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WASHINGTON

US House of Representatives Prepares for Second TPA Vote

The US House of Representatives is expected to hold a second vote later today on whether to approve Trade Promotion Authority (TPA), after a previous effort to pass the legislation stumbled last Friday.

Under the plan announced on Wednesday evening, House lawmakers will vote today on TPA as a stand-alone bill – without Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), a US domestic programme that provides support to workers displaced by trade.

The latter would then be voted upon separately; while details on how and when this would occur were still unclear at the time of this writing, some reports have suggested that TAA would likely be tacked onto a separate trade bill.

The Senate would then need to vote on TPA as well, given that the earlier version which was passed in that chamber included both TPA and TAA. That chamber would also need to hold a new vote on Trade Adjustment Assistance. (See Bridges Weekly, [28 May 2015](#))

The original package voted on by the House last week had included TPA and Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), requiring that both be passed in order for the entire piece of legislation to move forward, despite the two being subject to separate votes. While TPA was approved at the time, TAA failed, stalling the overall legislative package.

The move to now break the formal linkage between the two bills and hold new votes is considered risky by some, requiring top Republican lawmakers to provide assurances that both will indeed receive votes. Passing the TAA bill is currently seen as essential for advancing TPA, given the insistence of both Senate Democrats and the White House that the two measures reach the president's desk.

To that end, Republican leaders have pledged to do their utmost to hold votes on both TPA and TAA, with Speaker of the House John Boehner and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell issuing a joint statement to that effect on Wednesday.

"We are committed to ensuring both TPA and TAA get votes in the House and Senate and are sent to the President for signature. And it is our intent to have a conference on the customs bill and complete that in a timely manner so that the President can sign it into law," they [said](#).

Lawmakers, White House weigh fall-out

Meanwhile, last week's public rebuff by House Democrats of US President Barack Obama, of the same party, has drawn harsh criticism over the past few days from various quarters, particularly from Republican proponents of TPA.

The loss in last week's TAA vote was deemed particularly stunning in light of the number of Democrats who voted against it. Trade Adjustment Assistance has traditionally been a scheme backed by many of that party's lawmakers, who have long cited concerns over the potential negative impacts that trade deals can have on domestic workers.

However, given that TPA's advancement on Friday then hinged on a successful TAA vote, several Democrats chose to vote against the support scheme, despite being in favour of it. Others also cited a need for improving the support scheme itself, finding that the current proposal on the table did not do enough for US workers.

Paul Ryan, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee who has been strongly advocating for the trade legislation in his chamber, issued a stinging rebuke of those Democratic lawmakers who voted against TAA last Friday.

"The Democrats abandoned their president – the leader of their party – in droves on a bill and a programme that they demanded as part of this, that they have previously voted for unanimously, that they asked as a part of the process. To me, it was stunning that they would do this to the leader of their party," [said](#) Ryan in an interview with Fox News Sunday.

White House officials, for their part, cast Friday's result in a positive light, given that TPA did itself pass, with 28 Democratic votes. The overall result – an approved TPA blocked by a failed TAA – was deemed by White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest as merely a "procedural snafu," mirroring language used to describe some of the setbacks seen in the Senate before that chamber approved the trade bill.

Obama, who had strongly lobbied Democrats in the days and hours preceding Friday's vote, made the trade legislation the subject of his [weekly address](#), urging lawmakers to change tack and approve the TAA scheme before it expires.

"For the sake of those workers [who benefit from TAA], their families, and their communities, I urge those members of Congress who voted against Trade Adjustment assistance to reconsider, and stand up for American workers," Obama said.

New trade deals, he added, are also key to increasing opportunities for the middle class, calling them "the right thing to do for working families."

Pelosi calls for new trade paradigm

Despite the new strategy, winning over enough Democrats for it to succeed is set to prove a difficult task for TPA proponents.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat from California, released [an op-ed](#) in USA TODAY calling the TPA debate as "probably the last of its kind." Instead, Pelosi suggested a new trade paradigm, including a "global engagement on trade" under either the United Nations or in another setting.

"We must give workers more leverage and have more open discussion, with greater transparency and stronger accountability than the World Trade Organization or other trade negotiations," she said, without going into specifics.

Pelosi's [speech](#) ahead of last Friday's votes was widely viewed as dealing a lethal blow to any prospects of bringing enough Democratic support on board to pass the trade package, with the Minority Leader speaking at length on her reservations on TPA and why she would therefore be voting against TAA.

ICTSD reporting; "House GOP poised to pursue fast-track without aid for workers," POLITICO, 16 June 2015; "House Republican leaders zero in on new trade strategy," THE HILL, 16 June 2015; "How Republicans Could Get Obama Trade Promotion Authority," ROLL CALL, 16 June 2015; "Nancy Pelosi: Trade promotion authority on its last legs," USA TODAY, 15 June 2015; "Pro-trade Democrats huddle over fast-track strategy," POLITICO, 17 June 2015; "House to vote for a second time on fast-track for Obama," THE HILL, 17 June 2015; "Trade pact proponents claim new momentum," POLITICO, 17 June 2015.

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

WTO Members Debate Lighter Agricultural Tariff Cuts

WTO members are debating whether to explore lesser agricultural tariff cuts as part of a push to finalise the long-running Doha Round of trade talks, sources have said.

At an informal meeting of the trade body's agriculture negotiations committee, held Tuesday and open to all WTO members, major trading powers such as the US and EU said that they would favour looking at options that require countries to cut farm tariffs less steeply.

A number of developing countries nonetheless argued in favour of basing further talks on the latest blueprint for a Doha deal, tabled by a former chair of the agriculture talks seven years ago.

This would divide farm tariffs into different categories or bands, depending on how high they were – ensuring that high tariffs on particularly sensitive products do not escape cuts.

