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AGRICULTURE

Slow Progress on WTO Food Stockholding Talks

Trade negotiators have made slow progress in informal talks on amending WTO rules on food stockholding ahead of the global trade body's upcoming ninth ministerial conference in Bali, Indonesia, this December.

Delegates moved closer to agreement over how best to make information on subsidised food purchases for stockholding programmes more transparent to other WTO members, sources told Bridges.

The transparency conditions would apply to countries benefiting from an "interim mechanism" to provide greater flexibility to countries whose subsidised purchases for stockholding programmes could put them at risk of breaching current ceilings on trade-distorting support. (See Bridges Weekly, [14 November 2012](#)) The mechanism could take the form of a "peace clause" that would temporarily shield developing country subsidy programmes from legal challenge, sources said.

Developing countries in the G-33 coalition have sought greater flexibility to subsidise food purchases when building public stocks or providing domestic food aid. Large countries in the coalition, such as India, have argued that current rules on calculating trade-distorting subsidies fail to take due account of how price inflation has affected markets since the rules were first devised.

While developed countries fear that the proposed changes could open a loophole for developing countries to provide unlimited amounts of trade-distorting support through their public stockholding programmes, other developing countries are also uneasy about the potential impact of the proposals on their own poor producers.

Notifying farm support to the WTO

Informal talks convened by the chair of the agriculture negotiations, New Zealand ambassador John Adank, have led to convergence on possible transparency conditions, trade sources said.

"Members could easily reach consensus on transparency," one developing country delegate told Bridges.

A developed country official concurred. However, discussions over the scope of products to be covered by the arrangement and on possible safeguards to prevent



International Centre for Trade
and Sustainable Development

trade-distorting effects were moving more slowly, the sources said.

Strengthening requirements for WTO members to submit their regular subsidy notifications to the Committee on Agriculture was one option under consideration, trade sources said. Countries' notifications to the committee have often been significantly delayed in recent years.

Another possibility would be for countries to use as a template a questionnaire prepared by the chair of the agriculture talks earlier this year. (See Bridges Weekly, [23 January 2013](#))

Product coverage, safeguards: slower progress

Negotiators were still further apart in discussions over the scope of products that would be covered by the interim mechanism, one source said.

While some countries had proposed that the mechanism would cover a limited number of staple foods, such as rice and wheat, others argued that a broader basket of products should be covered.

"Different nations have different crops as staple foods," one trade official observed.

Negotiators are also still trying to define what safeguards could be agreed to limit the trade-distorting effects of subsidised food purchases for stockholding programmes. While some suggested that countries should be required not to export stockpiled food that had been purchased at administered prices, others argued that this was neither practicable nor desirable.

Opponents of the idea said that existing safeguards, such as the WTO's Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures, should instead prevent countries from causing domestic injury to producers in other countries.

Excessive inflation: what is "due consideration"?

A separate informal discussion last week on the margins of the WTO's regular Committee on Agriculture also looked at how excessive inflation should be given due consideration when the committee reviews how countries are implementing their commitments under the organisation's rules on farm trade.

Article 18.4 of the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture, which was agreed almost two decades ago at the end of the Uruguay Round, requires countries to give due consideration to inflation, but does not specify in detail how this should be done.

An informal "room document" circulated by Canada observed that Iceland, Tunisia, and Ukraine had all noted the impact of inflation rates when reporting their farm subsidies to the committee. The paper suggested that information on national inflation rates, and an explanation of how these may have affected countries' ability to abide by its commitments, could improve the functioning of the review process.

However, trade officials familiar with the talks told Bridges that developing countries were reluctant to engage in a discussion on the issue, while related negotiations were going on elsewhere.

"There was a refusal to discuss this," one trade official said.

A separate informal submission from the US, aimed at improving transparency on agricultural export restrictions, was also given a cool reception, sources said.

ICTSD reporting.

