

Editorial: Life after the G-20

Now that the G-20 Summit is finally behind us, trade observers focus on whether another ministerial meeting could be called this July, before the WTO's summer break. On that, Director General Pascal Lamy said on April 7 while in Zambia that he would gather ministers "as soon as possible" but "will not fix a deadline."

"I will reconvene ministers when I feel that the will to compromise is there ... and then if we were to do this and cross the line, what we call modalities, the end of the round could be six or eight months ahead from that," Lamy said adding that the WTO now awaits the results of the Indian elections and the new U.S. trade position before assessing the way forward.

In a speech to the Global Innovation Forum in Washington last week, U.S. Trade representative, Ron Kirk, stressed that his office was thoroughly reviewing the Doha Development Agenda and other trade initiatives, cautioning not to take the U.S.'s silence "as any substantive thought in terms of our direction." Kirk said the one thing he wanted to do was to "take a comprehensive look at everything and not do it tactically." Lamy will now have to hope that none of the major players: the Indians, the Japanese or the EU, decide to go through a similar process following their respective domestic elections.

New Agriculture Negotiations Chairman Confirmed

As anticipated, WTO members have agreed that New Zealand's ambassador to the WTO, David Walker, will be the new chairman of the agriculture negotiations replacing Crawford Falconer, who remained in Geneva as special ambassador to the WTO Doha Round agriculture negotiations after Dr David Walker became New Zealand's ambassador to the WTO late last year. "Dr Walker is one of New Zealand's most experienced trade negotiators and I have no doubt he is fully committed to bringing the agriculture negotiations to a successful conclusion. New Zealand is pleased to be able to make a further important contribution to the WTO process and I wish Dr Walker the very best of luck," said Tim Groser, former agriculture negotiations chairman and now New Zealand's Trade Minister.

The selection is the result of General Council chair Mario Matus's consultations with members who he informed on April 8 that the consultations "have shown a consensus" to appoint Dr Walker. Helping him in the consultations, which started on March 18, were ambassadors John Gero of Canada, who chairs the Dispute Settlement Body, and Muhamad Noor Yacob of Malaysia, a former General Council chair.

WTO chairs are formally elected by the bodies they chair. Their terms run from one ministerial conference to the next, unlike the chairs of the regular WTO councils and committees, whose terms are annual. Officials said Ambassador Walker's appointment will likely be confirmed at the next formal meeting of the agriculture negotiations which date has yet to be determined. Walker will then officially become the third New-Zealander in a row to chair the agriculture negotiations, after Tim Groser (2003-2005) and Crawford Falconer (2005-2009). Ambassadors Groser and Falconer have both left before the end of their terms, in Mr Groser's case to enter politics. Ambassador Falconer left to become a deputy secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Services Negotiations

The latest talks on services which took place between March 30 and April 6 mainly focused on “the regular work of the Services council” i.e. the organization’s General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) said Abdel-Hamid Mamdouh, the WTO Trade in Services Division Director. This indicates that the services negotiations will remain on hold for the moment.

Rather than discussing the Doha negotiations, Members asked the WTO secretariat to conduct new studies on regulatory and policies issues in some 20 sectors including telecommunications, cross-border movement of workforce and financial services. The economic downturn, particularly the financial crisis, has poured cold water on talks to further opening borders to financial services. Some delegates have already voiced the need to review some of the promises made at last July’s Services Signalling Conference given the amplitude of the financial crisis.

Upcoming Events

- General Council, May 27-28, July 28-29, Oct. 13-14, Dec. 17-18, 2009
- Official Appointment of the WTO’s DG, May 31, 2009
- India General Elections, May 2009 (at the latest)
- EU Elections, June 7, 2009
- OECD Ministerial Meeting, June 24-25, 2009 (Paris, France)
- G-8 Summit, July 8–10, 2009 (La Maddalena, Italy)
- APEC Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Trade, July 21-22, 2009 (Singapore)
- WTO Public Forum, Sept 28–30, 2009

Geneva Watch is published by Dairy Farmers of Canada, Chicken Farmers of Canada, Canadian Egg Marketing Agency, 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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