



# Geneva WATCH

An overview of the bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral trade negotiations

Charles Akande, Editor

## Marrakesh Mini-Ministerial

**Over 30 key World Trade Organization (WTO) Members – including Canada – attended the October 9-10 informal ministerial gathering in Marrakesh (Morocco). This latest meeting represented the third mini-ministerial held by Members as part of the preparatory work for the WTO’s 11<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference (MC11) in Buenos Aires (Argentina) this December.**

The gathering really started the afternoon of October 8<sup>th</sup> with participants holding bilaterals before the opening session. Trade Ministers officially kicked off the informal ministerial gathering on the 9<sup>th</sup> with a series of meetings held on various formats, bilateral, small group meetings to tackle specific issues, and plenary sessions co-chaired by the Morocco’s Minister of Industry, Investment, Trade and Digital Economy, Moulay Hafid Elalamy, and the chair of MC11, Argentina’s Minister, Susana Malcorra.

Officials said Ministers reviewed most of the eight topics currently on the agenda for MC11. The WTO’s Director-General, Roberto Azevêdo, told Ministers that there were some promising issues on the table, but there remains a long way to go in all areas in order to deliver a successful outcome at MC11.

Some matters, meanwhile, were described as more doable than others, one source said. It was recognized that if there was to be a successful outcome in Buenos Aires, issues such as domestic support, public stockholding for food security purposes, cotton, fisheries subsidies and transparency in export restrictions could be part of a the package. There are still rather large divergences on most, if not all, of those issues.

South Africa suggested that Members consider Marrakesh as the last opportunity to find convergence on issues for the MC11. If they failed here, they should consider abandoning the negotiations altogether, one source stressed. South Africa has been described as one of the countries that do not want to contribute toward achieving a successful outcome in Buenos Aires. Delegates in Geneva (Switzerland) have even described its position as dangerous for the MC11.

That being said, Ministers in Marrakesh decided to instead proceed with the ongoing negotiations in Geneva until November, as previously scheduled. Members have given themselves until two weeks before the start of the MC11 to finalize the negotiations in Geneva.

“This has been a positive meeting with strong support from Ministers for a successful 11<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires,” Azevêdo said at the end of the two-day ministerial. “We are certainly better placed after the discussion, but now need to translate this into action in Geneva. Ministers have heard one another’s positions and will now need to look at how to seek convergence – working with their Ambassadors in Geneva.”

“We should also work to ensure that we get the balance right in assessing the issues that we think we can advance at MC11 and those where further work will be required. All of this will require the same intensive levels of engagement to ensure we have a clear path forward both in Buenos Aires and beyond,” Azevêdo added, urging all Members “to make some kind of contribution” toward finding a balanced outcome.

“We can’t be in a position where Members insist on a particular outcome and expect everyone else to accept that. This is dangerous as one-size doesn’t always work for all,” he concluded.

The U.S. meanwhile did not oppose the decision to pursue the discussion in Geneva, but reiterated its view that consensus will be hard to achieve in Buenos Aires, given Members’ differences.

Plurilateral negotiations were also mentioned as an alternative to the multilateralism, particularly in areas such as e-commerce and investment facilitation, one source said. However, for the time being, Members prefer focusing on finding a multilateral agreement.

### **EU and the Cairns Group issued a joint Statement**

The EU and the Cairns Group Members (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, New Zealand, Malaysia, Pakistan, Peru, Thailand, Uruguay, and Vietnam), who are

currently trying to bridge their respective position on domestic support, released a joint statement at the end of the ministerial stressing that “there are significant – and in some cases growing – distortions in agricultural trade and existing rules are not fully sufficient to adequately discipline trade distorting subsidies.” The MC11 represents an opportunity to tackle these distortions, the two said.

“The European Union and Members of the Cairns Group jointly reaffirm a commitment to achieving progress and believe that focusing on a new discipline on the overall level of the most trade distorting domestic support, with due consideration to the development needs of developing members, offers a meaningful and achievable next step in this process,” the statement reads, adding that the two will continue to work together with all interested Members toward achieving new disciplines on agricultural trade distorting support.

**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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