

# Geneva Watch

*An overview of the WTO negotiations on agriculture*

## Editorial: Low Key Stock-Taking Gathering Confirmed

After a few days of senior officials' consultations, it came as no surprise when WTO Director General, Pascal Lamy, announced at the end of the Green Room meeting that the much-anticipated end of March "stock-taking" gathering will have to be done at the senior officials' level rather than at the Ministerial level. One positive outcome from this week's senior officials meeting (SOM) has to be the presence of Michael Punke, the Obama administration nominee for U.S. ambassador to the WTO who had attended most of the meetings where Members did not pull any punches with blame over the U.S.'s lethargic stance toward the negotiations. No doubt, Punke will be able to carry Members' frustration back to Washington.

## Senior Officials Meeting

Senior officials from the former G-7 Group – Australia, Brazil, China, the EU, Japan, India and the U.S. – met with Director General Pascal Lamy to discuss the status of the Doha Round and what needed to be done to bring things back on track. Michael Punke, the likely replacement of Peter Allgeier as U.S. ambassador to the WTO but who is still awaiting the U.S. Senate approval of his nomination, was also in attendance as an observer. Sources attending the meeting reported that several Members didn't hide their frustration with the lack of political engagement in the negotiations. It was reported that emerging developing countries ambassadors – Brazil, China and India – called for a two-stage process which will first involve trade ministers to tackle the remaining outstanding issues during the tentative end of March stock-taking meeting, before leaving the stage to the heads of state to address Doha Round at the G-20 Summit in Toronto on June 26-27.

However, this plan was opposed by the U.S. which, according to officials, is still pushing for bilateral meetings among Members as a means to advance the talks. The U.S. is of the view that Members do not need a stock-taking to seriously engage in intensive negotiations. Officials said the U.S. fears that the stock-taking will turn into a sort of "U.S. bashing event", where countries will seize the opportunity to blame them for the lack of progress in the talks.

## No Ministers at the end of March

At the Green Room convened on February 18, Members agreed with Lamy that at this stage it was preferable to give up on calling ministers to Geneva for the end of March stock-taking meeting (March 29-April 2). The meeting instead will take place – as anticipated – at the senior officials' level, who will return to Geneva a week before for the second scheduled SOM (March 22-26). The decision – though not a surprising one – came after senior officials admitted that not enough progress had been achieved so far on the remaining technical issues.

The U.S. is the one to blame for this "sudden" change of plans, Members said, making reference to the U.S.'s ongoing push for bilateral talks to take place between countries in order to find convergence on some issues. That said, sources reported that for the first time since the talks collapsed in July 2008, the U.S. is said to be willing to show flexibility and make additional concessions should emerging developing countries (Brazil, India, China, South Africa) agree to provide more market access.

Australia and other countries suggested not ruling out a possible involvement of ministers at a later stage to save the prospect of concluding the round in 2010. One such event could take place in a month or two, after the March stock-taking meeting, as soon as progress is finally recorded in Geneva. However, most observers think a gathering of ministers – days before or on the sidelines of the June 26-27 G-20 Summit – is a more likely target.

At the last G-20 Summit in Pittsburgh last September, the G-20 leaders asked their respective trade minister to “take stock of the situation no later than early 2010.” Lamy said this meeting will now take place at the senior officials’ level from March 29 to April 1. It is expected that the chair of each negotiating group will report on the progress achieved thus far in their respective areas before a formal decision can be taken on how we move forward.

Lamy will report back to the full Membership during the General Council on February 22<sup>nd</sup>. There, he is expected to urge Members to continue their effort to narrow the gap without setting any specific deadlines, one official who attended the Green Room said.

## Canada to Take General Council Chairmanship

This week, names of the next chairs of various WTO committees have been floated, pending their formal approval due to be made at the February 22<sup>nd</sup> General Council meeting. As expected, Canada’s ambassador to the WTO and current Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) Chair, John Gero is set to take over the General Council chairmanship. His current position as chair of the DSB will be occupied by Nigeria’s ambassador, Yonov Agah.

The other nominees are:

Committees	Ambassador (Country)
Trade Policy Review Body	H.E. Mr. Bozkurt ARAN (Turkey)
Council for Trade in Goods	H.E. Dr. Anthony Mothae MARUPING (Lesotho)
Council for Trade in Services	H.E. Mrs. Elin Østebø JOHANSEN (Norway)
Council for TRIPS	Mr. Martin GLASS (Hong Kong, China)
Committee on Trade and Development	H.E. Mr. ERWIDODO (Indonesia)
Committee on Balance-of-Payments Restrictions	Mr. Raimondas ALIŠAUSKAS (Lithuania)
Committee on Budget, Finance and Administration	Mr. Pasi-Heikki VAARANMAA (Finland)
Committee on Trade and Environment	H.E. Mr. Eduardo MUÑOZ GÓMEZ (Colombia)
Committee on Regional Trade Agreements	H.E. Mr. Alfredo SUESCUM (Panama)
Working Group on Trade, Debt and Finance	H.E. Mr. Federico A. GONZÁLEZ (Paraguay)
Working Group on Trade and Transfer of Technology	H.E. Mr. Hisham M. BADR (Egypt)

Meanwhile, the chairpersons of the negotiating groups (e.g. Agriculture, NAMA etc.) are expected to remain in place except for Rules and TRIPS negotiations. Rules chairman, Uruguay ambassador Guillermo Valles Galmes, is expected to be replaced as he is set to leave his Geneva position. There should also be a new chairman for the special sessions on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights which are likely to be led by Darlington Mwape (Zambian ambassador). All these ambassadors are expected to be officially confirmed at the General Council meeting of February 22<sup>nd</sup>.

## Upcoming Events

- General Council, Feb. 22-23, May 5-6, July 29-30, Oct. 6-7, Dec.14-15, 2010
- Agriculture Consultation, March 1-12, 2010
- Regular Agriculture Committee, March 11-12, June 10-11, September 16-17, November 18-19, 2010
- NAMA consultations, March 15-19, 2010
- Senior Officials Meeting (SOM), March 22-26, 2010
- Stock-Taking Meeting, March 29- April 2 , 2010
- G-20 Summit, June 26-27, 2010



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