

# BRIDGES WEEKLY

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## AGRICULTURE

### WTO Farm Talks Chair Urges Members to Accelerate Work for Buenos Aires Ministerial

Governments must "significantly accelerate" their work on farm trade topics ahead of the WTO's eleventh ministerial conference in Buenos Aires this December, says a new [report](#) from the chair of the agriculture negotiations, Kenyan ambassador Stephen Karau.

The report, prepared for a negotiating session late last week, was read out by Norwegian ambassador Harald Neple, who stood in for Karau in his absence.

The document summarises the results of the chair's informal consultations with negotiators, and came as governments submitted various new negotiating proposals and informal papers. (See Bridges Weekly, [20 July 2017](#))

Karau concluded that "different topics are at different levels of maturity." For example, many delegations considered that a substantial outcome at the ministerial conference was "within reach" on agricultural domestic support and in talks on how current farm subsidy rules affect developing countries' ability to buy food at minimum prices under their public stockholding programmes.

He described talks on cotton and on agricultural export restrictions as being at a similar stage of progress. However, he also noted that some members "expressed doubts about the possibility of reaching substantial outcomes on any of the topics under consideration."

#### Twelve working weeks left

However, Karau also warned trade officials that only twelve working weeks remained ahead of the conference in Argentina, and noted that talks had not yet moved into "a real intensive negotiation mode."

Members would need to move into text-based negotiations soon, both for topics on which a substantial outcome is expected in Buenos Aires and for issues which could be addressed as part of a work programme to be agreed at the ministerial, Karau said.

He also underscored that progress on agricultural trade topics was inevitably linked to countries' broader objectives for the ministerial conference.

"Priorities, process, and prospects in agriculture must be seen in the context of overall priorities, process and prospects for MC11," Karau said, using an abbreviation to refer to the eleventh WTO ministerial conference.

### **Domestic support**

The chair reported that WTO members are roughly split into two groups. One group favours an overall limit on agricultural domestic support, either as a fixed monetary value or as a "floating" limit related to the value of production. The other group calls for the elimination of current entitlements to use trade-distorting support classified as "amber box" as a prerequisite for any other reforms.

While the EU and Brazil have put forward a proposal for an overall limit on domestic support, China and India have argued that existing amber box entitlements should be eliminated first. (See Bridges Weekly, [20 July 2017](#))

Karau also said that countries favouring an overall limit had different views on what this should cover. In particular, they diverged on whether production-limiting support in the WTO's "blue box" should be included, and whether developing countries' input and investment subsidies for low-income, resource-poor producers should be covered.

The EU, Brazil, and a group of some Latin American countries have said that the priority should be tackling trade-distorting support, irrespective of whether this is allowed under "amber box" limits or whether it is counted under "de minimis" ceilings that are calculated as a share of the value of production.

In last week's meetings, Japan, Switzerland, and other countries in the G-10 group of countries with highly-protected agricultural sectors were critical of the suggestion that blue box support should be subject to new disciplines, trade sources told Bridges.

Meanwhile, most developing countries oppose any suggestion that limits be introduced on their ability to provide input and investment subsidies for low-income, resource-poor producers. This support faces no limits under current WTO rules.

"Reducing trade-distorting domestic support is a priority for virtually all delegations," Karau said in his report, while adding that countries' views on how to go about it still differ "significantly."

### **Public stockholding: G-33 proposal**

The G-33 coalition of developing countries tabled a new proposal on public stockholding for food security purposes, which would exempt developing countries from having to count food purchased at minimum prices towards their overall limit on trade-distorting support at the WTO.

The proposal is almost identical to an earlier submission from November 2015, but includes the addition of an annex requiring developing countries to submit further details about the programmes that would be covered. (See Bridges Weekly, [26 November 2015](#))

Agricultural exporting countries have argued that more transparency is needed on how developing countries buy food for these programmes, and have warned that the release of food stocks on global markets could distort trade, potentially also undermining food security elsewhere.

The G-33 would require countries benefitting from the new arrangements to provide data such as the quantity of food purchased and released under the programme; the prices at which the government buys and sells the stock; the total volume of production; as well as trade data on the value and volume of any exports and imports.

However, many agricultural exporting countries have said that they would prefer to use a [decision](#) agreed at the 2013 Bali Ministerial Conference as a template, rather than the November 2015 proposal from the G-33. (See Bridges Daily Update, [7 December 2013](#))

At the WTO's Nairobi ministerial conference in 2015, trade ministers [reiterated](#) their intention to pursue a "permanent solution" to the problems that many developing countries say they face under existing WTO farm subsidy rules in this area. In Bali, ministers had said they would do so by the time of the eleventh ministerial conference, though the Nairobi decision does not refer to this date. (See Bridges Daily Update, [19 December 2015](#))

While last week's paper from the EU and Brazil proposed addressing public stockholding jointly with domestic support, the G-33 have argued against establishing a linkage between the two areas.

### **Export restrictions**

Karau also reported that "broad support" existed among countries for Singapore's ideas on how countries could improve transparency around the use of agricultural export prohibitions and restrictions.

A new proposal from the Asian trading nation would have countries provide at least 30 days' notice before introducing these measures. Current WTO rules simply require countries to provide written notice "as far in advance as practicable."

Least developed countries (LDCs) would be exempt from any new commitments, the proposal says. The LDC group had proposed stronger rules on agricultural export restrictions in a separate negotiating submission two years ago. (See Bridges Weekly, [22 October 2015](#))

Singapore's proposal would also require WTO members to refrain from imposing export prohibitions or restrictions on humanitarian food aid that is bought by the UN's World Food Programme (WFP). At their Cannes summit in 2011, the leaders of the G20 group of major advanced and emerging economies agreed to ensure that food aid purchases were unaffected by such measures, but trade ministers meeting at the WTO biennial ministerial conference shortly afterwards were unable to agree on a similar commitment. (See Bridges Weekly, [9 November 2011](#) and [7 December 2011](#))

### **Cotton: draft proposal discussed**

Karau reported that he had convened meetings on cotton which had included discussion of a draft proposal prepared by the C-4 group of West African cotton-producing countries – Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mali.