Some agricultural exporting countries said that although they preferred an option that would result in steeper tariff cuts, they were also willing to explore other approaches in order to help strike a deal. Australia – coordinator of the Cairns Group of farm exporters – was among those that said it would look at different options with a view to reaching consensus.

Talks reach "decisive phase"

The chair of the agriculture negotiations, New Zealand ambassador John Adank, warned countries that they would need to make political choices if they wanted to ensure that they can reach an end-July deadline on agreeing a work programme on the outstanding Doha issues.

"Discussions now need to move to a more decisive phase," Adank said.

Adank reported on discussions he had held with a small group of WTO members, and in particular on the extent to which they favoured one of three options he had identified in a 27 May paper.

The first option was to build on the draft 2008 text - dubbed "Rev. 4" by trade negotiators – but look at different tariff cuts and possibly also different bands.

A second option would apply the tariff cut formula in Rev. 4, including requirements for minimum and maximum cuts to individual tariff lines, and use the outcome of this exercise as a starting point for applying a cut to the overall tariff average.

This approach would deliver relatively steep cuts to tariffs, trade sources said.

Finally, a third approach would also begin with the tariff cut formula in Rev. 4, and again include maximum and minimum cuts to individual tariff lines – but would apply an average cut in tariff lines to the resulting outcome.

Trade sources said this approach could allow countries to more easily continue shielding unusually high tariffs on sensitive farm goods such as certain tariff lines for rice, sugar, and dairy, or for livestock products such as beef, pork, and poultry.

Negotiators told Bridges that high tariff peaks on key products in many countries had remained largely unchanged after a simple average tariff cut was applied to farm goods in the Uruguay Round, the last round of trade talks to take place at the global level.

Adank said his consultations on the three options "had not revealed any clear collective preferences," sources said.

More clarity needed

A number of developing countries said they were not yet able to indicate which of the three options they preferred, because they had not yet analysed the implications for their own tariff structures or because they were not yet clear on what the different options would mean.

Adank suggested that the WTO secretariat could prepare a background paper to shed more light on what the different tariff cut approaches mean – and also proposed holding a technical workshop to look at the market access issue in greater depth.

Some trade officials told Bridges they had also sought more clarity about where the different negotiating options had come from.

"Argentina and Paraguay submitted proposals," one source said, arguing that it was unclear who had put forward the three options that were being considered, or why. (See Bridges Weekly, [26 March 2015](#))

"These are not the chair's ideas: it's a member-led discussion," said another.

Export competition "doable"

At a separate meeting of the WTO's regular committee on agriculture two weeks ago, trade negotiators also discussed a new [paper](#) from the Cairns Group on export competition, which argued that agricultural export subsidies and similar measures have "dramatically decreased."

The paper also found that most food aid donors' programmes are also consistent with proposed new Doha rules intended to ensure that aid does not inadvertently worsen food insecurity by displacing food producers by local farmers in recipient countries.

WTO members had agreed to an annual review of export subsidies and similar measures – grouped together by negotiators under the category of "export competition" – as part of a package of deals agreed at the trade body's 2013 Bali Ministerial Conference.

"Export competition is doable – and people should do it," said one trade negotiator familiar with the paper in comments to Bridges.

Domestic support: US, China still at loggerheads

A small group of members made little progress last week in informal talks on domestic support, trade negotiators told Bridges.

Officials familiar with the talks said that the US is continuing to seek a commitment from China to establish a limit on the overall trade-distorting support (or OTDS) that the country would provide under an eventual Doha Round deal.

The most recent draft text includes a clause that effectively allows China – as a “recently-accessed member” – to exceed the limit on OTDS if the country’s “de minimis” payments are greater. Trade-distorting “de minimis” support is a share of the value of production – 8.5 percent in the case of China, 10 percent for other developing countries, and five percent for developed countries.

Trade sources have told Bridges that the US is likely to have difficulty agreeing to the proposed limit on trade-distorting support after having passed the 2014 Farm Bill, which is expected to lead Washington to increase its trade-distorting payments, especially if agricultural prices continue falling.

At the same time, the US has argued that large developing countries such as China and India should accept tighter limits on their own trade-distorting farm subsidies.

“The US is not saying what they’re willing to offer, at all,” one negotiator told Bridges. “They’re just saying what they want from China.”

Trade sources told Bridges that Australia and Canada were seeking to explore negotiating options that might help build consensus in this area.

Months dwindle to weeks

Given the continued gaps in negotiating positions, some officials cautioned that it will be difficult for WTO members to reach agreement on a work programme ahead of the July deadline.

“At this pace, some people think that the work programme could go to December,” one trade source said. The WTO is due to hold its next ministerial conference that month in Nairobi, Kenya.

Others disputed that assessment, arguing that members would still be able to agree on some form of a work programme by the deadline, even if this did not resemble a detailed negotiating text like the Rev. 4 draft deal.

“The realisation is that we need to conclude things, sooner rather than later,” said another official, explaining why negotiators were exploring options for gentler cuts in farm tariffs and subsidies than previously.

“Everyone’s conscious we have weeks now, rather than months – and at some point those weeks will become days,” another trade source told Bridges.

ICTSD reporting.

DISPUTES

US Appeals WTO Compliance Panel Report in Tuna Labelling Case

The US filed a notice of appeal earlier this month in its WTO dispute with Mexico over "dolphin-safe" tuna labelling ([DS381](#)), challenging the ruling of a previous panel which found that Washington had not sufficiently revised the policy to comply with global trade rules.

The US had amended its dolphin-safe labelling scheme in 2013, after the Appellate Body found that the original version violated core trade rules and discriminated unfairly against Mexican tuna products. (See Bridges Weekly, [16 May 2012](#))

The 2013 changes required that tuna could only enter the US as "dolphin-safe" on the condition that it was accompanied by a certification that no nets were intentionally set on dolphins in catching the tuna, and that no dolphins were killed or seriously injured in the "sets" in which the tuna was caught.

