

## **Editorial: Doha Talks Still in Slow Motion**

The two Green Room gatherings convened this past week by WTO's Director General Pascal Lamy did not produce the progress required to move the negotiations in this so-called "end game" atmosphere. Indeed, apart from the fact that Members agreed on a new work plan for the next three months – with three specific weeks devoted to each area of the talks i.e. one week in October, one in November and one in December – it remains unclear as to whether a push to secure modalities on agriculture and NAMA will come before the end of the year in order to finalise the round by 2010.

The Green Room meetings, however, gave each negotiating group chair the chance to report on the status of their respective discussions and outline which areas require further work to advance negotiations. "Everybody had a calendar and now our calendar is full until the end of the year," NAMA chair Luzius Wasescha said.

The past week's gatherings were also meant to prepare for Lamy's trip to the G-20 summit. Referring to the much anticipated Pittsburgh Summit on Sept.24-25, Lamy said his message to leaders would depend on the result of discussions the week of September 14. For now, Lamy finds the current negotiating process to be "too slow". "Either this week there is good progress and I will report this, or there is no good progress and I will report that," said the DG, adding that he will tell leaders frankly whether a deal next year can be struck or not. Based on the outcome of this first week of consultations, it is likely that Doha will remain on the backburner in Pittsburgh.

## **Stalemate continues in NAMA**

Following the Green Room gathering, NAMA chair, Ambassador Luzius Wasescha, asked Members to provide him with "signals" on crucial aspects of the negotiation like the sectoral initiatives, Non Tariff Barriers, preferential erosion or country-specific problems (South Africa, Argentina and Venezuela) to push the talks forward. Instead, he got warnings from some delegations on the dangers of reopening some "stable" texts (like preference erosion) or renegotiating some aspects of the mandate (like the link between the coefficients in the formula and flexibilities and their application by developing countries). There were calls for transparency in some of the bilateral meetings going on and the need to maintain a truly multilateral approach throughout. But more importantly, there was no consensus on sectorals with countries like South Africa rejecting the idea to use Wasescha as a facilitator to advance discussions. In conclusion, the chair urged proponents of sectorals to provide an overview on where they stand, what their plans for the future are and an assessment of the chances of success for this initiative. He further described himself as a cook who can only make progress in the kitchen if Members provide him with the necessary ingredients and apart from a general agreement that the negotiations have to be concluded by the end of 2010, there were not many ingredients provided.

## **Agriculture Work Plan Unveiled**

For his part, Agriculture negotiations chairman, Ambassador Walker said he will work with Members to develop a schedule for the coming months over the next few days, with the aim to complete the negotiations in 2010. The chair said the programme will have two tracks:

1. Ongoing work on developing "templates"
2. Tackling outstanding topics in the December 2008 draft and working papers

Walker convened a Room E gathering with about 36 delegations to consult on the programme which, according to him, contains about 11 outstanding "issues or categories of issues" left open in the latest draft modalities including: domestic support, sensitive products (selection and treatment), tariff capping, tariff simplification, special safeguard mechanism, special products and preference erosion/tropical products. The aim of the meeting was to identify which issues should be covered and in what order.



## Reactions

Walker's programme was generally accepted by Members with several of them stressing the need to maintain the December draft as the basis of the talks. The EU for instance stated that it could not accept Members seeking to alter the parts of the December draft that have already been "secured". However, some like the U.S., never really accepted the last revised draft as the basis for future talks. The new Senate Agriculture Committee Chairwoman, Blanche Lincoln, warned that if the U.S. has to go back to the negotiating table, it must be with a new text. "We cannot go back to the old text". Brazil and the African Group were somewhat cautious and claim that the draft, as it currently stands, is conditional on the outcome in other subjects which in other words may require some "rebalancing".

## The WTO and Pittsburgh

Lamy said he has not written nor agreed on any G-20 language at this stage, but claimed that there is "now a clear realization in the WTO that if there is no acceleration (of the talks), then the 2010 deadline will not be doable". Discussions have so far landed little progress, even in services, where key delegations such as Brazil and Argentina rejected the idea of fixing a deadline for the submission of revised service offers before having clarity on agriculture and NAMA.

Lamy recognized the need to have the U.S. to show some signs of life. He vowed to press leaders at the G-20 Summit in Pittsburgh to "throw their weight behind a Doha deal". However, given the internal debate currently going on in the U.S., it is unlikely that the Obama administration will have the resources to devote to trade this year. U.S. Trade Representative, Ron Kirk, himself admitted that "the queue is a little full for the president right now" and a detailed speech outlining the Obama administration priority seems rather unlikely at this point.

Moreover, according to sources, the preparatory work done so far for the Summit in Pittsburgh has left little place for trade, especially with the controversy created by the Obama administration's decision to impose a 35% tariff on Chinese tires. Trade observers expect G-20 leaders in Pittsburgh to reiterate their ongoing support for concluding Doha while refraining from imposing new trade restrictions.

## Upcoming Events

- NAMA consultations, September 23-24, 2009
- G-20 Summit, September 24-25 (Pittsburgh, USA)
- Technical workshop schedules ("templates"), Sept. 25; Oct. 2-3 2009
- WTO Public Forum, Sept 28-30, 2009
- Agriculture Consultations week of Oct.12, Nov. 16 and Dec. 7, 2009
- General Council, Oct. 13-14, Dec. 17-18, 2009
- 7<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference, November 30-December 2, 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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