

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)

After nearly 14 months of exploratory discussion within the so called U.S.-EU High Level Working Group on Jobs and Growth which started on November 2011, U.S. President, Barack Obama, announced on February 12, that the US and the EU agreed to launch negotiations on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

The TTIP aims to be a very high-standard agreement covering a broad range of areas including amongst other things, a complete elimination of tariffs – which are already low: an average of 5.2% for the EU and 3.5% for the US according to WTO estimates – but also addressing other areas such as service investment, labor, environmental matters as well as harmonizing both countries' regulatory issues and standards – which according to the EU are equivalent to a tariff comprised between 10% and 20%.

“Through this negotiation, the United States and the European Union will have the opportunity not only to expand trade and investment across the Atlantic, but also to contribute to the development of global rules that can strengthen the multilateral trading system,” the two trading powers said in a joint statement.

That being said, no one expects these negotiations to be easy as several question marks remain as to how some of the most sensitive matters – including agriculture issues such as GMO and hormone-beef or intellectual property issues such as GIs – will be dealt with. For the EU some of these issues won't be included in the talks whereas U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk and Deputy National Security Advisor for International Economics Michael Froman, believe that “Everything is clearly on the table.”

“[W]e understand there will be sensitivities of issues on both sides, and part of what we'll be working through over the next 18 months is how best to make progress in the context of those sensitivities,” Froman said on February 13th.

The negotiations are not perceived to start before mid-2013 (June or July) as both sides will seek formal negotiating approval from their respective constituency – the Obama administration has to notify US Congress of its intent to negotiate with the EU in the coming weeks which in turn will kick-off a 90-day consultation process and similarly the EU will seek a formal negotiating mandate from its member-states which it hopes to receive by the end of the Irish presidency of the EU.

“Ideally, we'd like to complete this work in about two years from now – but, more paramount than speed is achieving an ambitious deal,” said EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht, making reference to the goal of completing the TTIP within 18 to 24 months.

Impact on CETA

During the press conference, Commissioner De Gucht was asked why Canada-EU trade agreement was blocked at this point. He said he continues to be confident that both sides can reach an agreement in the coming weeks but added that there are a number of issues that are not ready without specifying which ones.



“We do not see what could be the good agreement to close and although we would like to have the agreement as soon as possible, in the end, quality goes before speed, and we will find the right solutions for those topics and only then we’ll close the agreement,” De Gucht concluded.

Sources said CETA negotiators are expected to meet very soon - as early as the week of February 18, though not on agriculture issues.

WTO - Informal Agriculture Committee Special Session

The agriculture negotiations group met on February 15 to start their consultations with respect to topics that could be candidates for early harvest in Bali. Friday’s session focused on the G-33’s paper on food security or more precisely, public stockholding for food security,” which was circulated by the group last November and which proposes classifying public stockholding destined to enhance food security as green box support.

A questionnaire on countries’ food security /food aid programmes has been circulated to delegates in that regard and filled by about 22 Members.

The February 15th informal session kicked off a series of technical meetings – starting the week February 18 until early March and destined to better understand the proposal.

Throughout that period, Members will be given the chance to present and explain their own programme and exchange information on the issue without compromising their negotiating position or WTO obligations, Agriculture Negotiations chairman, New Zealand Ambassador to the WTO, John Adank said. Thus, they would then be in a better position to discuss the proposal itself and to assess its implications, the chair added.

Members generally agreed with the chair’s proposed timetable, with some voicing the need for a more precise timetable of meetings and topics to be discussed over the coming months which Ambassador Adank said would likely emerge once the technical meetings start.

Upcoming Events

- 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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