



Geneva WATCH

An overview of the bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral trade negotiations

Charles Akande, Editor

WTO Members Prepare for Low-Key Ministerial Conference

As they prepare for the 10th Ministerial Conference (MC10) meeting in Nairobi, Kenya this upcoming December, World Trade Organization (WTO) Members face two major questions:

1. What can be done in Nairobi, as it is now clear that they won't be able to close the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) there given the number of difficult issues still open particularly in areas such as domestic support and market access?
2. What to do with the remainder of the DDA, as it appears that a consensus – albeit a very fragile one – seems to be emerging from including export competition elements and development issues (mainly duty free quota free, services waiver, cotton and rules of origin) in the package?

The failure to find convergence in two of the agriculture negotiations' three pillars (domestic support, market access and export competition) has left delegates with only export competition as a possible outcome for Nairobi, since most have brought their export subsidies down to zero and the few who still use this measure, have committed to reducing it.

However, even if this is seen as a more mature item for the MC10, agriculture negotiations chairman Vangelis Vitalis, reminded Members on October 2nd that there is no consensus on the overall contours of the export competition package, "let alone its precise content nor indeed how this might relate to what happens after Nairobi."

Some developing countries have also pushed for issues such as the Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM) to be included in the Nairobi package. They argued that SSM is not linked to market access and that the measure would help protect developing countries' farmers from the adverse impacts of big players' subsidies. However, the inclusion of this item faces stiff opposition.

At a meeting of the General Council on October 8th, Members agreed to keep the discussion going. There is an agreement to begin working on the potential outcome for Nairobi within the negotiating groups and seeking Members' views on what the final Nairobi document might look like. On this the WTO's Director General, Roberto Azevêdo, presented three options:

1. a Ministerial Declaration, the usual document of Ministerial Conferences which has some weight in the future work of the organization
2. a non-consensual Chairperson's statement, which carries less weight
3. a hybrid of some sort – which could be partly consensual text and partly non-consensual text

A parallel discussion will also take place on the future work that will be carried out after the MC10 as it is clear that whatever the outcome in Nairobi, this will not represent the conclusion of the DDA single undertaking, thus the question what to do with the DDA issues that are not properly addressed at MC10?

"At this point, there are divergent views on what happens after Nairobi," Azevedo told the full Membership on October 8th. "Many say that if there is no consensus to end the Doha Round then it will simply continue – you would need consensus to end it – and that we should state this clearly. Others say that if we do not deliver Doha by Nairobi then that will be it – even without a formal statement affirming the demise of the DDA."

On October 12, Azevedo appointed three Ambassadors – Ambassador Gabriel Duque of Colombia, Ambassador Harald Neple of Norway and Ambassador Stephen Karau of Kenya – to facilitate consultations with Members and collect their views on "the structure of the potential Nairobi outcome document; the elements that the document might cover (which could include priorities for post-Nairobi work); and what subsequent process could be employed to develop a draft of the outcome document."

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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