PREFERENTIAL AGREEMENTS

EU, US Trade Chiefs Address Regulatory Concerns Ahead of Negotiating Round

Top trade officials from both the EU and the US sought this week to dispel fears that regulatory differences could stymie efforts at reaching a bilateral trade deal, as negotiators prepare to kick off the second round of negotiations in Brussels on 7 October. The trade chiefs have jointly asked negotiators to aim for a "commonly agreed" outline of the regulatory and rules component of the bilateral pact – openly acknowledged to be the most difficult part of the talks – by January.

Given this timeline, this second round of talks, which will last from 7-11 October, is set to focus primarily on regulatory issues and standards, according to the European Commission. A third round is already slated for December in Washington, as both sides work to quickly negotiate a sweeping bilateral pact.

Officials have said that they hope to achieve substantial progress – and possibly complete a deal – by late 2014, given the timing of the congressional midterm elections in the US and the end of the current European Commission's term. The bilateral talks were formally launched just this past June during the annual G-20 leaders' summit, and negotiators held their first round of talks in Washington the following month. (See Bridges Weekly, [20 June 2013](#) and [18 July 2013](#), respectively)

Fear of "watered down" regulations unwarranted, trade chiefs say

The two sides have the world's largest trading relationship, exchanging US\$2.7 billion in goods and services daily, and account for a third of world trade flows. Tariffs between the EU and US are already low, averaging less than three percent. The big gains from a bilateral pact, analysts say, would involve harmonising differences in non-tariff barriers, particularly in the areas of regulations and standards – both famously tricky subjects for the two trading partners.

"The greatest opportunity – and the greatest challenge – of [the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, or TTIP] is in the area of regulation and standards," US Trade Representative Michael Froman [said](#) in a speech in Brussels earlier this week, following a meeting with his European counterpart, EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht.

Some critics, however, have warned that the negotiations to harmonise their different systems could lead to "watered down" regulations – a concern that both trade chiefs sought to assuage in their respective remarks this week.

"There is nothing we seek to do through TTIP to undermine the determinations that each of our systems has made with regard to the appropriate level of health, safety, and environmental protection of our people," Froman added.

The goal of the bilateral talks in this area is to "bridge the differences," rather than to pursue a "broad deregulatory agenda," he added. Specifically, cross-cutting principles that could contribute to this process include transparency, participation, and accountability.

Concerns, he said, over the US' perceived focus on cost-benefit analysis and Europe's preference for the precautionary principle are "largely anachronistic," noting that both sides do not limit themselves only to these considerations.

With regards to standards, the US trade official specifically called for negotiators to avoid restricting their development to "nationality-based" process.

"[This] is a tempting way to carve out market share for national constituencies, but the costs are too high, not just for trading partners, but also for standards-setters and regulators forced too often to leave cutting-edge technical solutions in the cold," Froman cautioned.

In separate [remarks](#), De Gucht sought to issue similar assurances, noting the EU's previous experiences in creating the single market among its own member states. The EU trade chief also said that he hopes to see a set of "horizontal rules" that would guide regulatory cooperation – in other words, the establishment of mutual recognition of regulations over various sectors.

"In this respect, ensuring joint transatlantic leadership in the development of global norms and standards goes hand in hand with building progressively a more integrated marketplace," De Gucht said.

ICTSD reporting.

AGRICULTURE

US Government Shuts Down, Leaving Farm Bill Unfinished

Lawmakers in the US were unable to reach a final budget compromise in the early hours of 1 October, triggering a shutdown of the federal government. Given the budget impasse, Congress was also unable to reach agreement on a 2013 Farm Bill, letting last year's extension to the 2008 legislation expire.

Farm policy has taken a back seat in recent weeks to a confrontation along party lines regarding the Obama Administration's reforms to US healthcare. Although procedural steps to move the omnibus legislation covering American agriculture are being assiduously addressed by the leadership of the agriculture committees, substantive compromises have remained subject to broader debates on the budget and the healthcare law.

Nutrition compromise efforts on hold

Before the August recess, the two chambers of Congress had differed on the nutrition component of the Farm Bill, so much so that they could not be reconciled. (See Bridges Weekly, [18 July 2013](#)) After legislators returned to Washington in September, compromises were being hashed out as some members of the House of Representatives put forward a bill to re-link the commodity and nutrition titles.