While the original measure applied the disqualification only inside the Eastern Tropical Pacific (ETP), the 2013 "Final Rule" applied the eligibility requirement regardless of where the tuna was caught or the nationality of the fishing vessel.

However, other documentation and tracking and verification requirements essentially remained unchanged, and continued to vary depending on whether the tuna was caught inside or outside the ETP.

Mexican fishermen predominantly fish for tuna in the Eastern Tropical Pacific, using purse-seine nets which are temporarily set on dolphins to attract the tuna that swim below. However, Mexico's tuna fleet has been found to comply with international standards, including the Agreement on the International Dolphin Conservation Program (AIDCP).

Following these changes, Washington claimed that it had fully complied with the Appellate Body's rulings. Mexico disagreed, asking for a compliance panel to determine whether these revisions were consistent with WTO rules.

This past April, the compliance panel affirmed that the US is entitled to disqualify tuna from the label if that tuna is caught by "setting" on dolphins. Nonetheless, the panel found that the revised scheme – in particular the differences in certification, tracking, and verification requirements depending on where the tuna was caught – continues to discriminate against Mexican tuna. (See Bridges Weekly, [16 April 2015](#))

Tuna certification, tracking

Washington has asked the Appellate Body to review the panel's findings and conclusions under several non-discrimination provisions of WTO rules.

For instance, the US is challenging the panel's conclusion that the certification, tracking, and verification requirements under the 2013 tuna labelling scheme impose lesser burdens on tuna caught outside the ETP large purse-seine fishery than inside it. The panel had said that this modifies the conditions of competition in the US market, to the detriment of Mexican tuna.

The 2013 version of the labelling scheme requires the use of independent observers as well as captains' certification for tuna caught inside the ETP, but not outside it. Record-keeping and verification are also required only for ETP tuna caught by setting on dolphins.

Consumer information

Washington also took issue with the panel's finding that having different requirements for tuna caught outside the ETP's large purse-seine fishery could result in inaccurate information being passed on to consumers.

The panel had concluded that the detrimental impact to Mexican tuna caused by the requirement does not stem exclusively from a legitimate regulatory distinction, as required by Article 2.1 of the WTO's Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreement.

Discrimination

Washington also disagreed with the panel's finding that those different requirements impose "arbitrary and unjustifiable discrimination between countries where the same conditions prevail," which goes against the chapeau of the WTO's General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) Article XX.

The GATT Article XX exceptions outline a set of justifications under which WTO members may enact measures that would otherwise be illegal under international trade rules so long as these are used to fulfil greater public policy objectives, such as natural resource conservation or the protection of human, animal, or plant life or health.

Washington is also asking the Appellate Body to review the panel's assessment and conclusion both under TBT Article 2.1 and GATT Article XX chapeau with respect to the "determination provisions," which allow the US Assistant Administrator to make certain determinations that have the effect of triggering an observer requirement outside the ETP's large purse-seine fishery.

The compliance panel had said that, as a result of these provisions, fisheries other than the ETP large purse-seine fishery may be treated less stringently under the amended tuna measure in some cases, despite mirroring the ETP's conditions either in terms of the level of dolphin mortality or the degree of tuna-dolphin association.

The panel said that this further supported its conclusion of the certification requirements violating trade rules.

Next steps

The WTO's Appellate Body generally reviews questions relating to law or legal interpretation and not the factual findings in panel rulings.

The US and Mexico already have in place a bilateral understanding where they have committed to help enable the Appellate Body circulate its report within 90 days from the notification of an appeal.

ICTSD reporting.

CLIMATE CHANGE

UN Climate Negotiators Make Marginal Advances at Annual Bonn Meeting

The co-chairs of a multilateral group tasked with hammering out a new universal climate deal have received a mandate to draft a more concise, coherent, and streamlined suggested text, after nearly two weeks of meetings in Bonn, Germany. The new document, expected by 24 July at latest, will not be a formal draft text but rather a "tool" geared towards advancing the negotiations.

The move came after delegates struggled to make headway on a 90-page draft negotiating text, the result of talks held in Geneva, Switzerland in February. That text contained a myriad of proposals from countries on what to include in, and arrangements for, the new climate deal.

According to a [document](#) released by the co-chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (ADP), Ahmed Djoghla of Algeria and Daniel Reifsnyder of the US, the "tool" will consolidate the "Geneva Negotiating Text" and present countries with a clearer view of options on the table in various sections.

It will also make suggestions on which paragraphs of the Geneva negotiating text might be included in the new agreement and which might be placed in a multilateral decision that would adopt it at the twenty-first Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), being held in Paris, France this December.

"If we get it wrong we could send the whole process backwards," Reifsnyder told delegates in the closing session of the June negotiations last Thursday. "On the other hand, if we get it right, we can spur the process forward."

While parties broadly endorsed this approach last week, a negotiating coalition known as the Group of 77 and China cautioned that the new document should not prejudice the sequencing or prioritisation of issues, and others urged the co-chairs to proceed with great caution.

Parties have agreed that individual "Intended Nationally Determined Contributions" (INDCs) will form the building blocks of the new emissions-cutting agreement, which should enter into force at the end of the decade, replacing the current Kyoto Protocol.

Twelve INDCs, from countries responsible for 31.6 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, have been submitted to the UNFCCC Secretariat to date. The EU and Morocco will co-host an informal forum, outside the official process, in October to examine INDCs submitted by that time.

Questions over pace

Work undertaken in Bonn on the Geneva negotiating text largely resulted in some mechanical streamlining of repetitive proposals, with different sections progressing at different speeds. In some areas, parties began to discuss conceptual issues and the structure of the text, yielding a variety of results.

