

APEC Meeting in Indonesia

With limited progress achieved so far on the “Bali Package” (trade facilitation, agriculture and least-developed countries (LDC) issues), WTO Members look to accelerate the negotiations in order to achieve a substantial outcome at the 9th ministerial meeting in Bali (MC9) in December. A “change in mind-set” is needed as Members discussed at the April 11th Trade Negotiations Committee (TNC) meeting, and are now looking to gather political support in the coming months to help advancing the negotiations.

The April 20-21 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) trade ministers meeting in Surabaya (Indonesia) was seen as one of two annual ministerial gatherings (the other is the traditional mini-ministerial meeting in Paris on the sidelines of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) annual forum) to help inject much needed momentum into the process.

For the occasion, APEC trade ministers issued a statement in support for the multilateral trading system.

“There is broad convergence of view that the negotiation as it stands now is not on course to lead to a successful outcome at MC9 on December 3–6, 2013 in Bali,” the APEC statement reads.

“We are deeply concerned about the state of play in the negotiations and we call on WTO Members to change the quality and level of engagement in order to expeditiously and effectively advance our work. We encourage all Members, particularly major players, to work hard to bridge the gap in coming months, recognizing that the continued viability of the WTO’s negotiating function is at serious risk. With the APEC economies representing more than half of world’s GDP and 44% of world trade, we accept our responsibility to make significant contribution to securing tangible results at MC9.”

APEC ministers said they committed to promoting progress in the negotiations on the Bali package and show the “political will and flexibility necessary to achieve convergence by MC9.”

The U.S. and China both warned that failure to achieve something concrete in Bali may also spell the end of the Doha Development Agenda (DDA).

“We are committed to better facilitating the negotiation process to guide us towards a balanced and meaningful outcome of MC9 for all Members,” APEC ministers stressed, adding that the MC9 should be a “stepping stone to future progress on other areas covered by the DDA negotiations,” providing a renewed confidence in the multilateral trading system. “Achieving that outcome must be the priority of Members’ work this year, but it cannot be the end. We reaffirm our commitment to build on the Bali package to achieve the full conclusion of the DDA and to continue the negotiation to address the remaining DDA issues post-Bali. In doing so, we will continue to respect the Doha mandate and its development dimension,” they concluded.

NAMA Talks to Wait for Bali

Meanwhile in Geneva, the NAMA (non-agricultural market access) negotiating group met on April 18th to essentially agree to freeze their negotiations until the post-Bali process begins. The chair of the NAMA negotiating group, Swiss Ambassador Remigi Winzap, said there was little interest in actively pursuing negotiations in industrial goods as delivering anything in this area of the talks in the short-term seems very difficult and could “rock the boat to Bali.”

While some delegations were ready to continue technical work on Non-Tariff Barriers, none of them were ready to work on the NAMA core-modalities at this stage, one official who attended the meeting said.

Because negotiations on NAMA market access are intrinsically linked to agriculture, Members were not ready to discuss the NAMA tariff reduction at this stage.

Ambassador Winzap said there hasn't been any fundamental shift in major players' position on market access thus far. The level of engagement in this important area of the DDA would depend on several factors, including the outcome in Bali and the negotiations' overall dynamism, the Swiss diplomat added.

Japan Welcomed into TPP

On April 12th, Acting U.S. Trade Representative, Demetrios Marantis, announced that the U.S. has successfully completed its bilateral consultations with Japan which focused on automotive, insurance sectors and Japan's non-tariff barriers (NTB) and welcomed Japan's participation in the TPP negotiations – pending a consensus agreement among the current TPP members and the completion of the respective domestic processes.

On April 19 and 20, TPP trade ministers held a meeting on the sidelines of the APEC gathering to discuss the possible inclusion of Japan in the ongoing TPP negotiations. The group has welcomed Japan so far, claiming that its participation “will underscore the economic significance of TPP and its promise as a pathway toward a Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific.”

That being said, Japan's formal participation in TPP rounds would have to wait for the U.S. Congress' green light following the 90-day consultation the U.S. administration holds with its Congress.

Upcoming Events

- WTO Director General Selection; Round 2, April 24, 2013
- Panel of Experts' Report: “Defining the Future of Trade,” April 24, 2013
- Green Room, every fortnight starting May 1, 2013,
- General Council, May 1-2, July 24-25, Oct. 8-9, Nov. 5-6, 2013
- TPP Round XVII, May 15–24, 2013, Lima (Peru)
- OECD Annual Forum, May 27–31, 2013, Paris (France)
- Informal Trade Negotiations Committee, May 31, 2013
- Regular Agriculture Committee, June 13-14, September 4, November 12, 2013
- Deadline for Bali Deliverables, August, 2013
- WTO Public Forum, October 1–3, 2013
- 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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