



Geneva WATCH

An overview of the bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral trade negotiations

Charles Akande, Editor

Oslo Mini-Ministerial

Trade Ministers from 25 key World Trade Organization (WTO) countries met in Oslo on October 21-22 to discuss issues pertaining to the ongoing negotiations, including potential deliverables, as well as the political guidance they can provide in preparation for the 2017 WTO Ministerial Conference (MC11) in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Trade ministers stressed in Oslo that it was now urgent to move from reflection to action and agreed to focus the work on addressing pending agricultural issues, starting with trade-distorting domestic support based on updated notifications, cotton, and the mandated permanent solution for public stockholding for food security purposes.

Some also raised fisheries subsidies (i.e. to limit the subsidies that lead to overfishing), services including services facilitation (as requested by India, which has recently tabled a paper on the issue), non-tariff barriers, and e-commerce.

There were some differences in emphasis and priorities, Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Børge Brende, said in his summary of the meeting. However, most ministers stressed the need to be realistic, and to look for doable and meaningful results. The ministers agreed that outcomes should be achieved through incremental steps rather than major leaps, at least in the short term, Brende added.

“Consensus is developing amongst some WTO members on these issues (...) Much work remains, however, before a credible outcome can be expected,” he stressed in a statement released on October 24th.

“For New Zealand, NTBs and domestic support in agriculture remain issues that distort trade - and therefore need to be dealt with (...) this can only be properly addressed in the WTO,” New Zealand Trade Minister, Todd McClay said.

The ministers urged WTO Members to table fresh and concrete ideas at MC11. Delegates in Geneva are currently brainstorming how to address domestic support. Many believe the current U.S.-China dispute on agriculture subsidies could have positive repercussions on the negotiations.

The U.S. wants emerging countries such as China and India to agree to further reduce their trade-distorting support levels. China has claimed that it made enough effort in that regard when it joined the WTO in 2001 and looks to maintain its developing country status privileges as outlined in the 4th revised draft modalities (Rev4).

Although there is a disagreement on the Doha Round, Trade Ministers acknowledged that “all Doha-issues remain on the table” including agriculture and industrial products market access “that probably need more time before results may be harvested,” Brende said.

“This discussion will provide useful inputs for the ongoing conversations in Geneva, where WTO members are working to determine the way forward,” WTO Director General, Roberto Azevêdo, added.

Azevêdo welcomed trade ministers’ engagement throughout the process, leading up to the MC11, stressing that frequent informal mini-ministerial meetings such as this one, allows for more focused discussions and will provide the necessary political direction for delegations in Geneva.

Several informal ministerial gatherings are expected to be arranged throughout 2017 with the goal of delivering concrete results in Buenos Aires.

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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