

General Council

At the General Council on Wednesday October 26, Director General Pascal Lamy summarized the discussion that took place during last Friday's (October 21) informal TNC. Lamy acknowledged that some Members found his DDA planning "not ambitious enough or specific enough" but that it nevertheless reflected the reality of where the negotiations currently stand.

The DG then outlined areas where Members seem to converge. These recognize that:

- The DDA will not conclude soon, but no one wants to give up
- Delivering an early harvest package on development for LDCs through paragraph 47
- Issues that are not agreed to through an early harvest should be picked up after MC8
- Look at new approaches consistent with the mandate to unlock the current impasse
- The importance of the WTO in keeping protectionism at bay.

"To meet the credibility test, we have to keep working across the entire WTO agenda by looking at and beyond the MC8," the DG said, before adding that Members are "obviously not there yet and need to keep working hard with the General Council chair over the coming weeks.

Most delegates also asked that their respective statement made last Friday be taken into account in this formal meeting.

Meanwhile, the EU created a bit of controversy when its ambassador, Angelos Pangratis, reiterated the need for Members to agree on a more specific roadmap, one that requires early harvests, timelines and orientation of process and which could be ratified by Ministers at the MC8.

The EU believes that all delegations could benefit from an early harvest in Trade Facilitation, the removal of non-tariff barriers (NTBs), from improving the functioning of dispute settlement mechanism as well as advancing a LDCs package for the MC8.

The Trade Facilitation issue is far from being complete but Members involved in the discussion say it is progressing fairly well and that no major roadblocks are to be reported.

The EU made a clear distinction between the above issues (which can be candidates for an early harvest based on paragraph 47) and the so-called 21st century issues (climate change, the relationship between trade and exchange rate, energy, food security) which, according to the Commission, are not up for negotiations at this point. However, the MC8 should recognize that the current multilateral trading system rulebook cannot adequately cope with these new issues. In addition, the Commission also advocated for the Information Technology Agreement (ITA) negotiating model to be applied as a model for pursuits in NAMA and Services sectorals.

The proposal raised some concerns. Several key countries such as Brazil, India, China and the US rejected it claiming that it could jeopardize the support already agreed to on the ministerial statement. Emerging countries like Brazil and India warned against putting forward a list of issues for consideration at the MC8, running the risk of reopening other issues and bringing the whole process back to square one.

The EU meanwhile justified its position by claiming that it was looking for guidance from Ministers at the ministerial conference i.e. specific guidance on issues that could be taken up post MC8. Sources say the Commission plans to present its proposal at the November 3-4 G-20 Summit in Cannes to garner leaders' support.

Upcoming Events

- G-20 Summit, November 3-4, 2011 Cannes (France)
- APEC Ministerial Meeting, November 11, 2011
- Regular Agriculture Committee, November 17, 2011, March 21-22; June 20-21, September 26-27, 2012
- WTO General Council, December 1-2, 2011
- WTO Ministerial Conference (MC8), December 15-17, 2011

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