

# Geneva Watch

*An overview of the WTO negotiations on agriculture*

## NAMA Negotiating Group

The negotiating group on Market Access for Non-Agricultural products (NAMA) accepted a proposal on March 1<sup>st</sup> by the chair of the group, Swiss ambassador Luzius Wasescha, to reopen the discussion on tariffs, issues that have been casted aside the last few years in favour of less contentious discussions on Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs).

In line with the decision adopted by Ministers at the 8<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference (MC8), the NAMA group will explore how negotiations can be advanced this year and if new approaches can be found to resolve the contentious issues.

In a January meeting, the U.S. asked the negotiating group to recognize the importance of the tariff component of the talks, claiming that continued discussion on issues such as NTBs was “business as usual that would not get us anywhere”. The tariff component includes the crucial areas of the coefficients that would go into the tariff reduction formula as well as the flexibilities granted to developing countries.

As for NTBs, the EU proposed a chair-led consultation process to advance the negotiation on this issue – maybe the only NAMA area where progress can be achieved and delivered this year. As such, Wasescha suggested a scheduled discussion to take place starting March 8.

The tariff component of the talks, however, will be tackled on March 14<sup>th</sup>, with the view to explore “whether something can be done” in that specific area this year. Wasescha said he is looking for new ideas linked to a different negotiating approach and invited Members to spell out clearly which areas progress can be achieved.

## Agriculture

In a fax sent to delegates mid-February, the chair of the agriculture negotiation, New Zealand Ambassador, John Adank, told Members that his doors were opened for confessionals with Members who desired to do so.

According to sources, Members visited him mostly to reiterate their respective redlines in the agriculture talks. Officials said Adank had identified export competition pillar as one of his top priorities for 2012. He believes – and he is not the only one pushing for it – that an agreement can be reached on this pillar this year, even in the midst of the current political environment.

## General Council

On Friday February 24<sup>th</sup>, Members approved the appointment of the new chair of the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) which they were able to do at the February 14<sup>th</sup> General Council. The delay was related to emerging countries’ (including Brazil, India and South Africa) rejection of Singaporean ambassador Kwok Fook Seng as the next DSB chairman.

The main reason of that rejection is said to be linked to the fact that this year’s DSB chair would automatically become next year’s General Council Chairman as per WTO’s traditional rotation of officers chairing WTO Bodies. Since the next General Council chairman will lead the process to select the next WTO Director General, Brazil, India and South Africa were concerned that ambassador Kwok – who had the support of the U.S. and the EU but also various Latin American and Asian countries – could end up favouring a U.S. /EU candidate to lead the WTO. As a result, Members decided on February 24<sup>th</sup> to instead elect Pakistan’s ambassador, Shahid Bashir as the new chair of the DSB.

Ambassador Kwok, for his part, has been elected chair of Committee on Trade and Development, a position which Ambassador Bashir had previously been targeted to preside over.

## Upcoming Events

- NAMA Informal Consultations, March 8, 9, 12, 14, 2012
- Friends of Services' Plurilateral Talks, March 19, 2012
- Regular Agriculture Committee, March 21-22, June 20-21, September 26-27, 2012
- Trade Facilitation Negotiating Group, April 16-18 and July 9-12, 2012
- WTO General Council, May 1-2, July 25-26, October 3-4, December 19-20, 2012
- G-20 Summit, June 2012, Los Cabos, Baja California Sur (Mexico)

Geneva Watch is published by Dairy Farmers of Canada, Chicken Farmers of Canada, Egg Farmers of Canada, Turkey Farmers of Canada and Canadian Hatching Egg Producers to report on the various events occurring in Geneva, particularly on the WTO negotiations on agriculture.

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