During the closing plenary, Laurence Tubiana, the special representative of the incoming COP21 French presidency, said that Bonn had been a critical moment for building trust between parties. Tubiana also signalled an upcoming 20-21 July informal ministerial consultation as an occasion that could help tackle politically thorny issues, while not involving textual negotiations.

While several delegations, such as the EU, have [warned](#) that the negotiations would need to speed up in the coming months, ADP co-chair Djoghlaif disagreed with the suggestion that the latest round of talks had been too slow, noting the advances made on the “complex” process of reaching a workable text.

Some parties last Thursday did raise concerns around [progress](#) on the ADP's second work stream, which focuses on boosting climate action before the end of the decade. Parties expressed support in Bonn for developing a text on pre-2020 ambition to adopt in Paris, despite showing different views on what to include.

Carbon markets: no deal

Discussions on market-based tools for addressing carbon emissions saw little progress in Bonn. Talks addressed work on a framework for various approaches (FVA), as well as a new market-based mechanism (NMM) at the multilateral level, complemented by non-market-based approaches (NMA) – which could establish common rules for climate mitigation efforts with international scope.

Negotiators discussed topics such as accounting frameworks and the necessary domestic and international arrangements; how best to monitor, report, and verify mitigation outcomes under these tools to ensure their quality; as well as discussions on the concepts of net decrease and avoidance of emissions.

A bid to secure draft conclusions recording this discussion and pledging to continue work was then scuppered after parties reportedly continued to disagree around the talks' mandate, as well as the relationship between SBSTA work and proposals for markets in the Paris deal. Some others reiterated their ideological opposition to the use of market-based mechanisms for climate action.

Proponents of the FVA, such as the EU, Switzerland, Mexico, Japan, and New Zealand, were among those arguing that common accounting and environmental standards for international mitigation markets – when emissions reductions pledged by one country are achieved in another – would be essential to avoid double-counting and ensure valid climate outcomes.

The FVA and associated tools discussion has also been affected by the ADP talks, where several countries have made proposals on the possibility of using market-based mechanisms in the new climate regime. Suggested text ranges from ensuring that internationally transferred units are not double-counted, using carbon markets to raise climate finance, enhancing the international offset Clean Development Mechanism, to limiting the use of international market based mechanisms.

Response measures

Under the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) and SBSTA, parties agreed to forward a bracketed draft [decision](#) on a forum and work programme on the impact of response measures' implementation for consideration in December. Parties are also invited to submit their views to the Secretariat on the shape of the work programme and modalities for its implementation by September.

The UNFCCC framework mandates that parties should take into consideration the needs of developing country parties arising from the impact of climate action, known formally as

response measures. The topic has proved difficult to navigate, with parties disagreeing at recent sessions on next steps for a forum whose two-year mandate expired in 2013. (See Bridges Weekly, [18 December 2014](#))

The bracketed draft decision from Bonn would continue and improve the forum as an opportunity for parties to share views and facilitate analysis and assessment in this area, with a view to recommending specific actions. Particular focus would be assigned to providing concrete examples aimed at helping developing countries deal with the impact of developed parties taking climate action.

The improved forum would meet biennially at the UN climate talks. The work programme would focus on economic diversification and transformation, as well as a just transition of the work force and the creation of decent work.

According to some officials, response measures is another topic affected by the political dynamics of the ADP negotiating track, with several relevant proposals also on the table therein.

Coming up

Along with the July release of the co-chairs' "tool," various diplomatic exchanges at high-level UN meetings and ministerial discussions are also planned for the weeks ahead. Two further ADP sessions are also currently scheduled before the December Paris meet, from 31 August to 4 September, and 19-23 October.

ICTSD reporting.

PREFERENTIAL AGREEMENTS

EU, Mexico Set Sights on 2015 Launch of Trade Talks

Leaders from the EU and Mexico confirmed last Friday that they would be launching negotiations to update their "Global Agreement," aiming to start the talks for revamping the economic, political, and cooperation pact by year's end.

The news came following a highly-anticipated bilateral summit – the first one between the two sides since 2012 – which brought together European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, European Council President Donald Tusk, and Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto.

In a joint [statement](#) released on 12 June following the Brussels meeting, the three leaders confirmed that a modernisation of the Global Agreement would be their "main bilateral priority" in the short term.

Among the various reasons for such a move, the three leaders said, was the fast-changing global trade landscape, including the proliferation of new regional trade agreements.

"We want to see our relationship reach its full strategic potential," Tusk [told reporters](#) after the summit.

"This modernised agreement will be a stronger foundation for taking our partnership forward because it will be far more ambitious and comprehensive," the Council chief continued, adding that leaders are eyeing both increased political cooperation and trade.

Years in the making

The move to launch negotiations comes two years after leaders agreed to explore the possibility of revamping the existing Global Agreement, setting up a bilateral working group tasked with reviewing possible ways forward.

EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmström and the Mexican Secretary of Economy Ildefonso Guajardo Villarreal then expressed last month their intention to upgrade the trade deal, with the 12 June leaders' summit raised as a key event toward the eventual launch of negotiations. (See Bridges Weekly [13 May 2015](#))

Peña Nieto confirmed last week that Brussels and Mexico City have now concluded a Joint Vision Report that will set the scope of the proposed negotiations. The document had not yet been publicly released as Bridges went to press.

Juncker, for his part, said that the upcoming meeting of the EU's General Affairs Council on 23 June, is expected to provide the Commission with the mandate needed on its side to begin the talks.

Deeper ties, new trade deals

Upgrading their existing trade deal, leaders said, would be key to ensuring more prosperity and improved wellbeing for their 626 million citizens.

