



# Geneva WATCH

An overview of the bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral trade negotiations

Charles Akande, Editor

## EU's Views on the Post-Nairobi Agenda

**The World Trade Organization (WTO) is at a turning point, the EU Trade Commissioner, Cecilia Malmström, told a dialogue meeting with European civil society on April 26<sup>th</sup>.**

Malmström stressed that the last WTO Ministerial Conference (MC-10) in Nairobi, Kenya, was a “threefold success” as it allowed Members to reach an agreement on the elimination of export subsidies, while expanding the Information Technology Agreement (ITA) to new products and, more importantly, gave delegates a chance “to adapt” the negotiating agenda going forward.

“[T]he Doha Round of WTO negotiations were blocked for many years (...) Now, with the Nairobi Declarations and the somewhat ambivalent statement on the future of the WTO, the way is open for a true consideration of where the organization needs to go, from now,” Malmström said.

There is wide recognition among Members that most of the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) topics will simply not disappear. What the Nairobi Declarations has created, is an atmosphere where Members are encouraged to tackle some of those issues under a different framework such as plurilateral agreements. Malmström, for her part, prefers tackling some of the issues multilaterally, however “we must also be realistic” she said.

“If it's a choice between making progress with a smaller number of partners or no progress at all, then we will choose to move forward – plurilaterally,” the EU Trade Commissioner declared, whether this is undertaken on a most-favoured nation basis, or not.

### Agriculture Domestic Support Top Priority

There are three categories of issues Malmström see emerging, following the consultations held in Geneva thus far. First, there is strong support for tackling domestic support in agriculture. Along with the EU, a number of countries, including Australia, Canada, and the U.S., are taking a closer look at developing countries' agricultural subsidies, after various studies have shown that countries like China and India have become huge agricultural powerhouses, with an increasing level of domestic subsidies over the past decade. These countries have failed to notify the WTO about their agricultural domestic spending..

“This is one of the most important and challenging unresolved issues, which many Members care about. Therefore, advancing on domestic support will be crucial for progress to be achieved on other issues,” Malmström said, citing digital trade and investment as two other areas of extreme importance to the Membership.

Malmström also cited fisheries subsidies, India's push for a permanent solution for public stockholdings for food security, services, export restrictions on energy and raw materials, and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) as part of the outstanding issues WTO Members appear to support.

Then there are the issues that appear destined to be tackled only on a plurilateral basis as Members hold divergent views on the issues. Market access for goods is one of the areas where a plurilateral or sectoral negotiations could be pursued, Malmström said.

At a recent meeting of the industrial negotiating group (non-agricultural market access, or NAMA), the U.S. asked Members to consider alternatives like plurilateral

deals for NAMA. Other prominent developed countries like the EU and Japan supported the idea. 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, and have high economic importance, and include inputs for production.

One informed source said the European Commission is currently brainstorming options on how to move the WTO's agricultural negotiations forward. The Commission will likely present its ideas at the traditional WTO mini-ministerial meeting held on the sidelines of the May 31– June 1 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) annual gathering in Paris.

**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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