

Preface

The classification of services in the digital economy proves critical for doing business, but it appears to be a particularly complex regulatory matter, which bears upon a manifold set of issues. In the context of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), when the services classification scheme was drafted in the early 1990s, convergence processes had not unfolded yet and the Internet was still in its infancy and not a reality in daily life. Therefore, policy makers are now struggling with the problem of regulating trade in electronic services and are in search of a future-oriented solution for classifying them in multilateral and preferential trade agreements.

In late fall 2011, the authors of this study have been mandated by the European Union, Delegation to Vietnam, in the context of the Multilateral Trade Assistance Project 3 (MUTRAP 3) to work out a report clarifying the classification of services in the information/digital economy and to assess the impact of any decision regarding the classifications on the domestic and external relations policy of Vietnam, as well as to discuss the relevant issues with local experts during three site visits (done by WEBER). The efforts in writing the respective report have shown that further research is highly needed in the field of classifications in general and of digital services classification in particular. Therefore, the authors have come to the conclusion that a publication of the study in a slightly amended version would be beneficial to a broader audience and might contribute to the ongoing debate on these thorny regulatory issues.

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