Furthermore, they said, upgrading their bilateral legal framework would help Brussels and Mexico City reinforce the potential of their [2009 Strategic Partnership](#). The two sides adopted their [joint executive plan](#) for this partnership in 2010, outlining a series of concrete actions and initiatives aimed at enhancing dialogue on political, security, environmental, and socio-economic issues.

Other areas which leaders flagged as having potential in an updated bilateral agreement included boosting their investment and their bilateral trade in goods and services, currently surpassing a billion euros per week. The leaders also expressed their aim to create the most comprehensive trade and investment framework possible.

Since the Global Agreement first entered into force 15 years ago, EU-Mexico trade has nearly tripled, hitting US\$65 billion in 2014. The 28-nation bloc accounts for eight percent of Mexico's total foreign trade, according to [a fact sheet](#) released ahead of last week's summit.

Meanwhile, those same 15 years have also seen a plethora of new trade initiatives emerge, often covering new disciplines that have not traditionally been covered in trade agreements. These planned trade agreements have been cited by officials on both sides as reason for ensuring that Brussels and Mexico City take steps to update the terms of their current relationship in order for it to remain relevant.

Both sides have already been active players in these new trade projects: while Mexico is currently involved in finalising a Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement together with 11 other countries, the EU is in its third year of negotiations for a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with the US.

The EU also concluded negotiations last year with Canada for a wide-ranging bilateral trade deal, which is currently awaiting ratification.

ICTSD reporting; "EU, Mexico to overhaul trade deal in light of Canada, US Talks," EUROPE ONLINE, 16 June 2015; "EU, Mexico agree to 'modernise' free trade deal," AFP, 12 June 2015.

AGRICULTURE

Russia Reports Sharp Drop in Farm Subsidy Spending

Russia's spending on trade-distorting farm support declined slightly in 2013, new figures suggest, although the share of support that is subject to a WTO ceiling on farm subsidies has fallen dramatically.

Moscow's [new report](#) to the global trade body reveals a small drop in overall trade-distorting support (OTDS) from the previous year, to just under US\$6.9 billion. However, 99 percent of this support was exempt from any WTO limit, as it fell below five percent of the value of agricultural production.

In 2012, only 16 percent of trade-distorting "de minimis" support fell below this threshold, allowing it to be exempted from counting towards the WTO ceiling on the country's "aggregate measure of support," or AMS.

Moscow was able to shield the US\$5.7 billion it spends in non-product specific support, in part because of a US\$260 million decrease in Russia's reported non-product specific support, and also partly due to an eight percent increase in the value of farm production.

Deer farming subsidy

Because all other types of product-specific farm support payments were also classed as falling below the five percent "de minimis" threshold, Moscow reported that its subsidy for deer farming was the only type of product-linked payment that counted towards its US\$9 billion ceiling.

Only US\$65 million was provided to deer production, the government's new figures show.

Milk, cattle, and swine production all received more in total trade-distorting support, but were all classified as "de minimis" under WTO rules, the report says.

Of the non product-specific payments, subsidised short-term credit and investment represented as much as US\$2.7 billion in spending, by far the largest category of support.

Under the terms agreed when Russia joined the WTO in 2012, the country's AMS spending must be gradually reduced to no more than US\$4.4 billion from 2018 onwards.

"Green box" payments

The government also reported an increase in spending that is classified as causing no more than minimal trade distortion, known as "green box" support at the WTO.

Spending in this category increased from US\$1.7 billion in 2012 to US\$2.9 billion in 2013, the new figures suggest.

The introduction of spending on decoupled income support was one factor contributing to the increase, with the government reporting it spent US\$1.2 billion in this category in 2013.

Moscow also reported it spent US\$1.2 billion on “general services,” which is also classified as green box and covers spending on public goods such as research, training, and infrastructure.

A clearer picture

Trade sources told Bridges that the new Russian figures should help provide a clearer picture of overall trends in farm subsidy spending.

The data complements recent reports from other developed country members such as the US, EU, and Japan, although these have not yet submitted 2013 data to the global trade body. (See Bridges Weekly, [15 January 2015](#), [30 October 2014](#), and [10 April 2014](#))

It also helps negotiators build on new data reported by China, India, and Brazil in recent months, although none of these countries have reported data for the more recent period covered by Moscow’s latest figures. (See Bridges Weekly, [13 May 2015](#), [18 September 2014](#), and [12 February 2015](#))

The figures suggest that Russia is providing less overall trade-distorting support than other developed country trading powers. The most recent notifications suggest that both the EU and US are providing the equivalent of around US\$12 billion, and Japan around US\$9 billion.

Moscow’s overall trade-distorting support is also less than that provided by Beijing or New Delhi, according to their most recent notifications, with China providing the equivalent of approximately US\$18 billion and India granting approximately US\$2 billion, with another US\$32 billion of input and investment subsidies exempt from WTO ceilings under a special clause for developing countries.

Among the major trading powers, Brazil also reported relatively low levels of overall trade-distorting farm support: Brasilia’s figures indicated this reached US\$2.4 billion in the 2012-13 marketing year.

Several countries have also reported significant levels of spending on green box payments, including outlays on decoupled income support in the EU, and food stamps to help poor consumers purchase food in the US.

Proposed new rules on farm subsidy spending have sparked controversy in recent talks at the WTO, with countries sparring over how the disciplines would affect developed and developing countries. (See Bridges Weekly, [23 April 2015](#))

ICTSD reporting.

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

Kazakhstan Begins Final Chapter in WTO Entry Process

After nearly two decades of negotiations, Kazakhstan completed talks to become the WTO's 162nd member on 10 June. The draft of the accession package will now go to the Working Party tasked with the negotiations for approval on 22 June, marking one of the last stages in the process.

The talks have been deemed among the most challenging that the global trade body has seen, with WTO Director-General Roberto Azevêdo welcoming last week's result as a "historic step."

