

Geneva Watch

An overview of the WTO negotiations on agriculture

WTO Director General Race

The WTO full Membership held a three-day General Council gathering to listen to all nine candidates aspiring to replace Mr. Pascal Lamy as Director General of the institution.

The candidates were given about half an hour to introduce themselves, to make their respective pitch and answer Members' questions as to why they think they are the best person to lead the organization for the next four years.

All of them insisted on the fact that they possess the right combination of negotiating skills, experience – whether that be at the business, managerial or political level – to effectively lift the WTO out of its current funk by injecting new energy and fresh ideas to bring the institution back to the forefront of the global trade negotiations once more.

They all pledged to serve as an honest broker between Members and to be an effective link between the Membership and the WTO secretariat. Among their commonalities was also the need to concentrate their immediate effort in making the 9th Ministerial Conference in Bali a success, which in turn would create much needed momentum to tackling the remaining topics of the Doha Development Agenda (DDA).

However, it is on the strategy to push the negotiations forward that candidates differed a little. Indonesia's former Trade Minister, Ms. Mari Elka Pangestu, believes she has the passion, the tenacity and the knowledge to deliver on the WTO's "bigger package". Her experience, leadership skills "as well as her ability to listen, find consensus and common opportunities amongst countries with different levels of development as well as between groups with different interests," will help unlock the Doha's gridlock.

Ms. Anabel González, (Costa Rica's Minister of Foreign Trade who was Director of the WTO Agriculture Division between 2006 and 2009) –said she is cautiously optimistic that Bali would deliver concrete outcomes and pledged to engage in a candid discussion.

Korea's Trade Minister, Mr. Taeho Bark, insisted on the need to rebuild trust. "[P]roblem-solving must start from going back to the basics," he said, which to him means restoring "the original Geneva-culture" whereby Members enter into a frank discussion regarding their differences and "frankly explore possible solutions."

Mexico's candidate, Mr. Herminio Blanco, for his part, intends to let Members decide how to deal with the remaining issues under the DDA and simply act as "an effective bridge-builder".

Ghana's former Trade Minister, Mr. Alan Kyerematen, calls for a "New Trade Consensus" composed of five key "strategic drivers" that will enable Members to "approach decision-making in a flexible and inclusive manner." He would ask Members "to take a broader and more flexible view of possible negotiating approaches and outcomes," one that would consider "plurilateral agreements on their merits, as long as the basic multilateral framework of non-discrimination is respected."

New Zealand's Trade Minister, Tim Groser, and Brazilian ambassador to the WTO, Mr. Roberto Azevêdo, took a bolder approach by simply claiming that they do not have a post-Bali strategy at the moment.

"I am not a man with a plan" said Mr. Groser, adding that he would rather come in with "a dozen different working hypotheses" including one which might fix the negotiating function.

Mr. Azevêdo, also declared he did not have a “pre-conceived solution either” but, that efforts to breathe life into the DDA must be resumed immediately after Bali. “We all know that the WTO is bigger than the DDA, but the reality is that the system will remain clogged unless we can find a way to unlock the Round. “We have to deal with the gaps, as they exist (...) [t]his is one of the areas where I’m certain I’ll be a good fit if you trust me with the DG position,” he told the entire Membership.

Upcoming Events

- CETA Ministerial Meeting, February 6-7, 2013, Ottawa (Canada)
- Informal Agriculture Negotiation, Mid-February
- General Council, February 15–26, May 1-2, July 24-25, Oct. 8-9, Nov. 5-6, 2013
- TPP Round XVI, March 3–14, 2013 (Singapore)
- Regular Agriculture Committee, March 26, September 4, November 12, 2013
- APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade, April 20-21, 2013
- OECD Annual Forum, May 27–31, 2013 (Paris)
- APEC Leaders Summit, October 1–8, 2013
- WTO 9th Ministerial Conference (MC9) December 3–6, 2013, Bali (Indonesia)

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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