The C-4 countries have long argued for cuts in the level of trade-distorting support provided by wealthier countries, on the basis that this disadvantages poor producers in West Africa.

The EU-Brazil proposal tabled last week singled out cotton for special attention, and recalled ministers' past commitments to ensure that the sector is addressed "ambitiously, expeditiously and specifically." (See Bridges Weekly, [20 July 2017](#))

The chair said that he had convened consultations on cotton involving the C-4 countries and also Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, Colombia, the EU, India, Pakistan, and the US.

"Most participants reiterated their support for a meaningful and specific outcome on cotton domestic support," the chair observed. However, he also noted that "a couple of participants" were less optimistic, given their assessment of the overall prospects for the negotiations.

In the US, ongoing lobbying efforts by domestic cotton producers have recently led to lawmakers from the US [Senate](#) and [House of Representatives](#) writing to President Donald Trump and Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue to call for a temporary support programme for cotton ginneries to be made permanent. (See Bridges Weekly, [16 June 2016](#))

Trade sources told Bridges that the US Administration's stance on farm trade and the WTO was still one of the major unknowns in the run-up to the Buenos Aires ministerial. US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer said in June that Washington does "not advocate a meeting that seeks major deliverables or significant negotiated outcomes," while saying the ministerial should still be a success. (See Bridges Weekly, [29 June 2017](#))

While Dennis Shea, vice chairman of the United States-China Economic and Security Review Commission, has been nominated to the post of US Ambassador to the WTO, he is still pending Senate confirmation.

ICTSD reporting.

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## WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

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# WTO Members Prepare for Autumn Negotiations, Endorse Update to Trade Policy Review

WTO members adopted changes to their "Trade Policy Review Mechanism" on Wednesday 26 July, during a General Council meeting that also addressed preparations for the WTO's ministerial conference this December, given the organisation's upcoming August break.

The General Council is the organisation's highest-level body outside of its ministerial conference, with this meeting's agenda including the election of [vice chairs](#) for the ministerial, along with updates on the WTO's e-commerce work programme and related submissions from members, among other topics.

### Trade Policy Review: changes approved

Members [endorsed](#) on Wednesday changes to the Trade Policy Review Mechanism, the transparency-focused exercise which allows for regular scrutiny of members' trade policies and macroeconomic environment.

These reviews, which apply across the WTO's 164 members, involve reports prepared by both the organisation's secretariat as well as the member under scrutiny; questions submitted by the remaining membership; and a meeting at the WTO's headquarters.

The changes confirmed this week were submitted for consideration early this year, and revise the timeframes for hosting trade policy reviews of WTO members.

Specifically, the organisation's four largest traders will be subject to review every three years, as opposed to the current biennial reviews; the subsequent 16 will face reviews every five years, instead of every four; and all remaining members reviewed every seven years, instead of the current six.

The revised timeframe will apply from January 2019 onwards, according to the amendment's text. This unanimous decision marks the first time that the mechanism has been revised in three decades, and has been explained as a way to improve the system in light of the organisation's growing number of members.

### Negotiations: preparing for autumn

The annual August break is a time which allows delegates to consult with capitals before negotiations resume this autumn. When they return to Geneva, they will have only a few months before the WTO's Eleventh Ministerial Conference (MC11) in Buenos Aires, Argentina, slated for 10-13 December. Sources say a planned "mini-ministerial" in early October in Marrakech, Morocco, could give some political momentum to the process, along with shedding more light on what might form a final set of outcomes.

In preparation for the Buenos Aires event, WTO Director-General Roberto Azevêdo met earlier this week with Susana Malcorra, the former Argentine foreign minister who will be chairing the December ministerial, along with the chairs of the various WTO negotiating groups.

The WTO chief also [reported](#) on the status of the negotiations at multiple meetings of the membership this week, including at the Trade Negotiations Committee (TNC) and at the level of Heads of Delegation, both on Tuesday.

"I think greater urgency is required across the board, if we are to see progress," he said that day.

Azevêdo highlighted in particular the attention being given to the topics of agriculture, services, and rules, the last of these being the area where fisheries subsidies are discussed. While welcoming a recent uptick in the submission of textual proposals in negotiating areas, he called for the talks to become "more focused" as the ministerial approaches, and suggested that members would need to be "realistic" in what could constitute Buenos Aires deliverables and what might take additional work.

"We need to increase the intensity of our work markedly if we are to make the progress that I think most members want to see – including, crucially, steps on development and in support of [least developed countries]," he added.

Concerns over the pace of the talks was also raised by a 47-member coalition this week, who issued a [joint communication](#) on the subject for both the General Council and at the informal meeting at the level of Heads of Delegation the day prior.

"To date, the political will to find compromises and to forge consensus is lacking. Even the legitimacy of discussing topics of interest to members has been put into question," said the group, which included various developed and developing country members.

They also noted that some non-negotiating issues involving the WTO's regular work, including dispute settlement and notifications, are under strain, and stressed that the Buenos Aires ministerial "presents an important opportunity to reaffirm the centrality of the WTO."