The process for bringing Kazakhstan into the organisation required overcoming various [hurdles](#), particularly in areas such as agricultural subsidies, trade-related investment measures, tariff adjustments affecting the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), and sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS), which involve food safety and plant and animal health.

For example, Kazakh negotiators fought to maintain the "maximum possible" domestic support for the agricultural sector, with the country's Agriculture Ministry reportedly [hinting](#) at an ongoing disagreement over subsidies. Details of how that subject was addressed in the accession package had not been released as Bridges went to press, given that the terms must still be adopted *ad referendum* by the Working Party.

Eurasian Economic Union

Kazakhstan is part of the Eurasian Economic Union, a regional bloc that also includes Armenia, Belarus, and Russia. The EEU, which has been in force since January of this year, builds off a previous customs union that was formed in 2010 between Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia. (See Bridges Weekly, [5 June 2014](#))

While Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia briefly attempted in 2009 to pursue WTO accession jointly as a customs union, they then decided that same year to continue their accession talks on individual tracks. (See Bridges Weekly, [21 October 2009](#))

Russia and Armenia are currently the only countries from the newly-formed EEU to be WTO members. While Armenia has been part of the WTO since 2003, Russia only joined three years ago, with its membership taking effect in August 2012 following nearly two decades of protracted negotiations. (See Bridges Weekly, [25 July 2012](#))

Since the EEU and WTO structure their tariff policies differently, Kazakhstan's plans for involvement in both have added another layer of complexity to the long-running accession talks. The negotiations with Kazakhstan focused largely on how to best work within EEU commitments, while also aligning with global trade rules.

Tariff adjustment for Kazakhstan required "resolving discrepancies between bilateral market access agreements negotiated by Kazakhstan with WTO members, Russia's schedule of commitments, and the common external tariff of the customs union," according to a [press release](#) released by the global trade club last week.

Tariff liberalisation is a key component of WTO accession talks. Along with negotiating multilaterally with existing members at the Working Party level, any country aiming to

join the global trade body must also hold bilateral talks with any individual members that express interest in additional market access concessions or commitments. These must then be extended to all other WTO members in the final accession package.

Next steps

Following the sign-off of the Working Party on the draft accession package, the terms will then go to the WTO's General Council for adoption. The General Council is the organisation's highest decision-making body outside of the ministerial conference.

Once it has received approval at the General Council level, the accession package will then require domestic ratification by Kazakhstan. Astana will then formally become a WTO member 30 days after submitting its instrument of ratification.

ICTSD reporting; "Kazakhstan: Astana Ready to Join WTO After Two Decades of Talks," EURASIANET, 11 June 2015.

PREFERENTIAL AGREEMENTS

Mercosur, EU Officials Consider Next Steps for Trade Talks

The Mercosur and EU countries are aiming to revamp talks for an Association Agreement and related free trade deal, ministers said last week after a meeting in Brussels, with the two blocs now planning to exchange long-awaited tariff offers by year's end.

"Ministers agreed that, provided conditions for a successful exchange are met, the goal shall be to exchange market access offers within the last quarter of 2015," they said in a [communiqué](#) issued on 11 June. "To assess those conditions, they tasked negotiators to meet expeditiously and report back to their respective authorities."

The ministerial-level discussions took place within the context of a larger summit between leaders from the EU and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, or CELAC, held in the Belgian capital on 10-11 June. CELAC includes the sub-regional blocs of Central America, the Caribbean, the Andean Community, and Mercosur.

Negotiations for an EU-Mercosur agreement first began in 1999, with the goal of creating one of the world's largest free trade areas, covering nearly 800 million consumers. The talks later skid to a halt in 2004 over disagreements regarding agricultural trade.

In 2010, the two blocs formally agreed to re-start negotiations for a region-to-region deal; however, the nine negotiating rounds held since have reportedly shown little progress, with the last being held in October 2012. (See Bridges Weekly, [19 May 2010](#))

The Mercosur bloc is made up of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Caracas, however, is not part of the talks with the EU, given that it only joined Mercosur in 2012. (See Bridges Weekly, [4 July 2012](#))

"No one is really ready to exchange [market access] offers," EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmström explained to reporters following the meetings. "That's the reason why we decided to increase technical works and hope to exchange offers before the end of the year."

Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, for her part, said that both Brasilia and Mercosur are in a position to soon present their offers to the EU.

"I believe that this could occur in the coming days of months," she said after meeting bilaterally with Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel. "We hope that, in this way, the question evolves in a manner that is satisfactory from the EU's point of view."

According to EU [statistics](#), the 28-nation bloc is Mercosur's top trading partner, making up 20 percent of Mercosur's trade in 2013. Meanwhile, Mercosur ranks as the EU's sixth most important export market.

Mercosur disagreements

Given the slow pace of the negotiating process, reports had emerged in recent months that some Mercosur members were interested in pursuing a potential deal of "different speeds," allowing Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay to move forward in the talks even if Argentina lags behind.

How this would work with the bloc's current rules, however, remains an unanswered question, given Mercosur's commitment to advance all negotiations jointly.

The EU, for its part, has said that it prefers to deal with Mercosur as a bloc. "Mercosur is our negotiating partner," not the individual countries, said Daniel Rosario, an EU Commission spokesperson, in comments reported by the EU Observer.

Despite the interest by Asunción, Brasília, and Montevideo in pursuing a multi-speed approach, officials from those members confirmed last week that they would prefer, if possible, to make the process work with Buenos Aires.

"I believe it is very important that Mercosur stays together. Argentina is a great partner of ours, and we have definitely not lost patience with Argentina," Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff said.

Argentina is widely considered as one of the leading causes for the current delay, given its concerns over whether a bilateral deal will indeed benefit the South American bloc's consumers.

