, including the European Union, which represents its 28 Member States. The 23 TISA parties currently comprise: Australia, Canada, Chile, Chinese Taipei, Colombia, Costa Rica, European Union, Hong Kong China, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Liechtenstein, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States. Current TISA parties collectively account for around 70 per cent of global trade in services. The group represents a range of both developed and developing economies and will continue to expand to include other WTO Members as the negotiations progress. China and Uruguay have indicated interest in joining the negotiations.

The structure of the TISA agreement is to be based on the WTO GATS, with some core GATS articles (including on definitions, scope, market access and national treatment, general and security exemptions) being incorporated. The Framework of the TISA is attached to this program for information purposes. TISA negotiators are addressing both how to liberalise services trade as well as improved disciplines or trade rules in areas where there have been significant developments since the conclusion of the GATS. Issues under discussion in the TISA negotiations include, among others, rules to cover domestic regulation (e.g. authorization and licensing procedures), international maritime transport, telecommunication services, e-commerce, postal and courier services, financial services, temporary movement of natural persons, professional services, air transport, road transport, energy-related services and export subsidies to services.

Formal negotiations began for the TISA just over a year ago, in early 2013. Since then several rounds of negotiating meetings have taken place. The week of April 28th – May 2nd 2014 will see the next session of the TISA negotiations. The TISA negotiating rounds always take place in Geneva, given the objective of the participants to ensure that this initiative will generate and support a renewed dynamism in services trade liberalization at the multilateral level.

Note: The TISA negotiations are open to the participation of all WTO members who share the same objectives and level of ambition. The TISA participants recognize the high importance of services in national economies and in trade as a generator of economic growth, greater prosperity and enhanced development.
