

Geneva Watch

An overview of the WTO negotiations on agriculture

TPP Negotiators Looking for Creative and Pragmatic Solutions Ahead of Bali Summit

At the 19th Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiating round, which took place in à Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei, from August 22-30, negotiators from the 12 countries involved in the talks – Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, United States and Vietnam – continued to advance the negotiations. The aim is to reach an important milestone by the time leaders meet on the sidelines of the October 7-8 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit.

Earlier in the week, trade ministers – including Canada's trade minister, Ed Fast – met on August 22-23 to consider how to address key outstanding issues with the goal "to offer guidance to negotiators and help drive the negotiations to conclusion on the 2013 timeframe" as directed by leaders.

Speaking on behalf of the group, newly appointed U.S. Trade Representative, Mike Froman, stressed that "the majority of issues are now at an advanced stage" and that "the 12 countries have explored how to develop a mutually-acceptable package, including possible landing zones on remaining sensitive and challenging issues and sequencing of issues in the final talks."

"Particular areas of focus have included matters related to market access for goods, services/investment, financial services, and government procurement as well as the texts covering intellectual property, competition, and environmental issues. We also discussed the remaining outstanding issues on labour, dispute settlement, and other areas," Froman stressed.

In Brunei, chief negotiators focused their work on the following chapters: rules of origin, financial services, environment, investment, intellectual property rights (IPR), government procurement, market access (including textiles) and competition.

The talks are slowly entering the political phase of dealing with the most sensitive issues. These are fairly substantial and include market access for goods (including agriculture), rules of origin, intellectual property rights (pharmaceutical patent protection and access to medicine), state owned enterprises, investment, financial services, government procurements and environment.

With respect to market access, there is still a lot ambiguity regarding the shape the final outcome. This is spurred by the United States which is negotiating bilaterally with "some" of the TPP members, having not only shared tariff offers that differ, but also only with those countries they don't currently have a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with. It remains unclear whether the results of the bilateral market access negotiation will be plurilateralized in the end.

At the end of the 19th TPP Round, negotiators did not announce when the next round will be taking place like they have done after each of the past 18 rounds. Various sources stressed that chief negotiators will be meeting in Washington D.C. on September 18-21 to continue tackling outstanding issues with the goal of providing ministers with a more advanced state of play in the TPP. It is also likely that chief negotiators will join ministers in Bali where the latter will hold another meeting prior to the APEC Summit.

The chapters that are likely to be tackled in Washington are unknown, but several intersessionals are being scheduled in September such as Technical Barriers to Trade in Mexico on September 2-5, e-commerce on September 2-6, in San Francisco and legal issues in Washington D.C. As this might be the last of the formal rounds, negotiators might now move to a different setting which may resemble the upcoming Washington gathering, where they will be take on only few chapters.

WTO Welcomes New Director General, Roberto Azevedo

Pascal Lamy has now left the building! Former Brazil's ambassador to the WTO, Roberto Azevedo, officially replaced him on September 1st.

The new director general, who will be formally welcomed by the full Membership during a general council meeting on September 9th, is expected to attend the upcoming G-20 Leaders' Summit in St. Petersburg on September 5-6.

Azevedo said he intends to intensify the work towards the next Ministerial Conference (MC9) in Bali. "[T]he WTO and the multilateral trading system are at an important crossroads," Azevedo stressed, "The 9th Ministerial Conference, which will be held in Bali from 3rd to 6th of December 2013, is a key priority. A successful meeting there will provide a much needed shot in the arm for the global economy and the WTO."

To help him deliver a concrete outcome in Bali, the Brazilian diplomat announced the appointment of his four deputy directors composed of former China's current ambassador to the WTO, Yi Xiaozhun; Germany's Karl-Ernst Brauner, who has represented Germany at the trade policy committee in Brussels; Nigeria's ambassador to the WTO, Yonov Frederick Agah, and the U.S.'s David Shark, who has been United States' Deputy Permanent Representative to the WTO since 2000. Mr. Azevedo has also appointed Australia's ambassador to the WTO, Tim Yeend, as his chief of staff.

"I believe that a deal can be struck, despite the short time we have between now and Bali. I shall do everything I can to see that agreement is reached. But there is no such thing as a sure thing, and a great deal of work and commitment are required in the coming weeks if we are to succeed," the new WTO chief said.

Upcoming Events

- Regular Agriculture Committee, September 4, November 12, 2013
- General Council, September 9, Oct. 8-9, Nov. 5-6, 2013
- The G-20 Leaders' Summit, September 5-6, 2013 St. Petersburg (Russia)
- TPP Chief Negotiators Meeting, September 18-21, Washington D.C. (U.S.)
- 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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