To date, WTO negotiations for MC11 have focused on a diverse set of areas. This includes the possibility of a deal disciplining harmful fisheries subsidies, with proposals from seven different groups or individual members on the table in the "rules negotiating group" within the WTO. According to a Geneva trade official, an updated proposal from six Latin American countries on the fish negotiations was submitted this week, revising an earlier iteration. (See Bridges Weekly, [20 July 2017](#))

A host of proposals have been put forward in the agriculture talks over the past fortnight, addressing topics such as agricultural domestic support and public food stockholding for food security. (For more on the agriculture talks, see related story, this edition)

Among other recent developments was renewed activity in another negotiating area, when the EU, Hong Kong, Chinese Taipei, and Singapore tabled a proposed ministerial decision this month within the group on non-agricultural market access (NAMA).

That document outlines transparency-focused articles on regulations involving two WTO agreements – those on sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS) and technical barriers to trade (TBT). For example, it puts forward the suggestion of a public internet portal, language on ensuring public consultations, and special and differential treatment. While that subject [generated](#) positive feedback from some delegations last week, according to the WTO, others questioned the difficulties of putting it in practice and whether this negotiating forum was the best place for the discussions the subject.

### **E-commerce work programme, digital proposals**

During Wednesday's meeting, the chairs of the Council for Trade in Services, Council for Trade in Goods, and the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) all

submitted reports to update the General Council on progress to date within the WTO's existing e-commerce work programme, which has been in place for nearly two decades.

Ahead of the General Council, several members also put forward communications outlining proposed ways to advance within the work programme, including at the ministerial. Those communications were tabled by Japan; Russia; and a group comprised of Australia, Canada, Colombia, Qatar, and Singapore. With some variations, all refer to the need for greater clarity on how to move forward in this area.

For example, Japan has suggested that members use the existing work programme to "comprehensively evaluate whether the clarification or strengthening of the existing WTO rules are necessary over the course of next one year after MC11," which would then help inform members on whether to launch a decision on formal negotiations. Japan has attached an "illustrative list of issues" to consider in this context.

Meanwhile, Russia has suggested setting up a "Working Group on Electronic Commerce" within the General Council umbrella, also based off the existing work programme and member submissions, to review areas where members might "make substantial progress," along with suggesting which tasks or topics could form that group's mandate.

The country group submission has called upon members to review how the existing work programme "could better facilitate more focused and holistic discussions on e-commerce," such as issues or improvements worth reviewing further, while still keeping the work programme "exploratory" in nature. That communication also called for a ministerial decision on the subject to guide future work.

How the topic of e-commerce and the digital economy will be addressed in Buenos Aires remains, for the moment, unclear. Under the decision adopted at the 2015 Nairobi ministerial, members agree to hold periodic reviews, such as the one held at this week's General Council, on the work programme and report to MC11 on the result. (See Bridges Daily Update, [19 December 2015](#))

ICTSD reporting.

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## GLOBAL ECONOMY

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# UK Trade Minister Outlines Post-Brexit Approach to WTO, US Economic Ties

The United Kingdom views "the future of global trade" as revolving particularly around digital economy, services, and development, according to Liam Fox, the country's Secretary of State for International Trade.

The UK official specifically outlined to audiences in Geneva and Washington over the past week how his country may approach this "new chapter in its history" when it comes to the WTO and US trade ties, respectively, given the expected Brexit date of March 2019.

[Speaking](#) late last week at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland, the UK trade official said that the country's objectives regarding the WTO would focus on addressing current and future challenges, while "[advancing] the cause of free trade," as part of its deep-seated commitment to the organisation.

"The UK has been a WTO member since the organisation's inception and I am proud to stand here today and say that the UK remains, to its core, committed to multilateralism, and to the WTO," he said.

Devoting much of his speech to the WTO, Fox said that the organisation "retains both a vital symbolic and practical significance," referring to its achievements in areas ranging from new rules on trade facilitation to drawing in new members – while also suggesting that the WTO still "may be in need of some refurbishment."

He also suggested that WTO members could gain from "another round of liberalisation," without going into specific detail on that subject. However, he did specify areas where the UK is interested in seeing the WTO take a leading role, along with its hopes for the organisation's next ministerial conference.

"At the [Eleventh] Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires and beyond we should challenge ourselves to adopt similarly bold measures to refurbish those elements of the multilateral architecture that are perhaps showing their age the most, recommitting ourselves to the principle of a robust, rules-based trading system," he said.

Trade ministers are due to convene in Buenos Aires, Argentina, this coming December for the above-mentioned ministerial, which is the WTO's highest level meeting. Members are still examining what may form a potential set of outcomes for the Buenos Aires meeting, including a possible deal on fisheries subsidies and some deliverables relating to agriculture. (For more on the WTO, see related stories, this edition)

He also said that the organisation "has the potential to set the agenda" in topics that are, for his country, the shapers of "the future of global trade." Fox specifically referred to the digital economy, including a "positive outcome" in Buenos Aires; pushing trade as "the main tool of development"; and advancing services liberalisation, later calling for plurilateral talks on a Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA) to resume.

Those TiSA talks, conducted among 23 WTO members that account for 70 percent in global services trade, have been on hold since late last year. (See Bridges Weekly, [24 November 2016](#))



Fox's speech came just days after Indian Commerce and Industry Minister Nirmala Sitharaman gave her own remarks on the WTO and multilateralism at the same university, outlining her recommendations for a "multi-pronged approach" on these subjects and warning against "inward looking" policies in the current global geopolitical context. (See Bridges Weekly, [20 July 2017](#))

### **UK, US working group**

The UK trade official later travelled to Washington for a meeting of the "UK-US Trade and Investment Working Group," a panel set up to boost bilateral economic ties between the two countries.

The inaugural meeting of the working group took place on Monday 24 July, and was chaired by both Fox and his American counterpart, US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer.

"We expect this working group to be a key mechanism to deepen our already strong bilateral trade and investment relationship, and to lay the groundwork for our future trade relationship once the UK has left the EU," said Lighthizer after the meeting, according to a [joint release](#) published by his office.

