

Geneva Watch

An overview of the WTO negotiations on agriculture

More Negotiating Groups Resume Talks

Negotiating groups have intensified their respective discussion lately. After NAMA consultations during the past two weeks, other negotiating groups are set to resume talks next week, starting with Services where the chair, Fernando de Mateo has called for an open-ended meeting on March 20 to explore how to multilateralise the talks that have been taking place among the “16 Friends of Services” (Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the European Union, Hong Kong, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, South Korea, Switzerland, Taiwan, and the United States) by involving emerging economies.

Agriculture attachés will also be solicited as several informal consultations are scheduled throughout the week to look at two papers tabled this week: Australian non-paper on export subsidies and Japan’s proposal on export restrictions. These issues are expected to be raised within the regular agriculture committee meeting (March 21-22) before, agriculture negotiations chair, John Adank, gathers the full Membership for an informal open-ended meeting either Thursday or Friday (March 23) to wrap up discussions and outline the way forward with the agriculture negotiations in 2012.

Australia’s non-paper focuses on export subsidies, specifically, requesting that the secretariat produces a report on Members’ commitments and trends for export subsidies over the period 95-2010 – “what particular categories of export subsidies are being utilized” – but also on food aid e.g. “aggregate food aid volumes across the list of product groupings.” Australia asked the report to be completed in time for the June 2012 regular agriculture committee meeting.

Ambassador Adank is said to have identified the Export Competition pillar as one of his top priority for this year along with other topics that will emerge from his consultations which could be mature enough for completion.

Sources also say it is unlikely that the US opposes moving ahead with the export competition pillar as the USTR may opt to support the Australian initiative with the view to show their readiness to negotiate in good faith given that a deal on export competition may trigger a positive step toward pushing the DDA forward.

As for the EU, sources said it is willing to go down that road as well given the support provided by some of its member-states among which the UK, Denmark, Finland, Sweden have all urged the Commission to fully engage in the export subsidies discussion.

The week will be capped by an informal open-ended meeting of the full Membership with Adank’s concluding remarks on his own consultations and his work plan/priorities for the remainder of the year.

NAMA Tariff Talks

The long awaited discussion on the tariff reduction component of the NAMA talks finally took place on March 14. Talks on this controversial issue – the Swiss formula and the flexibility to be granted to developing countries – have not been tackled since 2008, nearly 4 years since the March 14th meeting.

The discussion meanwhile was inconclusive as there was a widespread divergence among the membership on how to proceed, one source said, and this even though the NAMA chair, Swiss Ambassador, Luzius Wasescha, suggested new ideas to help advance the discussion.

According to the official, several developing countries expressed the view that new ideas to resolve the tariff issue were worth exploring, however, most wanted to stick with what is contained in the 2008 draft modalities text, which they said, is the result of difficult negotiations.

The US, for its part, regretted that there was not a robust discussion on the tariff reduction formula, something that it had hoped for. The US which has previously claimed 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,” declared being ready to discuss some NTBs issues such as textile labelling and remanufacturing provided that the discussion does not move the file backwards. The EU said it is open to discuss all issues, including some that other countries are adamant to drop, like the NTB-related Horizontal mechanism and export restrictions.

In his concluding remarks, Wasescha acknowledged that some ideas presented deserved further reflection and assured that he would continue consultations with different small groups of countries on how to design a way to move forward the discussion on both NTBs and tariffs, by taking into account Trade Ministers’ recommendations at the MC8 i.e. explore different ideas for the negotiation, advance the talks where progress can be made, and provide new avenues to break deadlocks.

Upcoming Events

- 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
- G-20 Trade Ministers, April 2012, Mexico
- 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
- TPP Negotiations May 8-18, 2012 Dallas (USA)
- OECD Forum, May 22-24, 2012, Paris (France)
- APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade, June 4-5, 2012, Kazan, (Russia)
- G-20 Summit, June 18-19, 2012, Los Cabos, Baja California Sur (México)
- APEC Leaders Summit, September 2-9, 2012, Vladivostok, (Russia)
- WTO Public Forum, September 24–26, 2012

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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