Though the measure did not pass, pundits say the effort indicated a willingness among sharply-divided lawmakers to eke out a compromise. Historically, rural farm interests and those concerned with urban nutrition have worked together to ensure the other a share of taxpayer funds.

Conservative lawmakers in the House, who had wanted to see deeper cuts in spending on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – more commonly known as food stamps – passed only the commodity portion of the Farm Bill earlier this summer. Democrats in the chamber, opposed to the cuts in SNAP, did not vote in favour of the Republican proposal.

A separate nutrition component of the Farm Bill was finally passed by the House late last month on a party line vote. The deep cuts in the House nutrition bill have been a source of contention between the two parties as they seek a compromise on farm policy. The Senate, on the other hand, has twice passed both the nutrition and commodity elements of its bill in as many years.

A final Farm Bill will require a procedural effort to reconcile the two bills. On Tuesday, members of Congress agreed on a group of senators to "conference" the two differing bills together, only for the government shutdown to put the process on hold.

Given the absence of a final bill, the possibility of an extension is again being discussed. Programmes such as food stamps, crop insurance, and existing subsidy programmes are likely to continue. Much like last year's farm bill extension debate, analysts predict that Congress could be spurred to action if Depression-era permanent legislation goes into effect at the end of the year.

Industry groups, analysts: Farm Bill could risk trade dispute

Prominent industry groups are worried that some programmes in the Farm Bill may spur trading partners to dispute whether or not the US is complying with international trade obligations. The National Foreign Trade Council, National Association of Manufacturers and US Chamber of Commerce recently released a [letter](#) that called on Congress to address the possible trade rule violations that could be caused by two programmes in the provisional Farm Bill commodity title passed earlier this year.

The letter, drawing on [analysis prepared](#) by the law firm White & Case, warns that the Senate's Adverse Market Payments programme and the House Price Loss Coverage programme would could "run the substantial risk of violating" WTO obligations for reasons similar to why the US was found to be at fault in the US-Brazil dispute over cotton support. (*Editor's note:* the White & Case analysis draws on [research prepared](#) by Bruce Babcock and Nick Paulson for ICTSD, the publisher of Bridges.)

Similarly, analysis [released by the University of Missouri](#) also argues that the shift from WTO "green box" compatible, or minimally trade distorting, direct payments to crop insurance programmes would make it more likely that this "might exceed [Washington's] commitments" to limit WTO "amber box" spending, which is viewed as trade distorting. Proposed changes in dairy support may prevent that from happening, however.

ICTSD reporting.

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

Political Engagement Needed for Bali Success, Azevêdo Warns

The past weeks of negotiations have yielded some encouraging advances, Director-General Roberto Azevêdo reported to WTO members on Monday. However, the pace of the Bali talks remains worryingly slow, he warned, given the few working days left between now and the December ministerial, and political engagement from capitals will be key to ensuring a successful outcome in the weeks to come.

Since taking office on 1 September, Azevêdo has been hosting an intensive series of meetings in various configurations with members, in the hopes of ramping up the preparations for the ministerial conference. Most of these have been among a cross-section of about 50 ambassadors, with at most one technical official each, in the "Room D/E" format, named after the rooms at the WTO where these meetings have been held.

The WTO chief has also held meetings with senior officials from capitals, as well as with the Trade Negotiations Committee (TNC), which is tasked with the overall Doha Round negotiations. (See Bridges Weekly, [26 September 2013](#))

Azevêdo: "Things are going to have to change"

The second cycle of Room D/E consultations kicked off immediately after the 23 September meeting of the TNC, with Azevêdo convening members for half a dozen sessions within the span of a week. Negotiating group chairs also held consultations in various settings to complement the process.

Reporting to members at another meeting of the TNC this past Monday, the Director-General noted some encouraging advances in all three areas – trade facilitation, agriculture, and development issues – over the past few days. However, he warned on Monday, "at the current pace we simply are not going to meet our target of having all landing zones clearly identified by the end of October."

"Things are going to have to change," he urged, while adding that he remains convinced that the task is not impossible.