The US official also referred to the "mutual goal of achieving free and fair trade and investment," using terms that have become common parlance in the new administration's trade rhetoric. He did not elaborate on what "free and fair trade and investment" would mean in the UK context.

Fox, for his part, elaborated that the working group's initial efforts will be to smooth over any issues that might arise as the UK exits the European Union, along with paving the way for "potential negotiations" on a bilateral trade pact. That same day, Fox gave a speech at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), a Washington-based policy think tank, which touched upon similar themes as his Geneva remarks – including on the future of the WTO.

It also looked specifically at the UK-US relationship going forward, with Fox referring more directly to the prospects of a future trade agreement, and highlighting the potential for economies "like the United States, or the UK," to deepen their trade ties in areas such as services.

"As a priority, the working group will seek to provide stability, certainty, and confidence for businesses on both sides of the Atlantic. Indeed, the first discussions will focus on providing commercial continuity as the UK leaves the EU," he [said](#) at AEI.

"But our ambitions are much wider. The working group is designed to provide a springboard, laying the groundwork for a comprehensive free trade agreement between our two nations post-Brexit – the start of a new and exciting chapter in our special relationship," Fox added.

The UK government has since released a report, described by Fox at AEI on Monday, looking at the bilateral trading relationship through the lens of every single US district – which Fox said is specifically designed for the 435 members of the US House of Representatives, who represent those districts in Congress.

### **Trump on UK, EU trade**

While the joint release from the working group referred to a UK-US trade agreement as a "possibility," US President Donald Trump later claimed on social media site Twitter that the sides were working on an accord.

"Working on major Trade Deal with the United Kingdom," [said](#) Trump, who also claimed that the European Union is "very protectionist" with the United States. Trump did not elaborate on his "protectionist" argument, though the US leader has previously [blamed](#)

Germany for the US' trade deficit in relation to that country. (See Bridges Weekly, [1 June 2017](#))

What Trump's statement might mean for the prospects of reinvigorating an existing trade negotiation between the US and EU was also unclear.

The US and EU launched negotiations in 2013 for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), envisioning a comprehensive deal that would yield market access gains in goods, services, and public procurement, along with making progress in harmonising rules and regulations between the economic powerhouses.

While the talks have been on hold since late 2016, Lighthizer has said that the administration views TTIP as "an area where there are a lot of very positive reasons to go forward," pending the completion of EU elections in some member states. Officials from the US and EU reportedly agreed in May to develop a "joint action plan" on trade. (See Bridges Weekly, [29 June 2017](#) and [1 June 2017](#), respectively)

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## DISPUTES

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# WTO Members Pursue Options to Improve Dispute Settlement Process

WTO members examined a series of issues last week involving the functioning of the organisation's dispute settlement arm, including a renewed initiative led by Canada on voluntary steps to improve the system's operation in practice.

During a meeting of the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) on 20 July, members also debated how to replace two members of the Appellate Body judges, given that one's term has expired and the other will end later this year – ultimately finding themselves unable to reach agreement, according to a Geneva trade official.

### Reform discussions

Since its establishment in the early 1990s following the Uruguay Round of trade talks, WTO members have put forward over 500 disputes. Some of these stay at the first "consultations" phase, while others make their way through the dispute panel and appellate processes, and even to "compliance" reviews and arbitration.

Over that timeframe, disputes have become increasingly [difficult](#), leading both past and present WTO Directors-General and the membership itself to raise concerns over the burdens on the system. This strain has manifested itself in much longer proceedings than what were originally envisioned under WTO dispute settlement rules. Meanwhile, efforts to negotiate updates to these rules have been formally underway since the Doha Round of trade talks was launched in 2001.

Discussions on reform of the DSU have shown little progress, with members unable to reach consensus on moving proposals forward. [Informal consultations](#) have also been underway over the past seven years under a separate "Dispute Settlement Efficiency Exercise," bringing together opinions on how to make the current system better – though the implementation of these ideas is up to the parties involved in any given case.

### New Canadian-sponsored practice documents

In July 2016, Canada led a group of members in launching an informal, voluntary [mechanism](#) that would involve information-sharing about new approaches to the dispute settlement process. The mechanism and a number of initial practice agreements were "[endorsed](#)" by various other members. At the time, Canada [noted](#) the difficulties in advancing membership-wide updates to the current system. (See Bridges Weekly, [28 July 2016](#))

Ahead of last week's DSB meeting, Canada put forward four additional communications outlining "additional practices and procedures in the conduct of WTO disputes." These procedural agreements, with varying numbers of endorsements, would supplement those that were circulated last year.

These new documents include creating a larger pool of candidates to choose from when setting up dispute panels; allowing dispute parties to submit documents only through electronic means, such as e-mail or DVD; speeding up responses to "third party" requests to join dispute consultations; and publishing working procedures, timetables, and preliminary dispute rulings.

According to a Geneva trade official, delegates from over a dozen members spoke in appreciation of Canada's efforts to spur discussion forward in this area, with some already confirming that they would endorse many or all of these approaches. Certain members also suggested areas where future voluntary agreements could go even further.

Some members did ask for clarification on how "endorsing" these voluntary steps would work, asking either for feedback from members that had endorsed the 2016 mechanism and associated documents, or for more details on what the term "endorse" means. For example, the US [asked](#) about the "intended legal effect, if any," of endorsements, while noting that it "appreciate[s] the opportunity for members to discuss these four proposals."

Canada also said that it would be updating and releasing a new list of endorsing members for when the DSB convenes in late August.

### **AB selection disagreement persists**

According to a Geneva trade official, WTO members remain at odds on appointing two new members to the Appellate Body – fuelling fears that the situation could significantly weigh down the system.

