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GLOBAL ECONOMY

International Trade Community
Preps for Packed Autumn
Agenda, Eyeing 2018/2019
Deliverables.....1

GLOBAL ECONOMY

WTO Members Set their Sights
on Kazakhstan Ministerial
Conference in June 2020.....5

GLOBAL ECONOMY

BRICS Leaders Pledge Support
for Multilateralism, Inclusive
Growth at Johannesburg
Summit.....9

TRADE AGREEMENTS

NAFTA Officials Look to Inject
Renewed Momentum into
Trade Talks as Autumn
Approaches.....12

TRADE AGREEMENTS

EU Commission: Promising
Start to Negotiations for
Australia, New Zealand Trade
Deals.....14

EVENTS & RESOURCES

Vacancies.....17

Events17

Resources21

GLOBAL ECONOMY

International Trade Community Preps for Packed Autumn Agenda, Eyeing 2018/2019 Deliverables

The international trade community will have a busy docket of negotiations and other processes when the autumn semester kicks off in September, while geopolitical tensions on trade are expected to remain a high-profile discussion topic. Meanwhile, electoral processes in various economies will likely have significant implications for these efforts in the months to come.

The results of these events could be pivotal in reshaping the global trading landscape, as countries across the globe work to advance a series of commercially impactful trade and integration agreements that could also usher in a new chapter in trade rule-making. Many of these processes have target dates for 2018 or 2019.

On the WTO front, negotiations continue in Geneva on topics such as disciplining harmful fisheries subsidies, while groups of members weigh possible approaches to reforming the global trade club so that it is better equipped to handle burgeoning trade tensions. (For more on WTO negotiations, see related story, this edition)

Awaiting the outcome of US automobiles investigation

While the US' recently imposed steel and aluminium tariffs continue to fuel tension with various trading partners, the prospect of new duties on automobiles and automotive parts are expected to loom large over the coming months. The US Commerce Department is currently conducting a Section 232 investigation under the 1962 Trade Expansion Act into whether such imports pose a threat to the country's national security.

The results from the Commerce Department are due with [270 days](#) from when the probe was launched, which was [23 May](#), meaning that a report could come out any time before 17 February 2019. The report could be issued sooner, however.

A final decision on whether to "adjust imports" of these products, such as by imposing tariffs, would then fall to US President Donald Trump.

Representatives from countries who are major car exporters met this week in Geneva, according to sources cited by Reuters, to weigh how to address the probe and any potential duties. Participants reportedly included Canada, the EU, Japan, Mexico, and South Korea.

NAFTA, US midterms

On the negotiating front, US officials are working with various trading partners on different trade accords. The US has now indicated that it hopes to clinch a deal with Canada and Mexico on updating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) by the end of August, despite reports that negotiators remain divided on politically sensitive issues such as automobile rules of origin. (For more on NAFTA, see related story, this edition)

Meanwhile, US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer said last month that the Trump Administration is hoping to negotiate a trade deal with a Sub-Saharan African country that could serve as a model for future accords with economies in the continent, thus paving the way for a new approach to US-African trade relations when the current version of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) expires in 2025. (See Bridges Weekly, [19 July 2018](#))

He also told Senate lawmakers last week that the US is looking to engage more in southeast Asia, naming the Philippines as one economy that could be a viable partner for a bilateral trade accord in the region, and set the stage for more to follow.

Meanwhile, the US is due to hold midterm elections on 6 November 2018, with Republicans fighting to maintain their grip on both the Senate and House of Representatives and Democrats looking to take control of at least one, if not both, chambers.

European Union works to advance suite of trade accords

The 28-nation EU has a series of trade negotiating processes underway with partners around the globe, as the current College of Commissioners prepares to wrap up its term on 31 October 2019.

It is looking to clinch a long-awaited trade accord within the framework of an Association Agreement with Latin American customs bloc Mercosur, though officials from both sides have expressed different views on when a deal could be reached. Some officials, such as Argentine Foreign Affairs Minister Jorge Faurie, have expressed the hope of reaching a political agreement as early as September. Mercosur includes as full members Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay, and some of these countries are in the middle of electoral cycles, with Brazil due to hold a general election in October. (See Bridges Weekly, [26 July 2018](#))

The EU also launched talks in June with Australia and New Zealand, respectively, for trade accords, and the first rounds of both processes were held in July. (For more on both negotiations, see related story, this edition)

The bloc is also looking to advance trade talks with members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), such as Indonesia, which is the largest economy in that grouping. The EU and Indonesia have held five negotiating rounds to date since launching talks two years ago. The EU is hoping to eventually use bilateral accords with individual ASEAN members as a platform towards a region-to-region accord.

Additionally, the European Union is looking to secure deeper ties with the Pacific Alliance, though it is not yet negotiating a formal trade agreement with the four-country coalition, which includes Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru. It does, however, have accords in place with the Alliance's individual members, and is negotiating a modernisation of its trade agreement with Chile after having negotiated an update to its deal with Mexico.

Meanwhile, EU and UK negotiators working on Brexit are aiming to wrap up withdrawal negotiations by an 18 October summit of the European Council, in order to keep processes on track for the UK's impending end-March 2019 exit. (See Bridges Weekly, [26 July 2018](#))

Industrial overcapacity, trade irritants, WTO reform: meetings coming up

On industrial overcapacity, which has been a hot-button topic in trade circles over the past few years and has faced additional urgency following the US aluminium and steel tariffs, a series of key meetings are set for autumn, including at ministerial level.

