

Services Negotiating Group to Restart Talks

Mexican ambassador to the WTO, Fernando de Mateo, who chairs the negotiations on services, has invited about 33 key WTO Members (Argentina, Australia, Barbados, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, the EU, Haiti, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Japan, South Korea, Lesotho, Malaysia, Mauritius, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand Turkey and the U.S.) to attend a meeting of the negotiating group on March 20.

The plan is to re-open discussions at the multilateral level instead of keeping it closed to the 16 so-called friends of the chair (Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, the EU, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Mexico, Pakistan, Singapore, South Korea, Switzerland, Taiwan, and the U.S.) who have been exploring alternative approaches for advancing the services talks, under the leadership of both the U.S. and Australia.

In his fax sent to delegates on March 2nd, de Mateo said he wants to “exchange views on how to advance the negotiations ... taking into account recent consultative efforts among some delegations,” and that the two rounds of brainstorming discussion that have taken place among the friends of services were in line with the MC8 decision to “more fully explore different negotiating approaches” in order to reach an agreement on all Doha Development Agenda (DDA) issues.

Sources say the Chair was forced to restart the multilateral talks following emerging developing countries’ rejection of the EU invitation to join the services plurilateral talks. Brazil, China, and India did not want to give any legitimacy to the current sidelined talks by joining it. On January 28th, they issued a joint statement in Davos, Switzerland denouncing the initiative saying that it goes “against the fundamental principles of transparency, inclusiveness, and multilateralism.” However, they declared being open to consider tackling services under the DDA. As such, de Mateo invited most countries that were involved in the July 2008 services signaling conference” along with representatives of regional groups and least developed countries.

Meanwhile, the EU, for its part, denied extending an invitation to the three emerging economies. It claimed to have explored the idea of hosting a similar meeting, but dropped it when it heard of Ambassador de Mateo’s intent to organize a service discussion under the DDA.

The U.S. will host the friends of Services’ third negotiating round on plurilaterals the week of March 19th.

Upcoming Events

- NAMA Informal Consultations, March 8, 9, 12, 14, 2012
- Friends of Services’ Plurilateral Talks, March 19, 2012
- Services Negotiating Group, March 20, 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)

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