Delegates speaking to Bridges in recent weeks have also noted some signs of improvement in the negotiations, while warning that any agreement in Bali will require some major compromises and calibrated ambition.

"The good news is that there is a process in place," one delegate commented to Bridges. "However, there is quite a bit of work still outstanding – some political, some technical."

At this stage, the new WTO chief is now sending a letter to ministers asking for their "personal and active" engagement in the remaining days before the ministerial. "Ministers and senior officials need to give you the additional room you need to genuinely look for convergence in each of the three areas," he told the TNC.

Azevêdo has set the end of this month as the window for negotiators to get their Geneva-based work done, and has urged members not to let this deadline – like previous ones in the long-running Doha Round negotiations – pass.

The Director-General is slated to attend this week's summit of APEC leaders, which is also being held in Bali. Trade observers will be watching the Asia-Pacific meeting closely to see what political signals officials may send regarding the WTO ministerial.

Work in Geneva is expected to continue in Azevêdo's absence, under the guidance of the respective negotiating group chairs, the least developed country (LDC) facilitator, and the four "Friends of the Chair" assisting in the trade facilitation talks. The Director-General will then host the next meeting of the Trade Negotiations Committee on 14 October.

Trade facilitation

Work around trade facilitation has intensified, Azevêdo said on Monday. However, the recent sessions also made clear the "considerable amount" of work that lies ahead. Customs cooperation – an area that some delegates speaking to Bridges have termed a "make or break" subject in the talks – has been given special time in the recent consultations.

The controversial Section II of the trade facilitation draft text – which deals with flexibilities for developing countries – was also discussed at length in the recent consultations, though advances throughout the talks have been "uneven."

The four "Friends of the Chair" – a set of senior officials who have been consulting with members since March on the remaining points of contention in the current draft text, under the guidance of Ambassador Eduardo Ernesto Sperisen-Yurt of Guatemala, who chairs the trade facilitation talks – will continue consultations with members until the next round of Room D/E consultations.

Agriculture: Members focus on "peace clause" details

The use of a "peace clause" as a potential interim solution to the controversial G-33 proposal on public food stockholding and domestic food aid has continued to feature prominently in the agriculture negotiations, particularly with regards to transparency, as well as safeguards to minimize any possible trade distortions. (For more on the agriculture negotiations, particularly the G-33 proposal, see related story in this issue.)

The two other proposals under consideration – both tabled by the G-20 coalition of developing countries – were also addressed during the latest Room D/E consultations. Divergences on the special and differential treatment component of the proposal relating to tariff rate quotas (TRQs) – which are used by some countries to charge higher tariffs on goods being imported after an initial quota has been filled – remain unresolved, though members are reportedly finding agreement on the transparency elements of the proposal.

On export competition, members are looking at whether a "step forward" on these disciplines, as outlined by the G-20, could be realistic for Bali, as well as whether and how the whole export competition pillar should be dealt with at the ministerial.

Monitoring Mechanism

The development-related consultations over the past several days have focused primarily on the proposed Monitoring Mechanism – an idea that has been in the works for several years – and issues related to the WTO's poorest members.

Earlier efforts to include the Cancún 28 proposals – a set of provisions related to special and differential treatment (S&DT) across the various WTO Agreements that were approved in principle a decade ago – and six Agreement-specific S&DT proposals in the Bali package have since been dropped.

The so-called Monitoring Mechanism would review the functioning of provisions in WTO rules for S&DT treatment in favour of developing countries and potentially suggest improvements. Discussions in the past week have focused on how often the mechanism should meet, its non-negotiating character, and the focus of the mechanism's review.

Proposals on two of the topics related to least developed countries (LDCs)- services and cotton – are still forthcoming. Meanwhile, Danish Ambassador Steffen Smidt has been consulting with WTO members over the past week on a revised proposal from the LDC Group regarding rules of origin, which sources say have been well-received. The divide within the same group regarding duty-free, quota-free market access remains unresolved, with Azevêdo urging both LDCs and other interested members “to reflect upon what is doable” before the ministerial.

ICTSD reporting.

POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

UN Assembly Ramps-up Pressure on MDGs, Clarifies Post-2015 Goals

Heads of state and senior officials attending the UN General Assembly have agreed to accelerate progress on achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), while taking another step forward in clarifying the post-2015 agenda. Leaders pledged to place a special emphasis on the "most off-track MDGs and those where progress has stalled" in the final stretch before the MDGs expire in 2015.

The 24 September-1 October meeting had been pegged as a key moment to take stock of what countries have achieved in their commitment to the eight international development goals, which were established in 2000. The Assembly was also expected to help flesh out the details of the new set of goals that will be implemented once the MDGs expire in 2015.

The [outcome document](#) from a special meeting held specifically to address the MDGs notes concern from member countries over "unevenness" and "gaps" in certain areas. The document calls on countries to accelerate progress on all goals, with a particular emphasis on poverty and hunger, access to primary education, child mortality, access to reproductive health (including maternal health), environmental sustainability, and access to water and sanitation.

Officials also pledged to increase aid to countries that have been "left furthest behind." In particular, officials noted that, "despite some impressive progress, most African countries remain off-track in meeting the goals."

The MDGs are eight development benchmarks targeting some of the world's most pressing humanitarian issues, ranging from halving extreme poverty rates to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education.

While success in achieving the goals has been mixed, General Assembly President John Ashe stressed that countries cannot give up even though the goal may be out of reach.

"Urgently implementing the global partnership for development is not only a moral obligation but will also put us at the best possible starting point for agreeing what comes next," Ashe told delegates. "We must do everything possible to accelerate action and get the job done by 2015."

High-Level Panel, SDG inputs to merge

The groundwork was laid for the creation of a successor to the MDGs in October 2010, when the outcome document for the "2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the MDGs" urged the Secretary-General to begin the follow-up process.

Significant progress was made at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in June 2012, where member countries started the process of developing a set of goals that would build upon the MDGs from 2015 onward. Countries agreed on the need for close linkages between the MDG and post-2015 processes.

Moreover, the post-2015 goals are expected to place a special emphasis on inclusiveness and sustainability, a point underscored by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon last week.

"It needs to be rights-based, with particular emphasis on women, young people, and marginalised groups," Ban told delegates last week. "It must protect the planet's resources, emphasise sustainable consumption and production and support action to address climate change."

Various possible facets of the post-2015 goals have already been discussed both by a specific Open-Ended Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which was launched in Rio, and a High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons. Some critics have voiced concern over possibility that the two separate processes could result in wasted effort and duplication.

Last week, leaders officially launched intergovernmental negotiations aimed toward the eventual adoption of a post-2015 development agenda, which will bring together the two processes into one universal set of goals.

To that end, the Open-Ended Working Group on the SDGs is set to conclude its work and publish a report by September 2014. The UN Secretary-General will then synthesise this together with the report by the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons released earlier this year, into one single document by end-2014. (See Bridges Weekly, [6 June 2013](#))

The negotiations will culminate in a September 2015 summit, where heads of state and government are expected to adopt the agenda.

ICTSD reporting.

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

Bali Preparations, Innovation in Focus at Annual WTO Forum

Civil society actors, including NGOs, academics, private sector representatives, and policymakers, gathered in Geneva this week to address the various linkages between innovation and trade, and the related challenges and opportunities that have emerged in the rapidly changing global market. The annual outreach event – known as the WTO Public Forum – comes in a ministerial year for the global trade body, with ministers from the 159-member organisation set to meet in the Indonesian island province of Bali this December in an effort to clinch a “mini-package” from the long-running Doha trade talks.

Though the main theme of the event was innovation, with sessions touching on subjects such as e-commerce, mobile technology, and the digital economy, the spectre of the upcoming ministerial conference loomed over the three-day proceedings, with various meetings specifically tackling different aspects of the Bali negotiations.

Bali-related topics on the agenda ranged from the Doha Round's impact on least developed countries (LDCs) to trade facilitation from business and consumer perspectives, as well as the implications of the ministerial for the remaining Doha process and the post-2015 development agenda, to name a few.

