



Geneva WATCH

An overview of the bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral trade negotiations

Charles Akande, Editor

July's General Council

The WTO full membership gathered on July 25-26 to discuss the state of play in the negotiations and the preparations for the 11th Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires (MC11).

Generally, speaking there is recognition that positive actions have emerged lately on issues that were previously stuck. Recently, several proposals have been tabled on various issues – including seven papers on fisheries subsidies and nine on domestic support, two topics Members hope to agree on in Argentina.

These proposals have set the stage for an eventful autumn, WTO officials said, as delegates prepare to intensify their work throughout the fall. They have at best 12 working weeks between the end of the “Jeune Genevois” holiday period (early September) and the MC11, agriculture chair Stephen Karau stressed.

There is one area where negotiations are advancing well and that is fisheries subsidies. The seven proposals tabled on the matter have all been converted into legal texts, and transformed into one consolidated text that will be circulated to Members and discussed this fall. The fact that no one has linked an outcome in fisheries subsidies with other areas of the negotiations gives a high degree of confidence that Members will be able to reach a successful outcome on this issue.

The agriculture chair also intends to intensify negotiations on domestic support, public stockholding, special safeguard mechanism, and other areas of the talks this fall.

“The issue we face today is how do we move forward considering the numerous elements available on the various topics, and their respective degrees of priority for the Membership, should we decide to move into text-based negotiations,” Karau said.

Many delegations envision that a substantial outcome at MC11 is within reach for public stockholding for food security purposes, domestic support, cotton and export restrictions. The same could not be said of other topics.

On domestic support, discussions have confirmed that reducing trade-distorting domestic support is a priority for virtually all delegations, Karau said. “Nevertheless, how to go about it still differs significantly,” he added.

Members are still holding to their red lines: India wants Article 6.2 (development box) to be excluded from the cuts; China wants to maintain its 8.5% *de minimis* level intact whereas the G-10 countries are concerned about an overall limit being imposed based on the value of production.

On market access, some countries, like Paraguay, Peru and Russia, would like to see a formal work program on the issue. They think that some incremental outcomes could be feasible at MC11, Karau said, while adding that others consider that a commitment to pursue market access negotiations post-MC11 would be more a realistic outcome. Others still simply believe that an outcome in this area will not be possible in Buenos Aires.

Susana Malcorra, Argentinean Foreign Minister and chair of the MC11, urged Members to “build bridges, not walls” at the Ministerial Conference as a lack of success in Buenos Aires is not an option, she said. The amount of work before Members is becoming a concern given the time left before MC11. There will be no time to spare after the summer break, she added.

WTO officials have said that Morocco has suggested holding a Mini-Ministerial in Marrakech on October 9-11 to assess the level of ambition for the MC11. However, this meeting has not yet been confirmed.

Meanwhile, the Trump Administration has nominated Denis Shea as the US Ambassador to the WTO. He has yet to be confirmed by Congress.

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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