
ANNUAL SESSION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE ON THE WTO

Geneva, 1-2 December 2006

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

DECLARATION

adopted by consensus on 2 December 2006

1. We, parliamentarians gathered in Geneva for the annual session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO, are gravely concerned at the prospect of a real failure of the Doha Round of trade negotiations. Despite the promise of more flexibility, major parties to the negotiations have shown little of it and the talks in the key areas of agriculture and non-agricultural market access have not progressed since the Hong Kong Ministerial Conference. This is a wake-up call for all political decision-makers, not least those of us who, as members of parliament representing the interests of the people, have the duty to oversee government action in the field of international trade and promote fairness of trade liberalization.
2. We reiterate our full commitment to the multilateral approach to trade policy and our belief in the central role of the WTO as the guarantor of a rules-based global trading system.
3. A prolonged suspension of the Doha talks would have a lasting negative effect on the entire multilateral trading system and may result in a proliferation of bilateral and regional trade agreements which often put poorer countries in a disadvantaged position. If efforts to revive the negotiations are not successful, the losses incurred would be immense, both economically and politically. Among the first to be adversely affected would be the least developed countries (LDCs), including cotton-exporting countries in Africa. In this regard, we welcome the decision of the informal Trade Negotiations Committee meeting of 16 November to engage in a soft resumption of the negotiations.
4. We call for a strong commitment on the part of all major players in the trade negotiations, including the European Union, the United States and the G20 parties, and urge them to reach a balanced agreement on all main negotiation topics of the Doha Round, while placing special emphasis on the need to ensure meaningful and sustainable economic gains for developing countries and in particular for the least developed countries. An agreement on specific quantifiable commitments on agriculture, where trade-distorting practices are particularly widespread, is fundamental for the overall progress in negotiations. As early shoots of neo-protectionism are already in sight, with influential protectionist lobbies being very active we emphasize the need for the parliamentary community to address this problem as a matter of priority. We also underline that, in order to fully implement the Doha mandate, the positive achievements of the negotiation must be preserved and offers made to date on various elements of the negotiating agenda should form the basis of the continuation of negotiation, bearing in mind that the market access process should be accompanied by measures to provide adequate information to consumers.
5. Keeping the focus on development is of paramount importance, particularly in order to contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. We welcome the endorsement by the WTO General Council of "Aid for Trade" recommendations on 10

October 2006 and urge all concerned parties to engage actively in their implementation. We also call on both developed and developing WTO member countries to create more favourable trading conditions for the LDCs, without awaiting the resumption of negotiations. The following areas deserve special attention: cotton; trade facilitation including improvement of infrastructure and of procedures and modalities of transactions; granting of duty-free and quota-free access for products originating from LDCs, such as the "Everything But Arms" initiative of the European Union and other relevant initiatives; real technical assistance and capacity-building measures. We call for a refocusing of policy on the needs and interests of developing countries as the starting point for the resumption of talks.

6. In the absence of a successful conclusion of the Round, there is a risk that WTO Members would try to achieve through litigation what could not be achieved through negotiations. The WTO dispute settlement system serves as a guarantee that violations by any country - no matter how big - are no longer beyond the reach of other Members. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the resources of the existing system are suited to the accelerated growth in the number of commercial conflicts referred to the WTO dispute-settlement procedures.

7. More than ever, the WTO is faced with organizational and institutional challenges. Before long, it will need to engage in institutional reform aimed at improving its functioning, and enhancing its accountability and democratic legitimacy. We are convinced that the negotiations process should be based on a bottom-up, transparent and inclusive approach. Consensus must be preserved as a cornerstone of WTO decision-making. It would be inconceivable to impose on any country trade policies that undermine its development. Moreover, we call for greater coherence between the objectives and rules of the WTO and the commitments made under other international conventions and agreements.

8. The current pause in negotiations should be used for reflection on ways of improving conditions for future talks. It would be particularly important to look at the usefulness of negotiation modalities based on trade-offs between the vastly different negotiation baskets. Under the present system, delegations often wait for the last possible moment to make their offers, which makes it difficult to calculate benefits prior to the conclusion of agreements.

9. We reiterate our commitment to provide a strong and effective parliamentary dimension to the WTO along the lines of earlier declarations adopted by our Conference. As part of this ongoing effort, we believe it is crucial for parliaments to exercise ever more vigorously and effectively their constitutional functions of oversight and control of government action in the area of international trade. Greater attention should be paid to trade-related capacity-building measures targeted at parliaments of developing countries in order to create equal possibilities of participation.