
ANNUAL 2008 SESSION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE ON THE WTO

Geneva, 11-12 September 2008

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

ANNOTATED PROVISIONAL AGENDA

1. Adoption of the agenda

2. Dialogue with senior WTO negotiators

The annual session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO will be taking place at a juncture when the future of the Doha Round remains uncertain due to highly divergent positions of WTO members on key issues including agriculture, non-agricultural market access, and services. Participants at the parliamentary session will have an opportunity to put questions to top WTO negotiators, receive first-hand information on the latest developments in WTO talks, and exchange views on possible ways forward.

3. Debate on substantive themes:

(a) Looking beyond Doha

Under this agenda item, delegates are expected to focus, from a parliamentary perspective, on the long-term consequences of a protracted stalemate in WTO negotiations. What is the future of a WTO-centric multilateral trading system if the Doha Round fails to deliver on its development promise? Would a spaghetti-bowl of bilateral agreements replace the multilateral system? Should the rising tide of protectionism be seen as an impediment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals? Are WTO accession rules and procedures sufficiently transparent? Among other issues, delegates are invited to address the issue of effective legislative oversight of trade talks, including through the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO.

(b) Can international trade help mitigate climate change?

Political leadership and public opinion have been alerted to the adverse impact of climate change on natural ecosystems, the economy and human health. The appropriate policies are yet to be put in place though, despite the known benefits of early action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and put an end to irresponsible production and consumption patterns. What kind of trade rules are required to limit climate change caused by trade-related activities? What can be done to amplify the capacity of international trade to attenuate negative environmental trends? Delegates are invited to explore these avenues, bearing in mind the need for innovative and cost-effective solutions.

4. Panel discussions

(a) Defusing the threat of conflicts over food and energy through trade

For the first time in many years, food shortages and soaring energy prices are back in the spotlight of the international media and the diplomatic arena. This interactive session will focus on the role of international trade as a means of adjusting supply and demand in a situation where countries are scrambling for markets amid fears of diminishing returns. The debate should also cover the issue of trade-distorting subsidies and tariffs, and the need to strengthen WTO rules.

(b) Trade in the era of digital revolution

One of the most visible examples of the way in which information and communication technologies (ICT) contribute to economic growth is the advancement of e-business and e-commerce throughout the world, including in developing countries. Governments, parliaments, civil society and the private sector all have a vital stake in grasping the digital opportunity and putting ICT at the service of development. This interactive panel will focus on the role of parliaments in providing an enabling legal and regulatory environment for e-commerce, and on trade facilitation through relevant capacity-building measures.

5. Guidelines for relations between governments and parliaments on international trade issues

As a follow-up to the initial exchange of views that took place during the Hong Kong session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO in December 2005, the Conference Steering Committee elaborated the enclosed draft Guidelines on the basis of two comparative studies, undertaken by the European Parliament and the French Senate respectively. Participants at the parliamentary session will be called upon to approve the text of draft Guidelines, with a view to its subsequent circulation to all parliaments as a recommendation for action.

6. Amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO

The current set of Rules of Procedure was adopted by the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO at its session held in Brussels in November 2004. On the request of a number of delegations, the Conference Steering Committee prepared a series of amendments to the Rules of Procedure with a view to establishing a mechanism for rotating the Steering Committee seats among different national parliaments. In accordance with Article 8 of the current Rules, the participants at the parliamentary session will be called upon to approve the proposed amendments, it being understood that the Steering Committee has already established a timeframe for phasing in the regional rotation and drawn up a list of geographical regions for the purpose of rotation.

7. Adoption of the outcome document

At the end of the session, the participants will be invited to consider and adopt an outcome document, the draft of which will be prepared by the Conference Steering Committee.