A trilateral group encompassing EU, Japan, and US trade officials is due to reconvene this autumn to discuss both how to tackle industrial overcapacity and other topics of shared concern, such as forced technology transfers and state-owned enterprises, and the possibility of a WTO reform agenda to tackle them. One source indicated that this meeting could occur in early autumn, though dates have not been announced publicly. Officials from all three countries are due to have a session at the WTO Public Forum on "making the playing field level again," which would focus largely on market-distorting industrial subsidies. (See Bridges Weekly, [7 June 2018](#))

Meanwhile, the EU-US Executive Working Group launched last week has a similar agenda, though dates for this new group to begin meeting have not been confirmed. The EU and China have their own WTO reform working group, chaired by vice ministers and set up following a leaders' summit in July. While an agenda for those discussions has not been announced, European officials have said that industrial subsidies, intellectual property and forced tech transfers, and dispute settlement would be topics that they would like to see discussed. (See Bridges Weekly, [19 July 2018](#))

Canada, for its part, is also planning to hold a ministerial-level meeting on WTO reform, sources say. According to Bloomberg, this gathering would not involve either the US or China, but instead would bring together a mix of advanced and middle-income economies from different world regions, spanning Africa, Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania.

In addition, the Global Forum on Excess Steel Capacity, set up following the 2016 G20 leaders' summit in Hangzhou, China, is due to [submit](#) a report on progress achieved to this year's G20 gathering, held under the Argentine presidency from 30 November to 1 December.

Asia-Pacific trade landscape

On the Asia-Pacific front, various processes are underway with an eye towards a 2018 or 2019 conclusion. For example, the 11 countries that are signatories to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) are in the process of ratifying the deal, in the hopes that it can enter into force next year.

To date, three countries have ratified the CPTPP so far. These are Mexico, Japan, and Singapore, in that order. Three more will need to ratify in order to reach the minimum threshold for the deal to take effect.

Countries such as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand are working through their own legislative processes for approving the accord domestically, though the new government in Malaysia has indicated that it plans to review the CPTPP and other policies endorsed by the previous administration. (See Bridges Weekly, [28 June 2018](#))

Separately, ministers from the 16 countries negotiating a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) said in early July that they hope to see a "package of outcomes" by the end of this year, and will be holding meetings throughout the rest of 2018 to that end.

RCEP includes all 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and their six FTA partners, namely Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea.

Ministers are due to meet in August, and officials have indicated that a possible target date for delivering this “package” could be an ASEAN leaders’ summit in Singapore from 11-15 November. (See Bridges Weekly, [5 July 2018](#))

ICTSD reporting; “Global auto powers plotting response to Trump auto tariff threats,” REUTERS, 30 July 2018; “U.S. trade chief eyes deals on NAFTA, Philippines, sub-Saharan Africa,” REUTERS, 26 July 2018; “Canada Cuts U.S., China Out of Talks on Reforming Global Trade,” BLOOMBERG, 27 July 2018.

GLOBAL ECONOMY

WTO Members Set their Sights on Kazakhstan Ministerial Conference in June 2020

The WTO is due to hold its next ministerial conference in June 2020 in Astana, Kazakhstan, after the General Council formally endorsed the Central Asian country's bid as host last week. The global trade club is due to have a busy agenda, both on the negotiating front and in various other substantive areas of work, when meetings resume in September.

The ministerial news comes just three years after Kazakhstan joined the WTO, which was finalised in November 2015. The June 2020 date is a slight departure from the normal WTO ministerial schedule, given that the global trade club generally holds these events every two years. The last one in Buenos Aires was held in December 2017, with participants expecting at that time to reconvene in late 2019.

When WTO members return to Geneva in September, they will have a busy season of work ahead, as they work to advance negotiations on multiple fronts, with some, such as fisheries, having a 2019 target for delivery. They will also be dealing with the continued ramifications from trade tensions among members, particularly but not exclusively between the US and China, as well as the ongoing impasse in selecting new Appellate Body members, with a fourth vacancy on the seven-member court due to open in late September if the situation is not resolved.

In the meantime, discussions among some WTO member groups at the working group level on crafting and pursuing a "reform" agenda for the global trade club are also expected to continue this autumn, with working groups in place between the EU, US, and Japan; the EU and US; the EU and China; and Canada with various other "like-minded" members. (For more on the international trade calendar, see related story, this edition)

Negotiations update: fisheries talks prepare for next phase

Negotiators working to craft a deal disciplining harmful fisheries subsidies by the end of 2019 will have a busy agenda when they reconvene in mid-September, with more "clusters" of meetings planned at almost monthly intervals through the end of the year.

For the past few months, the "rules negotiating group," which is tasked with this process, has met informally in this "cluster" format to streamline past proposals from members into a series of "working documents." These documents could eventually help members move towards a negotiating text. Members have also debated substantive issues in these meetings, with each cluster dealing with a particular chosen theme, along with exchanging information. These clusters have included meetings in plenary, meetings bilaterally among delegations, and workshops. (See Bridges Weekly, [21 June 2018](#) and [24 May 2018](#))

The most recent meetings were held from 23-25 July, with members discussing subsidies to illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. According to a Geneva trade official, members continued to express past positions on certain long-standing concerns, such as whether to include transition periods for developing economies as they build up their enforcement capabilities to tackle IUU fishing, or whether and how to use IUU lists developed by regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs). These RFMOs are multi-country agencies that work on managing either a particular fish stock that lives in and migrates between different geographic areas, or all of the fish species in a particular region.

Members did, however, make additional progress in their efforts to streamline the working documents, with a new version of these texts now [online](#). The latest addition to the working documents, following last week's meetings, involves articles on "transitional provisions" and "institutional arrangements" for a potential deal on fisheries subsidies. Other topics already covered in these working documents include definitions and scope; notifications and transparency; overfished stocks; overcapacity; capacity-enhancing subsidies; IUU fishing; and special and differential treatment.