The Appellate Body is a seven-member group that serves as the WTO's highest adjudicative body, with each member serving a four-year term, with the possibility of a one-time renewal. These appointments are made by consensus, and WTO rules do not dictate the details of how the appointment process should work.

Members are currently weighing two different proposals for beginning the appointment process to replace Ricardo Ramírez-Hernández and Peter Van den Bossche, whose respective second terms are ending this year. Ramírez-Hernández's term ended in June, while Van den Bossche's term ends in December.

Late last year, the DSB chairperson proposed one selection process for both slots, citing past precedent, and suggesting that this be wrapped up by June of this year. However, given that some members [pushed](#) for these two roles to be filled through separate processes, the chair has since been consulting with members on next steps.

Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru have put forward – and subsequently updated – a [proposal](#) that would focus solely on the Ramírez-Hernández slot. The EU, for its part, has tabled and updated a [proposal](#) covering both roles.

Meanwhile, the US has [maintained](#) on repeated occasions, including at [last week's meeting](#), that given factors such as the domestic change-over in its trade team, it is only prepared to move forward on the Appellate Body slot that opened in July 2017.

Some members have said that they would be willing to support either proposal to advance the overall process. If the appointment process is not launched soon, the Appellate Body will find itself, for the second time in two years, without its full slate of judges. The DSB chair is due to continue consultations with the membership to determine next steps.

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## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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# Agenda 2030: High-Level Forum Reviews Progress on Poverty Eradication Goal

Ministers and top officials from UN member states signed off on a [declaration](#) last week aimed at advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with a particular focus on the theme of "eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world."

The declaration was approved after the annual meeting of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). The eight-day session, organised by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), involved reports from countries on their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), a high-level segment, and discussions on challenges related to seven out of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

"We welcome efforts at all levels to implement the 2030 Agenda and recognise that after almost two years of implementation our individual and collective efforts have yielded encouraging results in many areas," the ministerial declaration said.

However, it called for more to be done, stating that "the pace of implementation must be accelerated as the tasks facing us are urgent."

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted two years ago by UN member states, [includes](#) the Sustainable Development Goals, which aim at shifting global players into more equal and sustainable frameworks for development. (See Bridges Weekly, [1 October 2015](#))

The goals that were reviewed in depth at the meeting this year included Goals [1](#) (ending poverty), [2](#) (zero hunger), [3](#) (good health and well-being), [5](#) (gender equality), [9](#) (industry, innovation, and infrastructure), and [14](#) (life below water).

The meeting was attended by 77 ministers, cabinet secretaries, and deputy ministers, along with over 2400 stakeholder representatives.

### Global environment, declaration debate

The ministerial declaration addressed a series of topics, ranging from food security and hunger to persistent gender inequality, the need for better access to health care and medicines, as well as infrastructure.

The document ties these to poverty eradication efforts, while warning that "nearly 35 percent of the population in least developed countries could remain in extreme poverty by 2030" and that hunger and undernourishment still affect hundreds of millions across the globe.

Continued extreme poverty, they said, could have especially damaging prospects for young people, and would require countries to take greater steps at the domestic levels to make sure their poverty eradication work is more impactful; involves better social protections; and addresses issues involving at-risk or remote populations. The declaration also advocates for taking environmental, biodiversity, and climate change into consideration, given their economic ramifications.

Ministers also refer to some of the challenges that are putting SDG implementation at a potential risk, calling for greater collaboration across stakeholders “to create the necessary enabling environment at all levels.”

“We are concerned about the significant impacts of the current challenging global environment on national efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda, including not only economic factors such as difficult macroeconomic conditions, low commodity prices, subdued trade growth and volatile capital flows, but also natural disasters, climate change, environmental degradation, humanitarian crises, and conflict,” they said.

The overall declaration, according to a UN press release summarising the events, noted that while the document itself was not subject to a vote, two paragraphs did see specific votes. While one of these was on the right to self-determination for those living under occupation, the other was specifically on trade.

The second paragraph in question – paragraph 21 – covers a range of topics. However, the language on trade, which states that they “will continue to promote a universal, rules-based, open, transparent, predictable, inclusive, non-discriminatory, and equitable multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization, as well as meaningful trade liberalisation,” was raised in the voting process.

The final recorded vote, according to the UN summary, saw the United States vote against, with 112 in favour and over 40 abstaining. According to Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB), a few members did raise questions over the language itself, with Australia, Canada, and New Zealand reportedly expressing interest in seeing topics such as resource sector mobilisation addressed further.

The UN report also indicated that the US had objected to addressing a non-UN organisation in this document, given that the 164-member WTO is not a UN body. Separately, the US also “dissociated itself” from sections within the seventh paragraph of the declaration, which includes references supporting the Paris Agreement on climate change.

US President Donald Trump announced his plans to withdraw his country from the global climate accord earlier this year. (See Bridges Weekly, [8 June 2017](#))

Other topics that [sparked debate](#) was how to treat language on topics ranging from gender inequality to wealth distribution and migration.

### **Civil society reactions**

Action for Sustainable Development, an international platform dedicated to engaging civil society groups in the 2030 Agenda process, [commended](#) the conference for its “enthusiasm and determination.”

However, the group also expressed concern over certain key areas, such as the speed of the poverty eradication efforts, including at the domestic level.

“We remain concerned that what has been presented in Voluntary National Reviews this year demonstrates that the pace of change is still too slow, and the reality remains that the scale of inequality globally is rising,” said the group.

The 2017 conference also saw Voluntary National Review (VNRs) presentations from 43 countries, close to double those reviewed the year prior. These country-led reviews are meant to feed into the HLPF process, and the civil society coalition suggested that while improvements are needed, these could be a useful platform for supporting the Paris Agreement’s implementation and other climate action efforts.