Despite recent reports of a “new dynamic” in the WTO ministerial preparations, Director-General Roberto Azevêdo has warned repeatedly in the weeks since he took office that the process remains too slow, and that new approaches and flexibilities are vital if the December high-level conference is to be successful. (For more on the Bali talks, see related stories, this issue)

The new WTO chief alluded to the timing in his opening remarks on Tuesday, noting that the multilateral trading system is “the most important feature” of the trade-innovation relationship.

“The fast pace of innovation is at odds with the outdated trade disciplines that still govern us,” he told participants, adding that the multilateral trading system urgently needs an update to remain relevant and propel innovation and development forward.

“Being at the heart of the WTO's attention, Bali negotiations had to be part of the Public Forum debate,” Azevêdo said, urging participants to weigh in during the 1-3 October meeting. “This is your forum. Your input during the next couple of days will be of great value to this organisation and its stakeholders.”

Froman: Trade facilitation a “win-win”

US Trade Representative Michael Froman, in his keynote speech on Tuesday, similarly called for WTO negotiations to evolve in order to facilitate – or even drive – innovation in technology and international trade.

“Bali has the potential to be a vital step towards the WTO creating something new, something that can lead to other new opportunities – to innovation in our approach to multilateral negotiations,” he urged.

The US official, whose stop in Geneva is one in a series this week related to major trade initiatives, with the others focusing on the US-EU trade talks and the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations (see related articles, this issue), particularly urged WTO members in his speech to resolve their disagreements on trade facilitation – one of the proposed deliverables for Bali – which he deemed “as close to a ‘win-win’ as exists in the real world.”

“In Geneva, trade facilitation is too often a bargaining chip in the great game of multilateral trade negotiations, a pivot point for tactical maneuvering.... We must close this gap,” he said. Talks to finalise the trade facilitation draft text have run into both technical and political hurdles in recent weeks that sources say are proving difficult to resolve.

Panellists in the opening session, which featured the WTO chief together with Finnish Trade Minister Alexander Stubb, Talal Abu-Ghazaleh of the Talal Abu Ghazaleh Organization, Luo Feng of IZP Technologies, and WIPO Director-General Francis Gurry, similarly stressed the value of a trade facilitation deal for improving logistics.

More information

The WTO Public Forum has been an annual event since 2001. The initiative typically draws a wide range of participants, including representatives of non-governmental organisations, intergovernmental organisations, academics, industry groups, private sector, and government.

Further details on the Public Forum, including audio and video from the sessions, are available [here](#).

ICTSD reporting.

IN BRIEF

Trans-Pacific Pact Takes Centre Stage as APEC Meet Begins

The annual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Week and related meetings kicked off in the Indonesian province of Bali on Tuesday; however, gatherings on the event sidelines of Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) officials are expected to dominate news headlines in the coming days, given the expectations of a possible announcement regarding the trade talks.

The Asia-Pacific summit has historically served as an opportunity for TPP leaders – all of whom are members of the 21-country APEC group – to discuss the state of play in their trade negotiations. With the 12 TPP members aiming to reach a deal by year's end, the Bali meeting has been touted as a possible milestone in the process.

Since the last negotiating round in Brunei, the group has been holding a series of "intersessional" meetings in the hopes of resolving some of their remaining differences.

"We'll be interested to see if we can get an announcement at the Bali APEC meetings, and if so, that will give us a good steer on the quality and progress" of the TPP talks," APEC Secretariat Executive Director Alan Bollard told Kyodo News in an interview.

However, the recent US federal government shutdown could pose a damper on the meetings, given the likely limitations on the functioning of the Office of the US Trade Representative.

In addition, growing concern among Washington legislators on the effects of Japanese monetary policy on the Asian country's export competitiveness has recently prompted a bipartisan group of 60 US senators to call for the TPP talks to add currency-focused rules.

Observers warn, however, that pursuing such an objective could spark opposition from some of the other TPP member countries. No formal decision has been announced by Washington at this time, though many expect the Obama Administration to avoid pushing for such rules in the talks.

