



# Geneva WATCH

An overview of the bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral trade negotiations

Charles Akande, Editor

## Shifting from Neutral to Full Speed Ahead?

**With the location set for the next World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference (MC11), Members have turned their focus to the agenda of the day, with discussions taking scheduled to take place both in Geneva and outside Switzerland.**

The first of those out-of-the-country meetings will come in the form of a two-day mini-ministerial gathering in Oslo (Norway) on October 21-22 involving 24 key countries (Argentina, Australia, Benin, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, EU, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kenya, Korea, Lesotho, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Pakistan, Russia, Rwanda, Singapore, South-Africa, Switzerland and the U.S.) to brainstorm about the next set of deliverables at the MC11.

Among the Nairobi decisions, trade ministers vowed to get involved earlier in the process to help build consensus for a successful outcome at the organization's 11<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference in Argentina in 2017. The aim of the Oslo gathering is to kick start this process by providing essential "political guidance on setting the scope of negotiations on issues already being discussed in Geneva, as well as other themes the Membership might be interested in," according to a statement circulated with the mini-ministerial program.

"This [brainstorming session] could include indications about what Members would like to achieve at MC11, and what needs to be done to get there. We hope that the meeting in Oslo will inspire ministers to further pursue ideas that can form the basis for positions and proposals in the WTO," the paper states.

The Oslo ministerial gathering will start with a lunch on October 21<sup>st</sup>, followed by a round table discussion where trade ministers will take on five key questions:

1. Building on the successes of Bali [MC9] and Nairobi [MC10], are smaller incremental steps easier to achieve than major leaps?
2. Would the locking in of existing policy regimes be more acceptable than results that require changes to domestic laws and regulations?
3. Would combining smaller multilateral steps with more ambitious plurilateral solutions within the WTO be a way to bridge the gap between ambitions and what is achievable?
4. Can the necessary balance be found within single issues, or is there a need for packages across issues?
5. How can Members seek balanced results, in the sense that everyone's interests are taken into account, and avoid the risk of hostage-taking?

Another session focusing on how to advance economic growth through international trade will complete the first day of meetings before trade ministers gather in a minister's-only dinner where they will exchange ideas on how to deal with the increasing backlash against globalization.

Two other sessions focusing on regional trade arrangements – whether these could be a source of inspiration for work in the WTO – and how to secure success at the MC11 and beyond are scheduled for the following day, before trade ministers close the two-day gathering with an hour-long lunch on October 22<sup>nd</sup>. It is worth noting that all the working sessions will feature a participation limited to minister plus one in the room.

## Where do we go From Here?

One of the key questions trade ministers in Oslo will try to answer is whether major comprehensive results are realistically achievable at the MC11, or whether Members would be better off with smaller incremental steps after the successes attained in both previous ministerials in Bali and Nairobi?

The Nairobi Ministerial Decisions put the emphasis on domestic support, public stockholding for food security purposes, a special safeguard mechanism, and cotton. However, discussions in Geneva have also demonstrated that Members are interested in addressing issues such as fisheries subsidies and e-commerce, in addition to important agricultural matters. As such, the underlining question ministers will have to answer is “what would be an appropriate mix between results to be obtained at MC11 and beyond?”

## After Oslo

No meeting of the agriculture negotiating group is anticipated before the Oslo gathering. Delegates previously expected the chair of the agriculture talks, New Zealand’s Ambassador, Vangelis Vitalis, to call a meeting of the full Membership in October. Now they believe the next agriculture negotiating group meeting (CoASS) will likely take place in mid-November, specifically from November 16 to 22 with a meeting of the full Membership on November 16<sup>th</sup>. This is anticipated to be followed by sessions on public stockholding on November 17<sup>th</sup> and cotton on November 18<sup>th</sup> before a discussion on the special safeguard mechanism on Nov 22<sup>nd</sup>.

The new schedule is believed to be built to provide enough time for Ambassador Vitalis to discuss the outcome of the Oslo ministerial meeting with key Members in Geneva, one informed source said.

**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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