A number of recent developments in the economic field are likely to influence the business of the Eleventh GATT Session which opens at Geneva on 11 October. The Session is expected to continue for six weeks.

Proposals for the establishment of a common market or customs union for Benelux, France, the Federal Republic of Germany and Italy are now being studied in Brussels; in Paris a working party established by the OEEC is examining the possibility of creating a free-trade area to include the countries forming the proposed customs union and other OEEC member countries. The Contracting Parties will be concerned as to the obligations under the GATT of those member countries of GATT which decide to participate in any such customs union or free-trade area.

A significant proposal has been made that there should be a general opportunity for consultations with member governments on the quantitative import restrictions which are still being maintained by them for balance-of-payments reasons; at this Session plans for such consultations are likely to be drawn up, but the actual consultations would be started at a later date. During the Session the customary consultations with certain countries on the discriminatory application of their import restrictions will be held and an opportunity will be taken to review developments in the OEEC's trade liberalization programme.

Switzerland, which is one of the most important trading countries outside the GATT, has signified its intention to apply for accession to GATT and this request will be discussed during the Session. In the field of customs tariffs there will be an examination of problems that arise if the new Brazilian customs tariff is approved by the Brazilian Congress and time will be given to the study of various matters affecting customs administration.
During the Session the Contracting Parties will examine the reports received on the functioning of the waivers from specific GATT obligations that have been granted to certain countries from time to time, including, in particular, the annual report by the member States of the European Coal and Steel Community. There is a short list of complaints of violations of obligations which will be dealt with under the appropriate GATT procedures. The position of Japan vis-à-vis the fourteen contracting parties which are not undertaking GATT obligations towards her will also be reviewed.

In the field of commodity trade, the Contracting Parties will consider the present position on the proposed establishment of an international agreement on commodity arrangements and the possibility of any alternative approach to the question of commodity trade. The Contracting Parties will also review developments during the past year in the disposal of surplus agricultural products.

It is expected that about 50 countries will be represented of which 35 are contracting parties and the rest observers; in addition, some 8 intergovernmental agencies will be represented. Early in the Session there will be an election of chairman and vice-chairmen of the Contracting Parties.