

Editorial: Weighing the Pros and Cons

With the poor progress recorded thus far in the negotiations, many trade observers are starting to gather in the camp of Doha doubters. That is the case of former senior trade officials who participated in a symposium organized by the European Centre for International Political Economy. Whether it's Franck Lavin, former U.S. undersecretary of commerce for international trade or Roderick Abbott, and Stoler Survey, two former WTO deputy director-generals, all expressed serious doubts that the Round would conclude this year, mostly because of the lack of real political interest being shown. Only former agriculture negotiations chairman,

Stuart Harbinson, thought the Doha has "a realistic possibility" of being concluded this year, citing the recent constructive discussion between China and the U.S. which "could impart considerable momentum." However, the bilateral discussions between these two trade powers have yet to produce a breakthrough. Maybe former European Trade Commissioner Leon Brittan has it right when he said the missing piece was a "pressure from industry" which made the difference in the Uruguay Round. His words seem to have resonated as WTO Director General Pascal Lamy plans to visit Washington the week of March 14th, hoping to rally the U.S. business community behind Doha to shift the weight toward the pro-Doha side.

USTR Annual Report

In its annual trade policy agenda released on March 1st, the office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) identified the WTO as one of its important items for 2011, but one that comes after other priorities such as the National Export Initiative, which aims to double exports by 2015, or the Columbia, Korea, and Panama FTAs and the Transpacific Partnership (TPP).

The USTR continues to stress that success in the Doha Round hinges on "securing meaningful market access commitments in agriculture, industrial goods, and services, particularly from key advanced developing countries that continue to be the fastest growing economies and are increasingly key players in the global economy."

The U.S. has challenged Brazil, China, and India to open their markets, particularly in the industrial sector — chemicals, electronics, forest products, health care and industrial machinery — to create new trade flows in order to conclude the Round. "[A]chieving a successful conclusion of the DDA in 2011 will mean shifting this long-running negotiation towards a clear focus on making markets – for industrial goods, services, and agriculture – much more open," the report states.

Bilateral talks held with China the week of February 21nd did not produce the kind of progress the U.S. was hoping for, although both camps admitted that their discussions were constructive.

Reports indicate that China continues to resist participating in the sectoral initiatives that the U.S. has identified as most important to them, such as chemicals, electronic goods and industrial machinery.

"There are clearly large gaps (...) the current pace of progress is simply not sufficient, and this is worrisome," USTR spokesperson, Carol Guthrie told the Bureau of National Affairs, a Washington based news publisher. "The need for serious negotiations, particularly through bilateral contact, is becoming more urgent than ever," she added.

In its annual report, the USTR mentions that it will continue to focus on a two-track approach: a bilateral track that includes meetings with Brazil, China and India, in “an effort to facilitate real give-and-take negotiations that can ultimately lead to a successful outcome in NAMA” and a multilateral track “to advance sectoral initiatives.”

Upcoming Events

- Informal Trade Negotiations Committee, March 8, 2011
- Agriculture Negotiating Group Meeting, March 9-18 , 2011 (TBC)
- NAMA Week, Mid March, 2011
- G-11 consultations, Week of March 21, 2011
- Regular Agriculture Committee, March 31, 2011; June, September and November 2011
- Revised Draft Modalities Texts, April 2011
- G-20 Summit on Agriculture, June 22-23 2011 Paris (France)
- Potential DDA Mini-Ministerial Meeting (Modalities), July 2011 (TBC)
- WTO Ministerial Conference (MC8), December 15-17, 2011

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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