"Mercosur would like to reach a deal and Argentina will do whatever possible so that the accord we reach with the EU, if we reach one, particularly benefits the people of Mercosur, because we believe that we cannot sacrifice the wellbeing of our people for an agreement that is not beneficial for our sectors," said Argentine foreign minister Hector Timerman in Brussels, according to La Nación, an Argentine newspaper.

Bolivia, whose bid to join Mercosur is now pending ratification by the bloc's existing members, has said that it will abandon its accession efforts if a trade deal is reached with the EU.

"Who wins with the competitive policies? The huge multinational corporations and not the peoples or the small farmers," said Bolivian president Evo Morales, in comments reported by the MercoPress news agency.

ICTSD reporting; "Rousseff denies being upset with Argentina over Mercosur and trade policies," MERCOPRESS, 12 June 2015; "Brazil/Uruguay expect Paraguay to join in speeding Mercosur/EU negotiations," MERCOPRESS, 25 May 2015; "Bolivia's Morales does not support Mercosur/EU deal based on 'competitive' trade," MERCOPRESS, 11 June 2015; "Mercosur llevará posició única a cumber con UE," LA NACIÓN (PARAGUAY), 29 May 2015; "EU gauges will for Latin America trade deal," EU OBSERVER, 11 June 2015; "Brasil avanza en su acuerdo con la Unión Europea," LA NACIÓN (ARGENTINA), 11 June 2015.

EVENTS & RESOURCES

Events

Coming Soon

19 June, Washington, US. HILL TRADE BRIEFING ON CURRENCY MANIPULATION. This briefing, hosted jointly by the Washington International Trade Association (WITA) and WorldCity, will address the ongoing Washington debate over the impact of exchange rates on trade. This will include, among other subjects, the legislative process to renew Trade Promotion Authority. More information, including a list of featured speakers and registration details, can be found at the WITA event [website](#).

20 June, Tokyo, Japan. SEMINAR BY WILLIAM ROBERDS: DEATH OF A RESERVE CURRENCY. This event, part of the Asian Development Bank Institute's Seminar Series, will feature William Roberds of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta as its guest speaker. The seminar will address the downfall of the Bank of Amsterdam, formerly the dominant central bank of Europe during most of the 18th century, examining the policy actions which led to its struggles. The meeting will then examine the potential lessons this episode can have for modern central banks. More information is available [here](#).

22 – 25 June, New York City, US. INTERGOVERNMENTAL NEGOTIATIONS ON POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA – SIXTH SESSION. This session, hosted by the UN, will focus on advancing the negotiations for the outcome document of the September 2015 summit on the post-2015 development agenda. Member States, major groups, and other stakeholders such as the UN and intergovernmental organisations, will gather to prepare for the September meeting. The programme agenda will be released shortly and can be found [here](#).

23 June, London, UK. DANI RODRIK: THE FUTURE OF ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. This event, held by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), will feature economist Dani Rodrik as the keynote speaker. The discussions will focus on the future of economic transformation in developing countries, while also reviewing the latest trends in this field. The meeting will be streamed live online from the ODI website. To learn more, visit the ODI [website](#).

23 June, Brussels, Belgium. THE FUTURE OF THE ENERGY UNION: A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE. This event, the first of three workshops on Energy Union, will be hosted by Chatham House with the support of the European Climate Foundation. The workshop will explore the future of the Energy Union within the wider context of Europe's foreign and security policy challenges. It will cover the complex challenges Europe faces with its energy policy. The following two workshops will be held in London and Berlin. To learn more, visit the Chatham House [website](#).

23 June, Washington, US. PROMOTING EFFECTIVE COMPETITION POLICIES FOR SHARED PROSPERITY AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH. As part of the World Bank Group's Global Engagement on Competition Policy, and in partnership with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), this conference will analyse the role of competition to promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth. This conference follows a call for empirical research to better understand the effects of lack of competition on a country's welfare. The conference agenda and registration can be found [here](#).

24-26 June, Manchester, UK. LOCAL LEADERSHIP FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH. The 11th annual meeting of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Forum on Partnerships and Local Development will bring together local and national leaders to discuss how to achieve inclusive growth to develop more resilient economies. For more information about the event, visit OECD's [website](#).

24-26 June, Geneva, Switzerland. TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD – AFRICA. The 61st executive session, held at the Palais des Nations, will discuss activities undertaken by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in support of Africa. Reports will also be given by the UN agency's subsidiary bodies. These include the Working Party on the Strategic Framework and Programme Budget; the Investment, Enterprise, and Development Commission; and the Trade and Development Commission. To learn more and register for the event, visit UNCTAD's [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.

19 June: Committee on Balance-of-Payments Restrictions

19 June: Dispute Settlement Body

22 June: Committee on Regional Trade Agreements

22 June: Committee on Trade and Environment

22 June: Working Party on the Accession of Kazakhstan

23 June: Committee on Regional Trade Agreements

23 + 25 June: Trade Policy Review Body – Chile

24 June: Committee on Trade and Development – Special Session

25 June: Committee on Budget, Finance and Administration

25 June: Working Party on State Trading Enterprises

26 June: Council for Trade in Goods

26 June: Meeting of the Joint Advisory Group on the International Trade Centre (ITC)

Other Upcoming Events

30 June – 2 July, Geneva, Switzerland. FIFTH GLOBAL REVIEW OF AID FOR TRADE: REDUCING TRADE COSTS FOR INCLUSIVE, SUSTAINABLE GROWTH. This event, hosted at WTO headquarters, will focus on the various actions underway to reduce trade costs, at levels ranging from the national, bilateral, regional, and multilateral, as well as the private sector and non-governmental. Participants will be asked to consider which actors are involved in what; how the issue of trade costs is being addressed by national governments and regional organisations in their planning; and whether sufficient progress has been made, and if not, how to improve it. To learn more, visit the WTO [website](#).

