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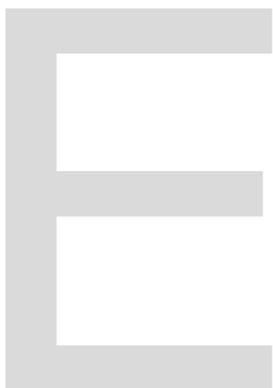
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Reports on recent IPU specialized meetings

(f) 2016 Annual Session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO

(Geneva, 13–14 June 2016)

The IPU and the European Parliament have organized annual sessions of the Parliamentary Conference on the World Trade Organization (WTO) since 2003. The Conference is a global forum that promotes common parliamentary action on international trade and development. Its primary objective is to provide parliamentary oversight of WTO work. It is a uniquely empowered intergovernmental organization. It has a particular focus on the transparency of its procedure and the fairness of multilateral trade agreements negotiated under WTO auspices. Over the years, the Conference has proven its great worth as a platform for trade-related dialogue between governments, parliaments and civil society, as well as a tool for building the capacity of parliaments in matters of international trade.



#IPU135

1. The 2016 annual session of the Conference took place on WTO premises in Geneva on 13 and 14 June. The session was attended by over 400 participants and observers from 56 countries and 12 international organizations, including 160 members of parliament. Also present at the session were representatives of 44 Permanent Missions to the WTO in Geneva, registered as observers.
2. The inaugural ceremony was addressed by Mr. K. Örnfjäder (Sweden), IPU Co-Chair of the Conference Steering Committee; Mr. B. Lange, Chairman of the Committee on International Trade of the European Parliament; and Ambassador H. Neple (Norway), Chairperson of the WTO General Council. One of the highlights of the session was a hearing with WTO Deputy Director-General, Mr. K. Brauner.
3. The session's overarching title was *What future for the WTO?* Events included a debate about making trade work for development in the wake of the Tenth WTO Ministerial Conference, which had taken place in Nairobi in December 2015. The work programme of the two-day session also included a plenary debate, a dialogue with senior WTO negotiators on the theme *WTO in the era of mega-regional trade agreements* and a panel discussion entitled *Trade as a vehicle of social progress: The gender perspective*.
4. At the closing sitting, the participants adopted by consensus an Outcome Document (see Annex) presented by the rapporteur of the Steering Committee, Mr. B. Lange (European Parliament). The Outcome Document recognized that a fair and equitable international trading system, based on free and fair trade for the benefit of all, could play a crucial role in stimulating global economic growth and sustainable economic development, and in creating jobs and ensuring welfare. The document urged the WTO to make full use of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO, by ensuring that parliamentarians had access to all the information they needed to carry out their oversight role effectively and contribute meaningfully to trade policies.
5. The proceedings of the session are available on the IPU website as an electronic publication entitled "Highlights of the 2016 session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO". It includes numerous photos, the full texts of main documents, speeches and presentations, as well as extracts of the debate.

Recommendations

6. Progress in the Doha Round of WTO negotiations is exceedingly slow and the entire concept of multilateralism is being called into question by the emergence of plurilateral alternatives. It is therefore of paramount political importance for parliaments to ensure effective oversight of their governments' stance in WTO talks. The Parliamentary Conference on the WTO provides a suitable platform for such action. Both parliaments and WTO negotiators are encouraged to use it more proactively.
7. The Conference continues to be one of the best examples of fruitful collaboration between the IPU and the European Parliament. This joint project, including its cost-sharing dimension, is mutually beneficial and should be maintained and developed.
8. The IPU should continue working closely with the WTO Secretariat with a view to speeding up the process of ratification of the Trade Facilitation Agreement. Its expected benefits for the global economy are estimated to be up to \$1 trillion per year. The Agreement, currently ratified by some 80 countries, will become legally binding once it has been ratified by two thirds of the 164 WTO Members.

2016 ANNUAL SESSION OF THE
PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE ON THE WTO

What future for the WTO?

Geneva, 13-14 June 2016

Organized jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the European Parliament