The new article on transitional provisions is brief, featuring two lines of bracketed text that would potentially prohibit the extension or renewal of existing programmes whose terms do not comply with the fish subsidies accord. Meanwhile, the new article dealing with institutional arrangements features 10 heavily bracketed paragraphs involving the planned accord's implementation. These paragraphs cover topics such as how the relevant WTO committee, such as the existing committee on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM), would examine and respond to members' efforts at putting a future fish deal in place. It also covers topics such as how that committee might engage with other international agencies with a fisheries management focus, as well as text effectively prohibiting legal disputes under this fish deal if they have sovereignty, marine jurisdiction, or territoriality implications.

WTO members will continue this streamlining work when they return this autumn. The chair's communication on the updated set of working documents notes that only "some of the many issues" involved in the negotiations are covered in these texts so far, thus requiring further talks to complete the exercise. Negotiators will also be testing out a new meeting format, in addition to the normal plenary sessions, known as "incubator groups," according to a Geneva trade official. These would essentially involve select groups of members who would brainstorm new ideas and options that they could then transmit back to the plenary for consideration, with the hopes of breaking new ground in the fish talks.

Other negotiating groups, such as agriculture, have also met in recent weeks. In the farm trade talks, five new proposals are now on the table from the US, China and India, the G33 coalition of developing economies, the Cairns Group of agricultural exporters, and Paraguay and Uruguay. Some proposals, such as the one from the US, are focused on market access, while others, such as the India-China submission, look at domestic agricultural support.

Some other negotiating groups, such as those which deal with non-agricultural market access (NAMA), trade and environment, and intellectual property rights, have seen little to no substantive developments this year to date.

US, Chinese ambassadors spar over economic models, WTO rule compliance

Last week's General Council meeting also saw the US and Chinese ambassadors spar openly over a series of trade irritants, after the US submitted two reports to the General Council on China's trade practices. While one of these was an annual report by the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) on China's WTO rule compliance, the second was a [new document](#) entitled "China's trade-disruptive economic model" that featured a series of complaints over Beijing's economic practices and what they mean for WTO members.

"This discussion is long overdue. Few issues are as critical to the future viability of this institution as the unique economic system embraced by China," [said](#) US Ambassador to the WTO Dennis Shea as he began his remarks on the subject.

Shea particularly took issue with the role of the Chinese government in the country's economy, along with Beijing's pledges to be pursuing reforms to transform its economy towards a more market-oriented model. He cited numerous concerns, ranging from the use of industrial subsidies and other tools to implement the "Made in China 2025" strategy to

the recent Chinese government "white paper" on the country's contributions to the WTO since joining in 2001. (See Bridges Weekly, [5 July 2018](#))

"Despite China's repeated portrayal of itself as a staunch defender of free trade and the global trading system, China is in fact the most protectionist, mercantilist economy in the world," Shea said last week.

The statement and the related US submissions prompted a detailed response from China, with the country's WTO ambassador countering the US' claims on substance, approach, and tone.

"The remarks by the US Ambassador Shea moments ago have made the air smell like gunpowder in this Council room. We should thank Ambassador Shea, as he reminded us that we are now in an unprecedented crisis of the multilateral trading system, and we can no longer sit leisurely by the lakeside, enjoying the sunshine and summer breeze," [said](#) Chinese Ambassador to the WTO Zhang Xiangchen.

He also noted that the WTO recently conducted its review of China's trade policies, which he suggested was a more appropriate venue for such discussions. He further said that China works to uphold global trade rules, and defended China's approach to various policy areas. For example, he argued that there is no mandatory technology transfer requirement for foreign companies wishing to do business in China, and that Beijing follows WTO rules and ensures compliance to dispute rulings that have found WTO-inconsistent measures. He also countered that state-owned enterprises (SOEs) "are market entities."

"Should any members wish to criticise other members' trade policy under other mechanism, I have no objection. If you feel like having more to say, I am then all ears. Although I do not believe the WTO is the appropriate place to discuss the economic models of members, I chose not to block the adoption of this agenda item at today's meeting of the General Council. Because blocking the normal proceedings and forcing a WTO body out of operation is definitely not our way of doing things," he said.

Plurilaterals, moratoriums draw scrutiny

The joint initiatives by some WTO members to explore a potential multilateral framework on investment facilitation and possible negotiations for rules on electronic commerce, launched during the Buenos Aires ministerial conference last December, have held meetings throughout the first part of the year, with work due to resume this autumn. (See Bridges Daily Update, [14 December 2017](#))

The work is still exploratory in nature, and participants are not yet involved in formal negotiations. Additional meetings are planned throughout the rest of 2018. However, the chairs of some WTO regular bodies, such as the Council for Trade in Services (CTS), reported to the General Council last week that some members who are not involved in these "plurilateral" initiatives, namely the one on e-commerce, have raised concerns over their potential implications for the organisation's work on multilateral tracks.

"A number of members expressed concern with regard to the plurilateral initiative on e-commerce being pursued in parallel to the multilateral Work Programme discussions. These delegations said they could not support an approach for which there was no mandate, which had a rule-making objective that ran contrary to the exploratory mandate of the Work Programme and which could lead to the fragmentation of the multilateral trading system," said the CTS chair in his [report](#).

Ahead of the General Council meeting, India and South Africa also submitted a [document](#) calling for a "re-think" on the long-standing moratorium on electronic transmissions duties, questioning whether prohibiting such duties permanently would deprive developing economies of useful government revenue, among other concerns. The moratorium, along

with a separate moratorium on non-violation and situation complaints under the WTO's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), have been renewed and extended at biennial intervals for around two decades.

While members have debated whether to make the moratoriums permanent, they have not yet agreed to do so. These moratoriums are often re-approved in tandem, though their renewal was briefly in jeopardy at the WTO's last ministerial conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina. (See Bridges Daily Update, [14 December 2017](#))

Sources familiar with the meeting noted that various members spoke in support of the moratorium on electronic transmissions duties, noting its benefits to members, consumers, and the development of the digital economy. Some also noted that such moratoriums are in place in numerous regional trade agreements.

ICTSD reporting.