2 July, London, UK. TRADE, GLOBAL VALUE CHAINS AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION. Dr. Ganeshan Wignaraja, an advisor from the Asian Development Bank's Economic Research and Regional Cooperation Department, will join the Overseas Development Institute's (ODI) Dr. Marie-Agnes Jouanjean, a research fellow, in a roundtable event discussing trade's impact on economic transformation through global value chains. The event will focus on the importance of global value chains, as well as the implications of trade policy at domestic, regional, and global levels. To learn more and RSVP for the discussion, visit ODI's [website](#).

15 + 17 July, Taipei, Chinese Taipei. CONFERENCE ON ASIA-PACIFIC ECONOMIC COOPERATION (APEC) REGIONAL LIQUIFIED NATURAL GAS (LNG) TRADE FACILITATION. Sponsored by the Energy Working Group through APEC, the two-day workshop invites experts from member economies, international organisations, and the regional LNG trading hub to share their views on LNG trade in the region. The discussion aims to focus on LNG development, trade obstacles, and regional trading mechanisms used by LNG suppliers and consumers. For more information, visit APEC's [website](#).

21 September, London, UK. ANTICIPATING AND MITIGATING MAJOR DISRUPTIVE RISKS TO GLOBAL FOOD TRADE. This one-day event, hosted at Chatham House, invites stakeholders to discuss the challenging reality in global food trade and trends to anticipate future disruptions. The discussions will feed into an ongoing Chatham House research project, which aims to map global food supply chains and their "choke points" to determine the most vulnerable trade routes. Attendance to this event is by invitation only. Event information is available at the Chatham House [website](#).

30 September – 2 October, Geneva, Switzerland. WTO PUBLIC FORUM: TRADE WORKS. This year's WTO Public Forum comes as the global trade body celebrates its 20th anniversary. The theme of "Trade Works" will focus on the contribution that global trade cooperation over the past two decades has made to the world economy. Participants interested in organising an event at the Forum are asked to submit their proposals by 19 June. More information on the event is available at the WTO [website](#).

26-27 October, London, UK. CLIMATE CHANGE 2015. The 21st Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is fast approaching. In this context, Chatham House will be hosting its 19th annual climate change conference, which aims to serve as a mechanism to assess what action steps can be taken to create a global climate deal that ensures long term climate action. The conference will incorporate the expertise of key stakeholders, with the goal of contributing to a positive outcome from the UNFCCC meeting in Paris. Participants will also analyse key risks, as well as important goals, for achieving a global consensus on mitigation priorities. For more information and registration, visit the Chatham House [website](#).

14-17 December, Nairobi, Kenya. TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT SYMPOSIUM. This biennial event, organised jointly by the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD) and the government of Kenya, will be held in parallel to the WTO's Tenth Ministerial Conference. The four-day event will include various high-level plenaries, press events, and private roundtables, among other features. A call for proposals is now underway for those interested in hosting partner sessions during the symposium. Further details can be found on the official event [website](#).

Resources

THROWING SAND IN THE WHEELS: HOW FOREIGN TRADE DISTORTIONS SLOWED LDC EXPORT-LED GROWTH. By Simon Evenett and Johannes Fritz (June 2015). This new eBook argues that the world's poorest countries were those most affected by the trade barriers and distortions that sprung up during the global economic crisis. The authors use data from Global Trade Alert in their analysis, finding that the barriers cut least developed country exports by 30 percent during the 2009-2013 period. To learn more, or to download the e-Book, please click [here](#).

BUSINESS GROWTH AND REGULATIONS. By Raian Divanbeigi and Rita Ramalho for the World Bank Group (June 2015). This policy research working paper explores the impacts of business regulations on economic outcomes. The authors used data covering 10 years in over 180 countries to determine the link between business regulations and economic growth. Among other findings, the results found generally positive trends of growth in cases where there was an improvement by 10 points in overall measure of business regulations. To read the entire working paper, visit the World Bank's [website](#).

INTERNATIONAL POLICY COORDINATION FOR DEVELOPMENT: THE FORGOTTEN LEGACY OF BRETTON WOODS. By Eric Helleiner at the University of Waterloo for the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (May 2015). This discussion paper reflects on the international financial policies developed at the Bretton Woods conference following World War II. Helleiner then discusses the application of those financial policies to today's economic climate and contemporary financial debates, particularly in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis. Read the entire discussion paper [here](#).

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT IN CLEAN ENERGY. Published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (June 2015). This report reviews policy restrictions to international investment in solar PV and wind energy, using this information to then evaluate the impact of such restrictions across value chains. To learn more, or to read the report in full, visit the OECD [website](#).

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WTO TRADE FACILITATION AGREEMENT: THE POTENTIAL IMPACT ON TRADE COSTS. Published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (June 2015). This new brief reviews the potential benefits from the implementation of the WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), finding that it could help reduce worldwide trade costs by anywhere from 12.5 to 17.5 percent. The results were reached using the 2015 OECD Trade Facilitation Indicators (TFIs), which are designed to inform governments on potential measures to improve border procedures, slash trade costs, and increase trade flows, while also identifying areas for action. The brief can be read [here](#).

THE ECONOMICS OF BIOFUEL POLICIES: IMPACTS ON PRICE VOLATILITY IN GRAIN AND OILSEED MARKETS. By Harry de Gorter, Dusan Drabik, and David R. Just. Published by Palgrave Macmillan (2015). This book, published as part of Palgrave's Studies in Agricultural Economics and Food Policy, focuses on the role that biofuel policies have played in recent years on global grain and oilseed markets. The authors combine theory and empirical evidence to examine how such policies create links between crop and biofuel prices, focusing on the US, EU, and Brazil. To learn more, visit the Palgrave [website](#).

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