



Geneva WATCH

An overview of the bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral trade negotiations

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Opposition to CETA

The week of April 11 saw a number of European officials threatening to veto the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA).

First of all, the Walloon government's minister-president, Paul Magnette, who told the Walloon Parliament on Wednesday April 13 that his region will not give its green light to the Belgian Federal government to ratify CETA unless it is guaranteed that its red lines, including issues related to the investor-state dispute settlement mechanism, are addressed.

“Until we have all the guarantees, it will not be possible for us to ratify such a text, and nor is it possible to give full rein to the minister of foreign affairs,” Magnette was quoted as saying during a parliamentary committee debate. The Walloon government backed a draft resolution that rejects a provisional entry into force of the agreement. The resolution also seeks to clarify whether CETA is compatible with other European treaties.

Romania and Bulgaria also voiced concerns

On April 14, the Romanian delegation in Brussels stressed that it will withhold its approval of CETA until a resolution is found regarding the Canadian regime of obligatory visas for Romanian citizens. Canada offers a visa-waiver to citizens of all EU member states except Romania and Bulgaria. Bulgaria said it is still in discussions with the Canada government to resolve the issue.

Romania meanwhile stressed that Bucharest expects to achieve full visa reciprocity in its discussion with Canada on visa issues. “Any Canadian citizen can travel visa free to Romania since 2002. This expectation is grounded on our excellent bilateral relations and also on the fact that, since 2008, the Canadian authorities have

committed themselves to this objective, both bilaterally and in the dialogue with the EU,” the Romanian delegation stated.

In a communiqué released on Thursday, the Romanian delegation explained that “starting at the EU-Canada summit in 2008, and continuing at the 2014 EU-Canada summit, Canada committed to relax its visa regime for Romanian citizens so as to provide unrestricted movement to all European citizens [as soon as possible] without any discrimination.” But Bucharest said this has not been done yet, hence it is exploring other avenues through which to obtain changes in the Canadian visa regime.

“In the wider context of the shared goal of signing and ratifying the Strategic Partnership Agreement and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) Romania feels that maintaining the Canadian visa regime for Romanian citizens puts them at an evident, unjustified disadvantage to the other European citizens. The current situation bars Romanian citizens from newly-created economic and trade opportunities. In this situation the Romanian authorities will reassess, at the EU level, the approach to the relationship between the EU and Canada so as to secure the goal of having obligatory visas for Romanian citizens eliminated,” Bucharest stated.

“We are hoping that the determination, indicated by the current Canadian government, to open the visa policy towards other close political and trade partners of Canada, will contribute to lifting the visa requirement for the Romanian citizens as fast as possible,” the Romanian delegation in Brussels stated on April 14, adding that the move would be “a natural and timely step in light of the 40th anniversary of the EU-Canada relationship and the upcoming EU-Canada Summit later this year, expected to mark a turning point for our future political and economic ties.” One European source said Romania will address the issue when Canada Trade Minister Chrystia Freeland visits Brussels the week of April 18.

Developed Countries Call for Plurilateral in NAMA

The non-agriculture market access (NAMA) negotiating group met on April 11 to explore ways to move their talks forward. One of the main discussion points revolved around the framework under which future negotiations would be best served.

The US reminded others of the status quo in some Members' positions, adding that it cannot cut its tariffs while others (i.e. emerging countries) maintain flexibilities and no binding commitments. It asked Members to consider alternatives like plurilateral deals which have enable the WTO to deliver on the Information Technology Agreement (ITA).The plurilateral framework has also been used to negotiate the Environmental Goods Agreement (EGA).

Other prominent developed countries like the EU and Japan also supported the US's idea. The EU said that while it believes that tariff reductions are the "bread and butter" of the WTO, it cannot progress on the basis that the EU bears obligations while its competitors enjoy flexibilities, perhaps making plurilateral agreements the best way forward. The Commission meanwhile suggested that any plurilateral approach should have a clear sectoral coverage, be of interest to both developed and developing countries and industries, have high economic importance, and include inputs for production. The EU cited pharmaceuticals and the chemical sector as areas where plurilateral negotiations can take place.

Meanwhile, China still insisted on the need to maintain special and differential treatment at the core of any NAMA discussion, regardless of whether the negotiations are undertaken on a plurilateral or sectoral basis. India also insisted that the revised draft text (Rev. 3) continues to serve as the basis of the negotiations.

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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