### Coming up

In 2018, the [theme](#) for at the HLPF conference will be the “transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies.” It will address the following specific goals: SDGs [6](#) (safe water and sanitation), [7](#) (sustainable energy), [11](#) (sustainable cities and communities), [12](#) (sustainable consumption and production), and [15](#) (sustainable terrestrial ecosystems).

The following year, the high-level group will review progress towards Goals [4](#) (equitable quality education), [8](#) (sustainable economic growth), [10](#) (reduce inequality), [13](#) (combat climate change), and [16](#) (promote peaceful and inclusive societies), which all aim to promote empowerment, inclusiveness, and equality.

Like the 2017 HLPF, these meetings will also look at SDG17, which involves means of implementation and partnerships for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals overall.

ICTSD reporting; “Summary of the 2017 Meeting of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development: 10-19 July 2017,” EARTH NEGOTIATIONS BULLETIN, 22 July 2017.

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## TRADE AGREEMENTS

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### EU Commission: Mexico Trade Talks "Progressing at a Good Pace"

Efforts to upgrade an existing EU-Mexico trade accord are "progressing at a good pace," according to the EU's executive branch, which [published](#) last week recent textual proposals and a report on the advances made in the latest negotiating round.

The European Commission said that this release, along with a round summary relating to the EU's negotiations with the Mercosur customs bloc, are part of its efforts to ensure more transparency in trade policy. The EU and Mexico were slated to hold "intersessional" discussions this week, with the next formal round planned for late September.

The reports say that recent rounds have yielded steady advances, with the announcement affirming that "both negotiations are progressing at a good pace with full engagement from both partners."

#### Updating the Global Agreement

The EU-Mexico trade talks are a part of a bigger agenda of revamping the Global Agreement, which sets out the rules on trade and cooperation between the two parties. Concluded in early 2000s, proponents of an upgrade say that the provisions on goods and services trade have become somewhat outdated, while also noting the gains seen under the original deal as an argument supporting deeper ties.

Four years ago, the EU and Mexico [began](#) exploring "options for a comprehensive update," and later announced in 2015 that they planned to move ahead with a new negotiation. (See Bridges Weekly, [13 May 2015](#))

Since then, they have held four formal rounds, with the latest taking place in Mexico City in late June and early July this year. "Significant progress was achieved during this round on most of the key issues, although further works are still required," the report [sums up](#).

Official Mexican communications prior to the meeting stressed the intention of both parties to conclude the talks before the end of the year. "Secretary Ildefonso Guajardo Villarreal and Commissioner Cecilia Malmström, held a telephone call in which they endorsed the commitment of both parties to conclude the modernisation this same year," [says](#) the release, referring to the top Mexican and EU trade officials, respectively.

Malmström has also stated previously that both parties are "committed" to finishing trade talks to modernise the agreement in 2017. (See Bridges Weekly, [11 May 2017](#))

#### Advances reported on services, investment

The Commission's report [identifies](#) the areas where the two partners have achieved progress, and builds off the [previous](#) communication from the third negotiating round, held in April.

Constructive dialogue was reported in the July round regarding issues of customs valuation, export and import licensing, various aspects on trade in services, public procurement, trade facilitation, and trademarks, according to the EU.



On services, the two trading partners are already working towards developing consolidated texts, including provisions relating to digital trade, telecommunications, and financial services, among others.

The report also says that the two sides agreed "on provisions relating to investment liberalisation and protection," without delving into further detail. One of the areas that saw "significant progress" was a planned chapter relating to supporting small and medium-sized enterprises' (SMEs) engagement in trade.

Discussions are still ongoing on issues such as export duties and charges, export restrictions, trade remedies, trade in repaired or remanufactured products, an annex on wine and spirits, geographical indications, subsidies, competition, and technical barriers to trade (TBTs).

Despite the various advances reported, the two sides will still need to reconcile differing approaches to certain areas of trade policy going forward.

The EU also released last week an updated textual proposal for TBTs, which [highlights](#) the modifications that the bloc is seeking in the course of the negotiations. Major changes relate to conformity assessment, which refers to the steps needed to meet the requirements for selling a product within either party.

"Mexico raised concerns related to the level of ambition of the proposals and compatibility with its system and legal framework," the negotiating round report [mentions](#) on the subject of TBT.

Protection of EU's geographical indications (GIs) has long been a crucial topic for EU trade negotiators, whether in this accord or in other contexts. Geographical indications are used for products who have a specific geographical origin, with reputation and characteristics tied to that location. Common EU examples include Feta cheese from Greece, or champagne from France. An example from Mexico would be the liquor tequila.

In the latest round of negotiations, Mexico "explained how it intended to proceed with the publication of the public opposition for the EU GIs."

### **Mercosur recap, leaders' push**

The [release](#) of negotiating reports also included an update on EU free trade talks with four founding members of Mercosur – Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay. The long-running negotiations have picked up steam since in 2016, and Brussels hosted the 28<sup>th</sup> round in early July. (See Bridges Weekly, [13 July 2017](#))

"As a result of the round, we have practically an agreed text on: customs and trade facilitation, mutual administrative assistance, financial services and capital movements and payments, as well as important progress on a range of other texts, notably goods, services and establishment, government procurement, geographical indications, trade and sustainable development and dispute settlement," [says](#) the Commission's report.

Mercosur leaders, at a summit held last week in Mendoza, Argentina, flagged the uptick in momentum as one of the most promising areas for the group, with some officials reiterating the hope that those talks might come to a close before year's end.

"Mercosur's participation in world trade should increase significantly and that is why trade agreements have been prioritised. We are moving forward with a view to finalising the EU deal in December this year," said Argentine Foreign Minister Jorge Faurie, according to comments reported by EurActiv.