GLOBAL ECONOMY

BRICS Leaders Pledge Support for Multilateralism, Inclusive Growth at Johannesburg Summit

Leaders from the BRICS countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – met from 25-27 July for the group's tenth annual summit, in which they pledged to enhance cooperation across a range of policy areas. The bloc issued the [Johannesburg Declaration](#) at the end of the meeting, a 102-point document that emphasised a commitment to multilateralism and the WTO, as well as in supporting an inclusive, sustainable development model.

The group of leading emerging economies organised in 2006 and held its first summit in Russia in 2009. South Africa, which chairs the coalition this year, has hosted the summit previously and has been a member of the bloc since late 2010.

The goal of the group is to enhance cooperation among its members to advance shared goals, which they name as mutually beneficial development built around economic and security pillars, as well as people-to-people exchanges between them.

The theme of this year's summit was "BRICS in Africa: Collaboration for Inclusive Growth and Shared Prosperity in the 4th Industrial Revolution."

The [4th Industrial Revolution](#) is a term coined by Klaus Schwab, founder of the World Economic Forum, in 2016. It is meant to capture emerging technological breakthroughs across physical, digital, and biological disciplines, for instance with robotics and biotechnology.

Through a new BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution (PartNIR), the BRICS countries aim to deepen cooperation "in digitalisation, industrialisation, innovation, inclusiveness and investment, to maximise the opportunities and address the challenges arising from the 4th Industrial Revolution."

The summit declaration lists the creation of a network of science parks and technology business incubators, as well as support for technology-intensive small and medium-sized enterprises as positive steps in this direction.

Additional new avenues for BRICS cooperation under South Africa's leadership [include](#) a Working Group on Peacekeeping; a Vaccine Research Centre focused on collaborative research and development and vaccine innovation; a BRICS Gender and Women's Forum as a dedicated track for gender and women's issues; and BRICS Tourism Track of Cooperation.

Global governance and multilateralism

Throughout the joint declaration, BRICS leaders reaffirmed their commitment to institutions of global governance, while also calling for reforms that would, among other changes, acknowledge and incorporate a greater role for emerging and developing countries; and "a more fair, just, and representative multipolar international order."

For instance, the declaration affirmed the importance of an "international system based on international law, with the UN Charter as its fundamental cornerstone." However, the document also asserted a "need for a comprehensive reform of the UN, including its Security Council, with a view to making it more representative, effective, and efficient, and to

increase the representation of the developing countries so that it can adequately respond to global challenges."

The group also reaffirmed its commitment to the "rules-based, transparent, non-discriminatory, open, and inclusive multilateral trading system" of the WTO, and pledged to make efforts to strengthen the multilateral trading system in the face of "unprecedented challenges."

The declaration stressed BRICS leaders' concern over the WTO dispute settlement system and the "impasse in the selection process for new Appellate Body members." There are currently three vacancies on the seven-member global trade court, and a fourth seat will open up at the end of September if the impasse is not resolved. The US has blocked the start of selection processes to fill those seats. Should members not reach a solution by the end of September, that would leave the court at only three judges, the very minimum it needs to function given that three Appellate Body members must sign off on any ruling.

The BRICS declaration thus urged all WTO members "to engage constructively to address this challenge" and continue to develop the multilateral trading system in the interests of all members, and in particular developing country members.

The BRICS leaders also called on developed and emerging economies to continue to engage on global economic cooperation through venues like the Group of 20 (G20), the Financial Stability Board (FSB), and other global forums.

Speaking at a BRICS Business Forum in parallel with the summit, Xi [noted](#) that the coming years would "see a profound reshaping of the global governance system," and called upon his fellow BRICS leaders to "firmly promote an open world economy, be resolute in rejecting unilateralism and protectionism, and promote trade and investment liberalisation and facilitation."

"The international community has reached a new crossroads; and we are facing a choice between cooperation and confrontation, between opening-up and a close-door policy, and between mutual benefit and a beggar-thy-neighbour approach" he warned, noting that the evolution of the international order will have implications far beyond major players, extending to middle and low-income economies as well.

Trade and sustainable development ties

The BRICS leaders affirmed their support for the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, noting the potential for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a means of delivering inclusive, sustainable development. They also called for developed countries to meet their foreign aid commitments and provide further support to developing country partners.

Similarly, the group affirmed its commitment to the implementation of the UN's Paris Agreement on climate change and to related processes under the UN climate talks, while urging developed countries "to provide financial, technological, and capacity-building support to developing countries to enhance their capability in mitigation and adaptation."

In the energy and energy efficiency fields, the countries called for greater intra-BRICS cooperation to speed up the transition to environmentally sustainable energy systems. They noted that BRICS energy ministers have set up a BRICS Energy Research Cooperation Platform to help advance this goal.

The group also seeks to build on and enhance progress from the BRICS Agricultural Research Platform, which was initiated two years ago. In particular, they aim to bolster intra-BRICS collaboration and improve research on climate-related resilience of current farm and food systems.

Other sustainability topics addressed in the declaration included water resources management, biodiversity conservation, and the "Oceans Economy," with the countries pledging enhanced cooperation on each.

Chinese, Indian leaders visit African countries ahead of summit

In the days ahead of the BRICS summit, Xi and Modi both visited several African nations, seeking to strengthen political and economic ties.

Xi visited Mauritius, Rwanda, and Senegal before arriving in South Africa, pledging financial support, especially for infrastructure projects linked to China's Belt and Road Initiative. (See Bridges Africa, [5 July 2018](#))

In Rwanda, Xi called for increased investment from Chinese companies in central and eastern Africa. He signed over a dozen bilateral agreements and loans with the country, including US\$126 million in loans for two road projects, according to figures cited by the South China Morning Post. China has also invested in highway projects in Senegal recently, and on his visit, Xi pledged additional support in the areas of peacekeeping, anti-terror efforts, and general development.