OUTCOME DOCUMENT

Adopted by consensus on 14 June 2016

1. The WTO has since its creation played a pivotal role in strengthening multilateralism, promoting an inclusive world economic order and fostering an open, rules-based and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system. We remain convinced that a fair and equitable international trading system, based on free and fair trade for the benefit of all, can play a crucial role in fomenting global economic growth and sustainable economic development, creating jobs and ensuring welfare.
2. In this regard, we recognize the importance of the outcomes achieved at the Tenth Ministerial Conference in Nairobi, in December 2015. The Ministerial Decisions related to agriculture and LDCs are crucial for the developing countries and LDCs. The decision regarding export competition on agriculture is an important agreement that will help level the playing field in a sector still marked by some protectionist trading practices and rules in certain countries, which is of importance for the developing countries.
3. We appreciate the decision on public stockholding for food security purposes and call for the conclusion of negotiations on finding a permanent solution to the issue, in keeping with the decision. We believe that the issue of food security is vital for developing countries and that WTO rules must support efforts to combat hunger. In line with the same decision, we also want to stress the importance of a speedy adoption of a proposal for a Special Safeguard Mechanism, in conformity with the Nairobi Ministerial Decision on the issue.
4. It is now of utmost importance that all Members of the WTO implement the decisions taken both in Nairobi and in Bali, including swift ratification of the Trade Facilitation Agreement, creation of new export opportunities for LDC service-providers under the LDC services waiver and simplification of regulations governing rules of origin. We call for the extension of the Information Technology Agreement for those WTO Members concerned.
5. We urge WTO Members to capitalize on the momentum created by recent progress, bearing in mind the strategic objective of strengthening the multilateral trading system and the need to consolidate the WTO as the centre of trade negotiations, while at the same time recognizing that new approaches will be necessary. Flexibility, openness, inclusiveness and political engagement will be key to advancing on all the remaining issues of the Doha Development Agenda (DDA). Since the Doha Round was launched in 2001, the world has changed dramatically in economic, political and technological terms. New challenges such as e-commerce, digital trade and international investment can also be discussed without prejudice to outstanding issues of the DDA.
6. It is widely acknowledged that trade in services, as a new frontier for enhancing the participation of developing countries and LDCs in international trade, is important not only for developed countries, but is rapidly emerging as a critical vehicle for realizing development gains for all. However, positively integrating developing countries, especially LDCs, into the global services economy and increasing their participation in services trade, particularly in modes and sectors of export interest to them, remains a major development challenge.

7. We need to intensify efforts to achieve rapid progress in services negotiations in each of the pillars of services negotiations such as market access, domestic regulations and LDC services waiver to achieve progressively higher levels of liberalization of trade in services, while ensuring that particular attention is given to sectors and modes of supply of export interest to developing countries. WTO Members also need to work on issues that can facilitate trade in services.

8. We believe that the process leading up to the Ministerial Conference has once again shown the importance of more transparent and inclusive negotiations. The Ministerial Conference should not be used to replace the negotiating bodies at the WTO. In order to achieve greater efficiency and accountability, a review of the working practices of the WTO will also contribute to better rule-making in the trade forum.

9. Recent years have witnessed a surge in plurilateral, regional and bilateral trade agreements, motivated by participants' desire to further liberalize and address trade rules and disciplines in policy areas insufficiently dealt with in the WTO and, to some extent, by the lack of progress in the Doha Round. Such agreements present a double advantage since: (a) they can stimulate trade between participants, especially by unlocking liberalization and upgrading rules and disciplines in policy areas tackled less thoroughly in the WTO; and (b) they may support the multilateral system, provided that such agreements are open, transparent and WTO-compatible, based on shared rules and create the conditions for possible future discussions in the WTO. We stress, however, that, in this sense, these agreements should not undermine the role of multilateral accords in international trade.

10. We acknowledge that trade can not only be a key factor in economic development but can also act as an important tool in the path to development. We underscore the need to link the multilateral trade agreements and the implementation of the international development agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

11. Paragraph 8 of the Doha Mandate mentions gender equality and women's empowerment among the goals which are essential for all countries to attain. We note that gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment are instrumental to development strategies for achieving gender equality and are key to the eradication of poverty. Therefore, we encourage policymakers to mainstreaming gender in macro-economic policies, especially in trade policy.

12. Despite the fact that 95 per cent of global enterprises are SMEs, which are significant as engines of growth, innovation, social integration and employment, SMEs currently only account for a small portion of trade among WTO Members. Considering the need to further strengthen the capacity and ability of SMEs to engage in international trade and enter the global market, we therefore encourage the WTO Members to reduce supply chain barriers to trade and enable SMEs to generate profits from the global value chain. This includes but is not limited to, expansion of market access, financial access and funding mechanisms, business networking, technical assistance, communication and transport infrastructure, as well as capacity building.

13. The challenges facing the WTO stress the need for the continued involvement of parliamentarians in this important world trade body. Parliamentarians not only ratify the outcomes of negotiations, they are also a crucial bridge/liaison between the WTO and the people they aim to serve. We urge the WTO to make full use of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO, co-organized by the IPU and the European Parliament, ensuring that parliamentarians have access to all the information they need to carry out their oversight role effectively and contribute meaningfully to trade policies.