Other officials, while similarly suggesting that an accord might be possible in 2017, have suggested that both sides will need to be "pragmatic" in their approach to doing so. The

talks for a region-to-region trade deal fall within a larger effort to ink an Association Agreement between the two blocs, and have been underway since 1999 with mixed results.

ICTSD reporting; "Mercosur nations prioritise end-of-year EU trade deal," EURACTIV, 25 July 2017; "Mercosur pide pragmatism para cerra acuerdo con la UE," DEUTSCHE WELLE, 20 July 2017.

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## GLOBAL ECONOMY

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# US, China Conclude First "Comprehensive Economic Dialogue," Eye Future Areas for Progress

The US and China completed their first "Comprehensive Economic Dialogue" last week, reviewing progress made on certain trade items within the "100-day" window set by leaders, while pledging to continue efforts towards resolving various other economic issues.

The event was co-chaired by US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, and Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang, and also included other high-ranking officials from both sides.

After last week's talks, a joint statement [released](#) by Ross and Mnuchin says China "acknowledged our shared objective to reduce the trade deficit which both sides will work cooperatively to achieve."

The principles of "balance, fairness, and reciprocity will continue to guide the American position," the document adds.

A separate report by Chinese state-run news agency Xinhua and circulated by the country's Ministry of Commerce [said](#) that both sides agreed to "strengthen cooperation, accounting for the differences, and continue the constructive cooperation to narrow the trade deficit." The statement highlights that both parties recognise the principles of "win-win cooperation" and "dialogue and consultation" as key for moving forward.

### Earlier advances

Washington officials noted that over the past 100 days, the major areas where they have seen advances [include](#) issues such as credit ratings, bond clearing, electronic payments, commercial banking, liquefied natural gas, as well as China's completion of its changes to its import restrictions on American beef.

In his opening remarks, Mnuchin also [mentioned](#) those earlier achievements under the 100-day plan, particularly on beef, given China's previous 13-year ban following a case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy – known more commonly as mad cow disease.

The beef outcomes had been pushed for heavily by American meat producers in the run-up to an April meeting between US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping. (See Bridges Weekly, [13 April 2017](#))

"Despite our success at expanding exports, the foreign market with the greatest growth potential – China – remains closed to US beef and beef products, even as China imports large and growing volumes from our competitors," the joint letter [said](#) at the time

China [announced](#) that it was lifting the import ban last autumn, while the previous US Administration was still in place. Technical details were, however, finalised this year, without which US producers were purportedly "still blocked from selling any US beef to Chinese consumers," according to the letter.

Beijing's statement [refers](#) mainly to the earlier advances, such as on poultry exports to the US, or the approval of some American biotechnology applications. It also indicated that

steel and aluminium trade were of continued interest to both sides, among others, in a reference to the high-profile issue of global industrial overcapacity.

Issues such as boosting bilateral trade in services were also flagged as needing future work. No announcements were made last week on the bilateral investment treaty (BIT) negotiations, an area where China is reportedly wishing to resume work given the rapid growth of US-bound investments. Those talks started in 2008 but have yet to be finalised.

### History of talks

While this was the inaugural meeting of this new "dialogue," the two sides have previously held high-level dialogues in similar configurations under earlier US administrations. This includes a "Strategic and Economic Dialogue" [established](#) in 2009 under then-US President Barack Obama and then-Chinese President Hu Jintao, which convened annually to address "the challenges and opportunities that the US and China face on a wide range of bilateral, regional, and global areas of immediate and long-term strategic and economic interest."

This mechanism, in turn, replaced US-China "Strategic Economic Dialogue," [set up](#) by the previous administration in 2006, "to provide an overarching framework for ongoing productive bilateral economic dialogues."

During his opening remarks last week, Mnuchin referred to the history of high-level talks between the two sides, and explained that the current format "was broadened to include a wide array of issues," and can "increase the focus on concrete and targeted commitments."

### Trade stats

The two sides have long had a complex history, both on trade and on other major policy issues. The Asian giant is credited as the US' top source of imports, and the third largest destination for American exports.

While US deficit in goods trade had [decreased](#) by 5.5 percent between 2015 and 2016, according to data published by the Office of the US Trade Representative, it still totalled US\$347 billion last year, making up nearly half of the country's total trade deficit.

The current US administration has repeatedly raised concerns over the causes of the deficit, arguing that in some cases, unfair practices are at play, for instance in areas such as currency and intellectual property rights.

Addressing "imbalances caused by Chinese government intervention in its economy, as well as addressing the impact of China's industrial, agricultural, technological, and cyber policies on US jobs and exports" was therefore a key topic for the Comprehensive Economic Dialogue, according to [Mnuchin](#).

In a speech last week to business leaders in Washington, Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang [mentioned](#) that one of the reasons for US' trade deficit with China may result from "outdated US regulations on export control," which Beijing says are inhibiting trade in those goods from reaching their full potential.

Citing an [op-ed](#) published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the vice premier noted that "if the US were to liberalise its export barriers against China to the same level as those applicable to Brazil or France, the US trade deficit with China would narrow by up to 24 and 34 percent respectively."

ICTSD reporting; "China offers concessions to avert trade war with US," FINANCIAL TIMES, 9 April 2017; "What's at stake at China-US Comprehensive Economic Dialogue?" CHINA DAILY, 18 July 2017.

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## EVENTS & RESOURCES

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# Events

### Coming Soon

28 July, New Delhi, India. DEVELOPMENT SEMINAR AT BROOKINGS INDIA: AMERICA'S ECONOMIC ANXIETY. This Brookings India seminar will feature Jonathan Morduch, Professor of Public Policy and Economics at New York University, as its guest speaker and Shamika Ravi, Senior Fellow at Brookings India and the Brookings Institution, as the discussant. The event will focus on the financial insecurity that affects many in the United States, as raised in a book by Jonathan Morduch and Rachel Schneider, along with possible recommendations. To learn more or to register, please visit the event [website](#).

