
PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE ON THE WTO

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

RULES OF PROCEDURE

adopted on 26 November 2004, amended on 12 September 2008

The days when foreign policy, and more specifically trade policy was the exclusive domain of the executive branch are over. The WTO is rapidly becoming more than a trade organisation, having an ever growing impact on domestic policies and the daily life of citizens.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union and the European Parliament are therefore jointly organising a Parliamentary Conference on the WTO (hereinafter the Conference) that will meet at least once a year and on the occasion of WTO Ministerial Conferences. The Conference is an official parliamentary event that is open to the public.

ARTICLE 1 - Objectives

1.1 The Conference is a forum for the exchange of opinions, information and experience, as well as for the promotion of common action on topics related to the role of parliaments and the organisation of parliamentary functions in the area of international trade issues.

1.2 The Conference seeks to promote free and fair trade that benefits people everywhere, enhances development and reduces poverty.

1.3 The Conference will provide a parliamentary dimension to the WTO by:

- (a) overseeing WTO activities and promoting their effectiveness and fairness – keeping in mind the original objectives of the WTO set in Marrakech;
- (b) promoting the transparency of WTO procedures and improving the dialogue between governments, parliaments and civil society; *and*
- (c) building capacity in parliaments in matters of international trade and exerting influence on the direction of discussions within the WTO.

ARTICLE 2 - Composition

2.1 Participants in the Conference are

- delegations designated by parliaments of sovereign States that are members of the WTO;
- delegations designated by IPU Member Parliaments from countries that are not represented in the WTO; *and*
- delegations designated by the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie.

2.2 Observers to the Conference will be

- Representatives of international organisations and others who are concerned by issues of international trade and specifically invited by the Steering Committee on the basis of a list that has been approved jointly by the co-organisers; *and*
- representatives of governments of sovereign States that are members of the WTO.

2.3 The event will also be open to other persons with a specific interest in international trade questions. These persons may follow the work of the Conference without intervening in its proceedings and will have no speaking rights. They will be issued a security badge bearing their name only. They will not receive an official invitation or be accredited to the event.

ARTICLE 3 - Presidency

3.1 The Conference is presided over jointly by the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the President of the European Parliament, or their substitutes.

3.2 The Presidents shall open, suspend and close the sittings, direct the work of the Conference, see that the Rules are observed, call upon speakers, put questions for decision, make known the results of decisions and declare the Conference closed. The decisions of the Presidents on these matters shall be final and shall be accepted without debate.

3.3 The Presidents shall decide on all matters not covered by these Rules, if necessary after having taken the advice of the Steering Committee.

ARTICLE 4 - Steering Committee and Secretariat

4.1 The Steering Committee is jointly established by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the European Parliament and is composed of representatives of parliaments of sovereign States, of the IPU and the European Parliament as the Conference co-organizers, of selected other regional and international parliamentary assemblies and structures, and of the WTO Secretariat.

4.2 The Steering Committee is responsible for all matters relating to the organisation of the Conference and shall take decisions on the basis of consensus. All decisions taken by the Steering Committee shall, as appropriate, be circulated in writing and approved before the end of each meeting.

4.3 Membership in the Steering Committee shall be institutional, with every parliament or organization having the right to choose its representative(s). In the interest of consistency in the work of the Steering Committee, parliaments and organizations shall endeavour to ensure that, as far as possible, the person(s) who represented them in previous sessions of the Committee continue to take part in subsequent sessions.

4.4 When more than one representative of a national parliament takes part in a session of the Steering Committee, only one member of parliament per delegation shall be part of the decision-making process.

4.5 Changes in the composition of the Steering Committee shall be proposed jointly by the IPU and the European Parliament, as the Conference co-organizers, subject to approval by the Steering Committee as a whole. Where possible, equitable geographical distribution shall be taken into consideration.

4.6 National parliaments shall hold a seat on the Steering Committee for a period of four years. However, the Steering Committee may invite a given parliament to hold its seat on the Steering Committee for another term. The rotation shall be scheduled in such a way that no more than half of the parliaments representing a given geographical region shall be replaced at any one time.

4.7 The definition of geographical regions for the purpose of rotation shall be established by the Steering Committee.

4.8 The Conference and the Steering Committee are assisted in their activities by the secretariats of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the European Parliament.

ARTICLE 5 - Agenda

5.1 The Conference decides on its agenda on the basis of a proposal from the Steering Committee, which shall be communicated to the participants at least one month before the opening of each plenary session.

ARTICLE 6 - Speaking rights and decisions

6.1 Participants and observers have the same speaking rights.

6.2 Priority to speak shall be given to participants wishing to make a procedural motion which shall have priority over the substantive questions.

6.3 The Conference shall take all decisions by consensus of the delegations of participants. Conference decisions shall be taken after due notice has been given by the President.

ARTICLE 7 - Outcome of the Conference

7.1 The draft outcome document of the Conference shall be prepared by the Steering Committee with the assistance of one or more rapporteurs and communicated to the participants sufficiently in advance.

7.2 Amendments to the draft outcome document shall be presented by the delegations as defined in Article 2.1 or by rapporteurs in English or in French with the amended parts clearly marked. Amendments shall relate directly to the text which they seek to amend. They may only call for an addition, a deletion or an alteration with regard to the initial draft, without having the effect of changing its scope or nature. Amendments shall be submitted before the deadline set by the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee shall decide on the admissibility of amendments.

ARTICLE 8 – Adoption and amendment to the Rules

8.1 The Conference shall adopt and amend the Rules.

8.2 Any proposal to amend the Rules of the Conference shall be formulated in writing and sent to the Secretariat of the Conference at least three months before the next meeting of the Conference. The Secretariat shall immediately communicate such proposals to the members of the Steering Committee as well as to the delegations of the Conference. It shall also communicate any proposal for sub-amendments at least one month before the next meeting of the Conference.

8.3 The Conference shall decide on any proposal to amend the Rules after hearing the opinion of the Steering Committee, including on their admissibility.