Mauritius is in the process of negotiating a free trade agreement (FTA) with China, which would make it the first African nation to do so. In South Africa, Xi pledged US\$14.7 billion of investment and promised to increase Chinese imports from the country.

Modi visited Rwanda and Uganda prior to the BRICS summit, pledging a US\$200 million loan for infrastructure projects in Rwanda, according to reporting by The East African. India also plans to open 18 new embassies across Africa, bringing its total number on the continent to 47, further signalling enhanced commitment to the region.

In the BRICS summit declaration, the countries stressed the importance of infrastructure and connectivity for Africa's continued development. They affirmed their continued support "for sustainable infrastructure development in Africa, including addressing the infrastructure financing deficit."

The declaration also highlighted the importance of multilateral development banks, especially the BRICS-led New Development Bank (NDB), in increasing private investment and financing for infrastructure projects. (See Bridges Weekly, [17 July 2014](#))

The countries also noted the upcoming establishment of an NDB Americas Regional Office in São Paulo, Brazil, which along with the Africa Regional Centre, "will help the NDB consolidate its presence in those continents."

Next year's BRICS summit will head to Brazil, who will have the rotating chairmanship of the coalition.

ICTSD reporting; "China's Xi says world must 'reject protectionism outright,'" ASSOCIATED PRESS, 26 July 2018; "Xi Jinping's trip to Africa cements continent's growing ties to China, and Beijing's loans," SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST, 29 July 2018; "Xi Jinping signs up Senegal for belt and road plan, pledges closer Africa ties," SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST, 22 July 2018; "Why Asian giants have eyes on resource rich East Africa," THE EAST AFRICAN, 28 July 2018.

TRADE AGREEMENTS

NAFTA Officials Look to Inject Renewed Momentum into Trade Talks as Autumn Approaches

Negotiators looking to update the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have resumed a busy agenda of meetings at ministerial and technical levels, including talks planned between the US and Mexican delegations later this week, with some officials hinting that a deal could be forthcoming by late August.

Outgoing Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto suggested this past week that a "promising horizon" may lie ahead for wrapping up the NAFTA talks, with Mexican and US ministers due to hold talks on Thursday and Friday to help inject further momentum into the process and make advances on some of the most contentious sticking points.

"We are determined to speed up [the negotiations] in order to make progress in a significant way throughout the month of August. It's not a deadline but we are convinced that we can reach an agreement," he said, according to comments reported by Mexico News Daily.

Mexican Economy Secretary Ildefonso Guajardo Villareal has been meeting with his US counterpart, US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, in the lead-up to the ministerial meetings this week in Washington. Similarly positive assessments have lately emerged from some US administration officials, with Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross telling reporters this week that the talks, launched one year ago, may lead to a political agreement shortly.

"Our immediate, most close-to-completion negotiations are with NAFTA, particularly with Mexico," Ross said this week, according to comments reported by Bloomberg. "There's a pretty good chance that we could be on a pretty rapid track with the Mexican talks."

The renewed pace in talks comes one month after Mexico held its federal elections, with voters naming Andrés Manuel López Obrador as Peña Nieto's successor. López Obrador, nicknamed AMLO, will take office in December, though the current and incoming administrations are reportedly already working together on ensuring a stable transition in handling Mexico's role in the continuing NAFTA talks.

Meanwhile, US congressional midterm elections are coming up, with campaigning due to intensify during and after the August recess. The midterms are scheduled for 6 November, and will see roughly one-third of the Senate's 100 seats and all 435 House of Representatives seats up for a vote, along with various gubernatorial seats and other state and local positions.

Mexico's chief NAFTA negotiator: various chapters near conclusion

A number of challenging topics remain outstanding in the NAFTA talks, including US demands for changes to rules of origin for automobiles; whether to include a five-year sunset clause or other review mechanism for an updated deal; and revisions to various aspects of the existing accord's dispute settlement chapters.

A sunset clause would cause the agreement to expire after five years unless it was renewed. The prospect of such a provision has drawn pushback from many quarters, including businesses, who argue for the need for a certain trading climate in order to make long-term investments.

Nonetheless, Mexican negotiators have noted that many chapters are well advanced, even if politically sensitive issues remain challenging to address.

"We will continue working on all chapters of the negotiation and will look to close out the modernisation chapters that are 80-90 [percent] finished: Customs & Trade Facilitation; Environment, Financial Services; Textiles; Energy; Digital Trade; among others," said Kenneth Smith Ramos, Mexico's chief NAFTA negotiator, [on Twitter](#) in previewing the upcoming meetings.

AMLO pledges NAFTA support, warns against uncertainty

Mexican president-elect López Obrador has called on US President Donald Trump to maintain his commitment to the NAFTA process, sending a [letter](#) to the US leader in mid-July calling for both sides to collaborate on shared concerns in the fields of trade, migration, development, and security.

"In the matter of trade, I think it is worth making an effort to conclude the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement. I think that prolonging the uncertainty could slow down investments in the medium and long-term," said the letter.

"I propose to resume negotiations with the participation of representatives from Mexico, Canada, and the United States," the letter continues.

Trump has also called for wrapping up the talks quickly, while cautioning his new Mexican counterpart that he is open to pursuing "a much different route" should negotiations not advance promptly. "It would not be my preference, but would be far more profitable for the United States and its taxpayers," he said in a letter to López Obrador in late July.

The US leader and other administration officials have previously hinted that the US could pursue bilateral tracks with Canada and Mexico on NAFTA, given that talks between Washington and Mexico City have reportedly advanced more quickly. Switching to the pursuit of bilateral deals would, however, mark a significant shift from the current trilateral nature of the discussions.