1-3 August, Abuja, Nigeria. ESTABLISHING A TRADE FACILITATION ROADMAP IN NIGERIA. This workshop is being organized by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) as part of its Empowerment Programme for National Trade Facilitation Committees. The programme aims to support countries that are putting in place trade facilitation committees, including by supporting the development of multi-year trade facilitation plans. More information about the workshop is available at the UNCTAD [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.

28 July: Informal Open-ended Dispute Settlement Body – Special Session

28 July: Working Party on the Accession of Azerbaijan

### Other Upcoming Events

8-10 August, Lomé, Togo. 2017 AGOA FORUM. This year's African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) Forum will be hosted jointly by the US and Togo, with the theme "The United States and Africa: Partnering for Prosperity through Trade." The event is geared towards senior officials from countries involved in AGOA's implementation. More information is available at the US State Department's [website](#).

20-23 August, Stockholm, Sweden. RESILIENCE 2017: RESILIENCE FRONTIERS FOR GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY. This conference is being organised by the Stockholm Resilience Centre and the Resilience Alliance, with this year's edition looking at various different themes, such as biosphere stewardship, social-ecological system dynamics, and social-ecological transformations for sustainability. A list of keynote speakers and a draft conference programme are both available online. More information is available at the event [website](#).

25-27 September, Geneva, Switzerland. TRADE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FORUM 2017. This annual event by the International Trade Centre (ITC) will examine the topics of voluntary sustainability standards and sustainable value chains, looking specifically

at partnerships and other collaboration in this field. To learn more and to register, visit the ITC [website](#).

26-28 September, Geneva, Switzerland. WTO PUBLIC FORUM 2017: "TRADE: BEHIND THE HEADLINES." This year's edition of the WTO's outreach event will have as its theme "Trade: Behind the Headlines." The meeting will aim to look at the real-life implications of trade, as opposed to rhetoric, and will also look at how trade can support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and related issues. To learn more, visit the WTO [website](#).

25-26 October, Budapest, Hungary, 17th WORLD EXPORT DEVELOPMENT FORUM (WEDF). The International Trade Centre's (ITC) flagship event will have as this year's theme "Trade - A force for good: include, innovate, integrate." The forum will explore how trade can generate positive change at a time when global challenges – economic, social, and environmental – are changing how trade works. WEDF will be co-hosted by the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and will gather business leaders, policymakers, and representatives of international organisations and trade and investment support institutions for interactive sessions and facilitated business-to-business meetings. Registration is now open at <https://wedf-registration.org/> For more information on the event, please visit the WEDF 2017 [website](#).

11-13 December, Buenos Aires, Argentina. TRADE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SYMPOSIUM (TSDS). This biennial event is being organised by the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD) in collaboration with select strategic partners, in parallel with the WTO's Eleventh Ministerial Conference. A dedicated website to the TSDS is now live, with information on how to become a knowledge partner; the event's format; and other relevant details. Please note that the TSDS will also feature the Bridges Writing Competition, an essay contest for current university students, which will soon be underway. Additional information on the TSDS will be made available closer to the date. To learn more, visit the TSDS [website](#).

14 December, Buenos Aires, Argentina. FORUM ON MIGRATION, TRADE, AND THE GLOBAL ECONOMY. This event is being organised by the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD) and the Fundación Foro del Sur, with a view to understanding the interlinkages between trade and migration. The forum is slated to bring together public and private sector participants, along with representatives from civil society and academia. More details on a call for papers is forthcoming. To learn more, visit the ICTSD [website](#).

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## Resources

**SUSTAINABILITY PROVISIONS IN REGIONAL TRADE AGREEMENTS: CAN THEY BE MULTILATERALISED?** By Peter Draper, Nkululeko Khumalo, and Faith Tigere (July 2017). This new paper is published under the RTA Exchange, an initiative jointly implemented by the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD) and the Inter-American Development (IDB). This paper looks at the sustainability provisions being included in various regional trade agreements (RTAs), along with their enforcement, including through dispute settlement. It also examines whether such provisions could be taken from the regional level to the multilateral one. The paper is available for download at the ICTSD [website](#).

**A PATH FORWARD FOR NAFTA.** Edited by C. Fred Bergsten and Monica de Bolle for the Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE) (July 2017). This new publication brings together a group of expert contributions assessing the possible ways to develop an updated North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). It also notes potential risks in the upcoming negotiations to modernise the accord, which are due to begin in August 2017. The publication is available at the PIIE [website](#).

**MAIN ECONOMIC INDICATORS, VOLUME 2017, ISSUE 1.** Published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (July 2017). This latest instalment in the OECD series on economic indicators looks at various countries, including OECD members, Eurozone countries, and select others. Among the indicators are various trade figures, such as exports and imports of goods and services. The full publication is available online [here](#).

**REPORT TO THE TPRB FROM THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL ON TRADE-RELATED DEVELOPMENTS.** Published by the World Trade Organization (WTO) (July 2017). This new report is from the WTO's regular monitoring exercise on recent trade developments, such as new trade-restricting and trade-facilitating measures. The publication covers the period from mid-October 2016 to mid-October 2017. The full report is available for download at the WTO [website](#).

**A FIRMING RECOVERY: WORLD ECONOMIC OUTLOOK UPDATE.** Published by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (July 2017). This latest update to the IMF's World Economic Outlook series revises past estimates on global economic growth for this year and the following, along with noting potential risks. Overall, it notes the "momentum" of the overall global economy, while also examining specific country prospects. The publication is available for download at the IMF [website](#).

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