ICTSD reporting; "APEC Chief Says Japan Can Play Key Role In Region FTAs," KYODO NEWS INTERNATIONAL, 9 September 2013, "Currency manipulation should be part of trade talks, Senators say," FINANCIAL TIMES, 25 September 2013.

Yemen Slated for WTO Entry

Yemen's thirteen-year pursuit of WTO entry is now approaching the finish line, officials announced last week, with the global trade body set to formally sign off on Sana'a's membership this December.

Yemen, whose main exports include oil, fish and fisheries products, and natural gas, will be the seventh least developed country (LDC) to join the WTO's ranks since 1995 – the most recent being Laos. The agreement was reportedly made possible after Ukraine ended its year-long hold on the Arab country's membership earlier this month.

Joining the 159-member organisation is a long process, with the poorest countries known for facing particular difficulties. While acknowledging the length of the negotiations, WTO Director-General Roberto Azevêdo also noted the importance of ensuring that the proper legal framework was in place for the accession. "Setting the conditions before you make an agreement is better than having an argument once the deal has been done," he [said](#).

As part of its accession commitments, Sana'a has agreed to bind its tariffs to an average of 21.1 percent for all products, while opening its markets in 11 services sectors. The country has also made commitments regarding technical barriers to trade, customs valuation, and state enterprises, among others.

The accession package will be presented both to the WTO's General Council, as well as at the upcoming ministerial conference in Bali, Indonesia, for formal approval. Yemen will next need to ratify the accession domestically before its WTO membership can become official. Other accessions that have been rumoured in recent months as possible contenders for Bali approval include Kazakhstan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Afghanistan, but none of these had been finalised at the time of this writing.

ICTSD reporting.

EVENTS & RESOURCES

Events

Coming soon

7 October, Seoul, South Korea. THE SEOUL POST-2015 GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE: IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPLICATIONS. This conference is being organised by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and will focus on the post-2015 development agenda. Discussions at the meeting – which will bring together development and opinion leaders and practitioners – aim to inform the intergovernmental negotiations that are now underway to determine a universal set of development goals once the current Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) expire in 2015. More information is available [here](#).

10 October, Washington, US. IS COOPERATION DEAD? INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION IS THE 'NEW NORMAL.' This event, sponsored by the Chatham House, will present an overview paper bringing together the insights from the preliminary results of a Chatham House-IMF joint project. Featuring speakers from the International Monetary Fund, the Indonesian Ministry of Finance, and Chatham House, the project aims to rethink economic policy coordination in the new post-global economic crisis environment, with regards to both theory and practice. Particular emphasis will be placed on where policymakers should direct their coordination efforts in the coming years. For more information about this event, please click [here](#).

10 October, Washington, US. A NEW AGENDA FOR AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT FINANCE IN THE 21ST CENTURY: A CONVERSATION WITH AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK PRESIDENT DONALD KABERUKA. This event, sponsored by the Africa Growth Initiative at the Brookings Institution, will feature the president of the African Development Bank (AfDB), Donald Kaberuka, for a discussion on African development finance. Kaberuka will specifically focus on the need to find new, efficient ways to leverage private capital, as well as maximising and sharing revenues from African countries' natural resources. Visit the Brookings Institution [website](#) for more information.

10-11 October, Brasilia, Brazil. STRENGTHENING LEGAL CAPACITY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. This event, hosted jointly by the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD), the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Trade Organization, and the Advisory Centre on WTO Law (ACWL), aims to serve as an opportunity for Latin American countries to share their experiences in handling WTO disputes. Held with the cooperation of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this event is one in a series of dialogues aimed at strengthening legal capacity in developing countries, with previous events being held in Geneva and Delhi. For more information, visit the ICTSD [website](#).

WTO Events

An updated list of forthcoming WTO meetings is posted [here](#). Please bear in mind that dates and times of WTO meetings are often changed, and that the WTO does not always announce the important informal meetings of the different bodies. Unless otherwise indicated, all WTO meetings are held at the WTO, Centre William Rappard, rue de Lausanne 154, 1211 Geneva, Switzerland, and are open to WTO members and accredited observers only.