However, Mexican and Canadian officials have indicated that they prefer a trilateral approach, rather than clinching bilateral deals. In recent weeks, Canadian officials have also been meeting with their Mexican counterparts, including with López Obrador. Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland told CBC News that she is "hopeful" that NAFTA talks can go "back into high gear" in the post-election landscape.

Guajardo, meanwhile, indicated that the US-Mexico meetings planned this week are "just a method, not a direction," given that negotiators and ministers from all three countries often meet bilaterally, as well as in a trilateral format. "We still want a trilateral NAFTA."

ICTSD reporting; "U.S. Talks With Mexico on New Nafta Near Completion, Ross Says," BLOOMBERG, 30 July 2018; "Cabinet ministers meet with Mexican president-elect in shadow of trade spat," CTV NEWS, 25 July 2018; "NAFTA teams ready to 'start solving' stalled issues: Mexico," REUTERS, 27 July 2018; "Officials agree to step up NAFTA talks; August conclusion possible: Peña Nieto," MEXICO NEWS DAILY, 28 July 2018; "Mexico vows it won't cut a separate trade deal with Trump," CBC NEWS, 26 July 2018; "Trump Says U.S. May Have Separate Trade Deal With Mexico," BLOOMBERG, 18 July 2018; "Trump Congratulates Mexico's President-Elect, With Nafta Warning," BLOOMBERG, 24 July 2018.

TRADE AGREEMENTS

EU Commission: Promising Start to Negotiations for Australia, New Zealand Trade Deals

The European Commission recently circulated reports about the early negotiating rounds with Australia and New Zealand, respectively, for free trade agreements (FTAs) with both countries, indicating that both processes had seen some promising advances since they were formally launched in late June.

The two nascent trade negotiating processes have been touted by all sides as a way to support new trade rule-making, along with making sure that their trading relationships become even more commercially competitive in light of the plethora of trade agreements that both sides are involved in with other partners. Prior to the talks' launch, some officials had floated the possibility of wrapping these accords up in 2019, though a formal timeline has not been set.

The current European Commission finishes its term on 31 October 2019, with President Jean-Claude Juncker not seeking a second term at the helm, meaning the EU's executive arm will see a shake-up the same year as the European Parliament elections.

The next Australia election, meanwhile, must be held next year as well, though dates have not been set. New Zealand is operating on a longer electoral timeframe, given that the coalition government of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern took office just one year ago.

Exchanges of proposals, practices

According to the EU's executive arm, it has put forward a suite of proposals that cover various negotiating areas for the initial discussions with Australia and New Zealand.

For the Australia talks, the EU has submitted proposals on topics such as customs and trade facilitation, dispute settlement, energy and raw materials, public procurement, intellectual property, mutual administrative assistance in relation to customs, rules of origin, small and medium-sized enterprises, state-owned enterprises, technical barriers to trade, goods trade, and trade remedies.

Meanwhile, Australia has also submitted proposals in some areas as well, such as intellectual property rights. The EU summary of the negotiations indicated that this first round was largely meant to review proposals, along with how different processes such as public procurement work in the European Union and Australia, and get a better understanding of shared objectives in several areas. These include, for example, how to tackle different aspects of services trade and investment liberalisation. State-to-state dispute settlement was another topic examined, as the two negotiating teams reviewed how each side has addressed in the issue in other free trade accords.

They also looked at the planned sustainable development chapter of the FTA, reviewing how the subject is addressed in their other trade agreements. The European Commission summary noted that the two sides specifically talked about an "action plan" that Brussels released in February on sustainable development and EU FTAs. (See Bridges Weekly, [1 March 2018](#))

The EU's report on the New Zealand talks, meanwhile, also indicated a "constructive atmosphere" during the first round of talks in Brussels. That round was also primarily focused on exchanging ideas, proposals, experiences in different subject areas, and expectations going forward.

Brussels has put forward proposals on customs and trade facilitation, dispute settlement, energy and raw materials, public procurement, intellectual property, rules of origin, small and medium-sized enterprises, state-owned enterprises, technical barriers to trade, goods trade, and trade remedies.

Both sides are already looking at getting ready for making market access offers in goods, once modalities are reached and other data is shared. They already made some progress in discussions on the text of a goods chapter, according to the EU Commission report, which said that "it was possible to agree on three basic articles and achieve a substantial agree of convergence on several others."

Neither side has submitted proposals on services trade, though talks are underway in this area to understand Wellington's and Brussels' practices, approaches, and interests, and what a services chapter could look like here. They have also indicated interest in a dedicated chapter on digital trade, though neither the EU nor Zealand has submitted proposed text for this area.

They also have some agreed text in topics such as intellectual property rights and small and medium-sized enterprises, with more work forthcoming on both chapters. In many areas, the negotiators looked at their existing FTAs and commitments at the WTO, along with how to improve on these in an EU-New Zealand accord.

Ciobo: Current FTA negotiations could cover 88 percent of trade

Meanwhile, Australian Trade Minister Steve Ciobo gave a [speech](#) in Melbourne on 31 July outlining Canberra's approach to its future trade policy, with free trade agreements with key partners at its core.

"The main way the Government brings more opportunity within the reach of more Australian businesses is through trade agreements. The strategy is as simple as it is ambitious. As the rules-based trading system comes under pressure from above, we are carefully crafting together a network of binding trade relationships from the ground up," he said.

He also said that if the Australian government successfully completes all FTA negotiations that it is a part of, which includes multi-country Pacific Rim accords and the ongoing talks with the EU, among others, that it would mean that over 88 percent of Australia's bilateral trade would be covered by some sort of trading agreement.

The trade deal with the EU, he said, "could be Australia's biggest FTA," and would ensure that Canberra has competitive trading terms in place with Brussels.

His New Zealand counterpart, Trade and Export Growth Minister David Parker, has similarly stressed the importance of inking a trade accord with the 28-nation European Union.

