

Editorial: Low Expectations for MC7

Ahead of the ministerial conference, WTO Members once again received a warning from the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC¹) Member-countries who urged delegates to step up to the plate or run the risk of missing yet another deadline. Discussions in Geneva have looked rather slow the past several weeks, but the Director General, Pascal Lamy, aims to change that by scheduling text-based negotiations involving Senior officials a week before trade ministers gather for the 7th Ministerial Conference.

APEC Reiterates Support for Doha

In their final statement following a ministerial meeting held in Singapore on November 11-12, APEC's trade ministers stressed that they remain "determined to ensure an ambitious and balanced conclusion to the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) in 2010, based on the progress already made, including with regard to modalities," and to refrain from implementing "all forms of protectionism" measures. The statement vows to "translate recent political commitments into tangible progress in the negotiations" ahead of the WTO 7th Ministerial Conference (MC7) scheduled for the end of the month.

The MC7 will be an important opportunity to take stock of progress made so far, APEC ministers said, urging Members to accelerate the pace of the talks in all areas under negotiation, particularly in Agriculture and non-agricultural market access. Progress should be through various avenues (i.e. bilateral and multilateral discussions) involving text-based negotiations to evaluate and close the remaining gaps before entering what Lamy once qualified as "the endgame". This intensification of work will enable negotiators to meet the 2010 target set by G-20 leaders in Pittsburgh earlier this year.

The group had previously made similar declarations in past years – and most recently in July 2009 – which have had limited impact on advancing the talks. This time, however, the group warns that the DDA may again miss its 2010 target unless Members show "maximum flexibility" to secure consensus on a final package. "We note the importance of continued involvement and stand ready to engage directly to ensure momentum is maintained," APEC Ministers stressed adding that they will again assess the DDA's situation no later than early 2010.

Observers believe this declaration, just like those produced in the past, will remain empty as the U.S. is not ready to enter the endgame. Lamy himself acknowledged that during an interview with an Italian newspaper last week, saying that "the U.S. is proving to be slow in reaching a clear and articulated negotiating position" and that this may, in the end, create a bigger problem as 2010 is also the year of the U.S. mid-term elections.

Even though Obama has lately recognized the need to open trade in order to boost the U.S. economy and more generally, the global economy, the U.S. President, meanwhile, has somehow put a twist on his assessment calling "countries to import more U.S. goods and the world to rely less on exporting to the U.S." Moreover, the Washington based Bureau of National Affairs, reported that Obama told a panel of private sector advisers that the U.S. trade policy was in a "debilitating gridlock" and needed to be coordinated more effectively. The U.S. President is said to be looking for "the kind of growth that used to characterize the U.S. economy – export-driven growth, manufacturing growth, growth that pays high wages and provides high living standards for a broad-based middle class."

¹ Australia; Brunei; Canada; Chile; China; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Republic of Korea; Malaysia; Mexico; New Zealand; Papua New Guinea; Peru; The Republic of the Philippines; The Russian Federation; Singapore; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; United States and Viet-Nam.

So far this has been what the U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk has been searching for, i.e. a commitment from emerging developing countries to provide more market access in the NAMA sectoral discussion and particularly chemical products, electronics and machinery goods in order to move things forward.

MC7

According to WTO officials, over a hundred ministers (or ministerial level officials) have already confirmed their participation at this year's Ministerial Conference, which will feature two working sessions expected to address the state of the DDA. The first, entitled "Review of WTO activities, including the Doha Work Programme", will be chaired by Lamy on Dec. 1st. The other session, "The WTO's contribution to recovery, growth and development" on December 2, will most certainly address the DDA as well, albeit in a less detailed manner.

Ministers are poised to take two decisions during the three-day meeting: to extend two moratoriums on electronic commerce and "non-violation" cases in TRIPS and to agree on the dates and location for the 8th Ministerial Conference.

Upcoming Events

- FAO World Food Summit, Nov. 16-18, 2009 (Rome)
- Agriculture Consultations week Nov. 16 and Dec. 7, 2009
- Regular Agriculture Committee, Nov. 19, 2009; March 11-2, June 10-11, Sept. 16-17, Nov. 18-19, 2010
- Senior Officials Meeting, week of Nov 23-27, Dec 14-16
- 7th WTO Ministerial Conference, November 30–December 2, 2009
- General Council, December 17-18, 2009

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.

For more information or comments, please visit: www.farmsandfoods.ca

Legal Deposit:
National Library of Canada
ISSN 1496-9254