7 October: Working Party on State Trading Enterprises

8 October: Working Group on Trade, Debt and Finance

9 October: General Council

10, 18, 25 October, and 1 November: Committee on Budget, Finance and Administration

10 - 11 October: Council for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights

10 October: Sub-Committee on Least-Developed Countries

11 October: Working Party on the Accession of Kazakhstan

Other Upcoming Events

15-18 October, Arusha, Tanzania. AFRICA CLIMATE CONFERENCE 2013. Convened by the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP) and the African Climate Policy Center (ACPC), this event aims to bring together stakeholders to identify the state of knowledge on the African climate system, including gaps in knowledge; put forward an African agenda for future climate research to inform adaptation decisions; and develop a framework for mainstreaming climate change into policy. For more details and to register, please visit the event [website](#).

30 October, Washington, US. GLOBAL SERVICES SUMMIT. This event, sponsored by the Coalition of Services Industries (CSI), aims to bring together key trade leaders and policy makers from around the world to discuss current international trade issues, with specific interest in services. This year the theme focuses on services moving forward; the opportunities, the challenges, and the future of the global services market. The summit will feature ambassadors, trade ministers, and journalists, along with private sector leaders and representatives from intergovernmental organisations. More information and registration is available [here](#).

3-5 December, Bali, Indonesia. BALI TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT SYMPOSIUM. This event, hosted by the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development, will be held in conjunction with the WTO's Ninth Ministerial Conference. The event aims to encourage innovative thinking and analysis on issues related to trade and sustainable development, in order for stakeholders to translate them into inputs for future negotiations. The event will bring together academics, policy researchers and analysts, representatives from inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations, businesses or the private sector, and parliamentarians. Additional updates on the event will be posted regularly on the ICTSD [website](#).

3-6 December, Bali, Indonesia. NINTH WTO MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE. The WTO's biennial ministerial conference is slated to be held in Bali, with the goal of advancing a set of deliverables from the broader Doha Round negotiations. Registration for NGOs closes on 13 October. More information on the event is available on the WTO [website](#); future updates on the conference schedule will be posted there in the coming weeks.

Resources

G-33 PROPOSAL: EARLY AGREEMENT ON ELEMENTS OF THE DRAFT DOHA ACCORD TO ADDRESS FOOD SECURITY. By Christophe Bellmann, Jonathan Hepburn, Ekaterina Krivonos, and Jamie Morrison for the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (September 2013). Some developing countries have proposed that WTO rules should be changed to allow them more flexibility to purchase food at subsidised prices under public stockholding or domestic food aid programmes. This short information note, published jointly by ICTSD and the FAO, looks at how rules, policies and practices in this area can affect trade and food security, in the run-up to the global trade body's ninth ministerial conference this December. To access the paper, please click [here](#).

TRANSATLANTIC TRADE: WHITHER PARTNERSHIP, WHICH ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES. By Lionel Fontagné, Julien Gourdon, and Sébastien Jean for CEPII (September 2013). In this report, the authors focus on the recently-launched EU-US trade talks, particularly on the areas of non-tariff measures, services, public procurement, geographical indications, and investment. After reviewing the main issues at stake, the authors assess the economic impacts of an agreement and outline their findings. The full report is available [online](#).

A NEW ECONOMIC BATTLEGROUND OVER UKRAINE. Published by the Peterson Institute for International Economics (September 2013). During this podcast Anders Åslund discusses Russia's push to prevent Ukraine from signing an association agreement – and related trade pact – with the European Union and what he suggests Kiev should do to make the deal a reality. Click [here](#) to listen to the interview.

STATE OF FOOD INSECURITY IN THE WORLD 2013. This latest version of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report features updated estimates of undernourishment, as well as an assessment of progress toward both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and World Food Summit (WFS) hunger targets. The report finds that further progress has been made towards the 2015 MDG target, which the FAO says remains within reach for the developing regions as a whole, although marked differences persist within regions. The UN organisation also notes that considerable and immediate additional efforts will be needed between now and 2015. For more information, or to download the report, click [here](#).

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