"The EU is one of New Zealand's largest economic partners. We share significant history, culture and values, and yet we currently discriminate against each other on trade. I'm pleased that this anomaly will soon be addressed," he [said](#) last month when talks were launched.

Parker also said at the time that these talks could allow Wellington and Brussels to enshrine their shared values in a formal trade accord, thus helping achieve sustainable development objectives and ensuring inclusive growth.

"We want an agreement that contributes to sustainable development by addressing issues affecting climate change, gender equality, indigenous rights, labour and environment standards, and that supports small to medium sized enterprises and spreads the benefits of trade more widely," he said.

ICTSD reporting.

EVENTS & RESOURCES

Vacancies

The International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD) is hiring a Managing Editor for Bridges Africa and Passerelles, its English and French-language periodicals focusing on trade and sustainable development in the African continent. The managing editor will be part of the Bridges editorial team and ICTSD's development programme. The deadline for applications is 24 August 2018. To learn more about the candidate profile and job responsibilities, please visit the ICTSD [website](#).

The UK Department for International Trade (DIT) is seeking expressions of interest for its inaugural Trade Policy Fellowship. The fellow will need international trade policy experience, an interest in research and policy, and a strong network within this field in the UK and/or abroad. Potential candidates would need either 3-5 years of work experience and/or a PhD in a relevant discipline. To learn more and to express interest, please contact simon.rowell@trade.gov.uk by Wednesday 15 August 2018.

Events

Coming Soon

6-7 August, Buenos Aires, Argentina. CIVIL 20 (C20) SUMMIT. The C20 is one of seven Engagement Groups of the Group of Twenty (G20) economies. The summit is meant to provide a platform for civil society organisations to discuss and develop policy recommendations for the G20, which will meet in Buenos Aires from 30 November – 1 December for its annual leaders' summit. The C20 has working groups on a number of topics, including gender; environment, climate, and energy; investment and infrastructure; and others. For more information, please visit the event [website](#).

7-8 August, Shanghai, China. CONFERENCE ON URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMICS IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD. This conference is organised by the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Economic Research and Regional Cooperation Department in partnership with the Shanghai Institute of National Economy of Shanghai at Jiaotong University and the Institute of World Economy of Fudan University. Discussions at this conference will focus on how to harness the potential of urbanisation in contributing to economic development, as many developing countries are projected to see significant increases in urbanisation in coming decades. ADB aims to facilitate the exchange of new research and ideas between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. For more information, please visit the event [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 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.

27 August: Dispute Settlement Body

Other Upcoming Events

16-17 August, São Paulo, Brazil. 4TH GLOBAL CLIMATE POLICY CONFERENCE (GCPC). The theme of this year's GCPC is "Harnessing Research for Climate Ambition and Transparency," with additional sub-themes on energy transition, sustainable cities, climate finance, and land use. The conference aims to aid countries in implementing their nationally determined commitments (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement on climate change. This year's event will also have a special focus on Latin American countries' NDCs and strategies to enhance their implementation. For more information, visit the event [website](#).

26-31 August, Stockholm, Sweden. WORLD WATER WEEK. This year's event, organised by the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), focuses on the theme, "Water, ecosystems and human development." It will convene experts and practitioners from a variety of sectors and countries to exchange information and ideas and discuss water-related challenges. The event will have a particular focus on the role of water in ecosystems and its connection to the human development agenda, seeking to align thematically with the UN focus on nature-based solutions in its World Water Development Report. For more information, visit the event [website](#).

4-5 September, Paris, France. OECD BLOCKCHAIN POLICY FORUM. This forum, organised by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) will explore the potential benefits and challenges associated with blockchain technology. The conference will have as its theme "Distributed Ledgers: Opportunities and Challenges," and will aim to provide a platform for governments and other stakeholders to discuss blockchain regulatory policy. Experts from business and academia will present on various topics, including the potential economic impact of blockchain and its ability to enhance inclusiveness and promote sustainability. For more information, visit the event [website](#).

2-4 October, Geneva, Switzerland. WTO PUBLIC FORUM. This annual WTO outreach event will have as its theme "Trade 2030." More specifically, the three-day meeting will consider "sustainable trade" between now and 2030, addressing topics such as technology-enabled trade and making the trading system more inclusive. A draft programme of sessions is now available online, with additional details forthcoming. More information is available at the WTO's dedicated site for the Public Forum [here](#).

2-4 October, Manila, Philippines. ASIA WATER FORUM 2018: INFORMATION, INNOVATION, AND TECHNOLOGY. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) will host the Asia Water Forum, focusing on the theme, "Information, Innovation, and Technology." The conference aims to facilitate discussion of a variety of water issues, including issues of supply, water use for food and energy, sanitation, and water resources management. It will also explore themes that affect these issues, such as resilience, inclusiveness, finance, and sustainability. The conference will examine how increased knowledge and advanced technology can aid member countries and improve development projects in the region. All sessions will be conducted in English. For more information, visit the event [website](#).

22-26 October, Geneva, Switzerland. WORLD INVESTMENT FORUM 2018. Over the course of 50 events including roundtables, summits, and private sector-led sessions, this annual forum, hosted by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) will address global challenges for international investment in the era of globalisation and industrialisation. Stakeholders from governments, investment treaty negotiation teams, global companies, and other forums will come together to discuss investment-related policymaking, particularly in relation to sustainable development. For more information and to register, please visit the event [website](#).

24 October, Geneva, Switzerland. HIGH-LEVEL INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT AGREEMENTS (IIA) CONFERENCE 2018. Organised by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) during the World Investment Forum, the theme of this year's IIA conference is "Going beyond IIAs: Fostering Coherence through Phase 3 of Reform." The event will follow up on UNCTAD's Reform Package for the International Investment Regime from 2017, looking specifically at Phase 3 of IIA Reform, which covers reform of national investment laws and policies. The conference will also take stock of progress on Phases 1 and 2 of IIA Reform, which involve guidelines for a sustainable development orientation in investment policymaking and updating the existing stock of old generation IIAs in line with these recommendations. The event will include discussion of how to improve overall investment policy coherence and country-level priorities for Phase 3 of reform. To learn more about, please visit the event [website](#).

