

## **Agriculture Negotiating Group to Resume Talks**

Agriculture negotiating group Chair and New-Zealand's Ambassador, John Adank, sent a fax to delegates inviting them to attend his first open-ended informal meeting of the year which will take place the afternoon of March 22<sup>nd</sup>.

The long-awaited meeting will brief the full Membership on the consultations the chair has been holding since his February 10<sup>th</sup> communiqué, inviting delegations that wish to meet with him to outline their views on the negotiations and how they see the work of the agriculture special session progressing in the period ahead.

Officials said Adank had identified the export competition pillar as one of his top priorities for 2012. They said the chair believes that an agreement on this pillar can be reached this year, even in the midst of the current economic and political environment.

Much like his NAMA counterpart who has put forward a 3-step consultation plan on all areas of the NAMA talks, some Members expect Adank to clearly outline how he expects to organize work this year, taking into account the outcome of the 8<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference (MC8) held last December.

## **NAMA Talks**

The NAMA negotiating group held the first of a series of four meetings scheduled in March to help move negotiations forward (8/03/12). The Chair, Swiss Ambassador, Luzius Wasescha – who plans to retire at the end of July – previously outlined a 3-step plan that will seek consultations on all areas of the NAMA negotiations using different formats, after which Members would switch to a debate mode where Wasescha intends to present different options, before finally starting negotiations on these options.

Thursday's (March 8<sup>th</sup>) meeting was directed to explore the three objectives set by Ministers at the MC8; i.e. exploring different ideas for the negotiation, advancing where progress can be made, and assisting ministers to look into ways of breaking deadlocks. The discussion focused on non-trade barriers (NTBs) the so-called "Wagon I" (mostly technical barriers to trade, but also including the Horizontal Mechanism and Remanufactured goods), where some proposals have achieved a certain degree of convergence.

Discussions, though, didn't permit advancement on the three issues. Thus, Wasescha suggested considering them in a small group format. According to one official, the U.S. continued to insist that "there was no energy, political momentum or convergence of views to engage in further consultations on many of the NTBs issues still in the agenda," expressing doubts over the potential success of the chair's proposed small group consultation if no discussion on the tariffs component of the talks (and an outcome in market access) are not tackled in parallel.

The U.S. questioned whether focusing solely on NTBs in small groups would change the outcome as it could be either productive or continue to irritate the process. The EU meanwhile took the opposite view, saying it was open to continue the negotiations on NTBs areas where convergence has been achieved so far.

Officials said other Members also expressed doubts on the possible progress in NTBs, giving the impression that work in that area is moving in circles without a clear way forward.

On March 12<sup>th</sup>, Members gathered again for a half-hour discussion on so-called NTBs “Wagon II” issues; i.e. matters that are seen as creating more controversy than “Wagon I” (e.g. Export licensing, Export taxes, unilateral trade measures (the U.S. embargo against Cuba)).

Officials said Cuba, supported by several Latin American countries such as Ecuador, Venezuela, Argentina, Nicaragua and Brazil, said it wanted a deep debate on the unilateral measures imposed against them that were “inconsistent and incompatible” with WTO principles, whereas the U.S., for its part, reiterated its long-standing position that the subject would never gain consensus.

Given the differences in opinion, the EU, China and Switzerland urged the negotiating group to focus on NTBs issues listed in Wagon I as Members do not seem to be ready to tackle “Wagon II” issues.

The group will conclude this first series of negotiation on March 14<sup>th</sup> when they will take on the tariff-related issues of the negotiations, namely the Swiss formula coefficients along with the flexibility to be granted to developing countries.

## Upcoming Events

- NAMA Informal Consultations, March 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
- Agriculture Negotiating Group Open-ended, March 22, 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)
- WTO Public Forum, September 24–26, 2012

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