29-31 October, Geneva, Switzerland. FOSTERING THE ENGAGEMENT OF THE AGRI-FOOD SECTOR IN RESILIENCE TO CLIMATE CHANGE. This conference is organised by the International Trade Centre (ITC) and UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) secretariat. It will focus on building capacity of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the agri-food sector to adapt to climate change. It aims to foster dialogue and knowledge sharing among researchers, practitioners, and other experts, with a focus on three main themes: assessing climate risk and adaptation strategies; implementing adaptation strategies; and enhancing private sector investment in adaptation. The three plenary sessions organised around these themes will be accompanied by "Mini Workshops" and "Open Labs." Organisers are calling for contributors to the workshop programme through these accompanying sessions, with submissions expressing interest due by 15 August. For more information, visit the event submissions [webpage](#).

27-29 November, Paris, France. SIXTH GREEN GROWTH KNOWLEDGE PLATFORM (GGKP) ANNUAL CONFERENCE. The GGKP annual conference will take place in conjunction with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Green Growth and Sustainable Development Forum. The focus of the GGKP conference is "Inclusive solutions for the green transition: Competitiveness, jobs/skills and social dimensions." The conference seeks to address distributional impacts of green and low-carbon policy reforms, analysing inclusive solutions for stakeholders who might be harmed by such a transition. The conference will include panel discussions among a variety of stakeholders, including policymakers, academia, civil society, business, and labour. To learn more, visit the event [website](#). GGKP is also calling for papers for the conference, with a deadline of 30 July. For more information on relevant themes for submissions, visit the GGKP [website](#).

27-30 November, Iloilo City, Philippines. EAST ASIAN SEAS (EAS) CONGRESS. This event, hosted by the government of the Philippines and Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA), will bring together a wide cross-section of stakeholders to examine the latest regional developments in ocean governance and policy reform, climate change, the blue economy, the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and other related topics. To learn more about the event, please visit the PEMSEA [website](#).

10-11 January 2019, Cape Town, South Africa. 2019 PARTNERSHIP FOR ACTION ON GREEN ECONOMY (PAGE) MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE. The dates of the third PAGE Ministerial Conference have changed, now scheduled to take place in early January 2019. The conference brings together various UN agencies, governments, private sector and non-governmental organisations, and other stakeholders to discuss the transition to a green and sustainable economy as part of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. The conference aims to provide an opportunity to share ideas and experiences and highlight partnerships that can help to deliver on a "just transition" to a more inclusive and sustainable economic and financial system. To learn more, please visit the event [website](#).

14-15 February 2019, New Delhi, India. CARBON PRICING LEADERSHIP COALITION (CPLC) RESEARCH CONFERENCE. This event will be the first international research conference on

carbon pricing, hosted by CPLC. It will bring together researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in this field, aiming for an exchange of ideas and information that can help resolve the gaps that exist between theory and existing practice. CPLC seeks to foster leadership across the public and private sectors, academic, and NGO communities in order to implement carbon pricing policies more effectively and reduce global emissions. To learn more, visit the CPLC [website](#).

Resources

RTA EXCHANGE: AGREEMENT TEXT SEARCH TOOL. Published by the RTA Exchange (July 2018). This online tool is published by the RTA Exchange, a joint initiative by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD). It allows online users to search for keywords across trade agreements. The database covers nearly 400 regional trade agreements (RTAs) that are either already in place or under negotiation. The database can be accessed at the RTA Exchange [website](#).

MAINSTREAMING BIODIVERSITY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. Published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (July 2018). This report analyses how biodiversity is being mainstreamed in 16 "megadiverse" countries, looking at experiences across countries and sectors, as well as in monitoring and evaluating such efforts. Drawing on these examples, the report aims to identify ways in which biodiversity mainstreaming can be improved and how it can be utilised for sustainable development. To read the report, please visit the OECD [website](#).

CARBON PRICING CORRIDORS: THE MARKET VIEW 2018. Published by the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP) (July 2018). Launched in 2017, the Carbon Pricing Corridors initiative aims to improve understanding among businesses and investors about how carbon-related price signals affect greenhouse gas emissions and how they can align their actions with the UN's Paris Agreement on climate change. The initiative also aims to inform governments interested in utilising carbon pricing to meet their climate goals. This publication is the initiative's second annual report. While the inaugural report focused on the power sector, this year's edition updates the power sector analysis and includes a new section on the chemical sector. To download the report, please visit the CDP [website](#).

CHINESE INVESTMENTS AND AFRICA'S SMALL-SCALE PRODUCERS: DISRUPTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES. By Xiaoxue Weng, et al., published by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) (June 2018). This report analyses Chinese trade and investment in African agriculture, forestry, and mining sectors. Drawing on survey data, interviews, and focus group inputs, the authors suggest that while investment from China and other newcomers has generally been positive for African economic development, it may also have come with environmental challenges. The report aims to identify points within China-Africa commercial relationships where all stakeholders can engage to improve socioeconomic and environmental outcomes in the commercial landscape. To download the report, please visit the IIED [website](#).

THE MARITIME DIMENSION OF SUSTAINABLE ENERGY SECURITY. By Kapil Narula and published by Springer (2018). This book addresses sustainable energy security and the global energy system in the context of maritime activities. These include energy trade, energy supply chains, and maritime security. It also discusses oceans as a source of hydrocarbon energy and as a source of renewable energy, as well as efforts to lower emissions from shipping. The author shows how the maritime domain and sustainable energy are linked, aiming to fill a gap from traditionally siloed discussion of the topics. To purchase the book, please visit the publisher's [website](#).

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