

SEMINAR ON REGIONALISM AND THE WTO

WTO Secretariat, Geneva, 26 April 2002

The Fourth Ministerial Conference in Doha marked a further step in promoting the objective of a multilateral trading system based on non-discrimination and rejection of protectionist practices, with emphasis on its development dimension. Members committed themselves to achieve these principles and objectives through global trade rule-making and liberalization in the WTO framework.

At Doha, WTO Members also recognized that regional trade agreements (RTAs) can play an important role in promoting trade liberalization and in fostering economic development. In initiating negotiations to clarify and improve RTA-related disciplines and procedures, taking into account developmental aspects, Ministers highlighted the need for a harmonious relationship between the multilateral and regional processes.

The time is ripe for the WTO Membership to review such relationship afresh. WTO provisions entitle Members to conclude RTAs under certain conditions, of both a substantive and procedural nature. Though many of the issues at stake have been inherited from the GATT years, controversy nurtured by the language of the existing legal yardsticks has been a central element in the work of the Committee on Regional Trade Agreements (CRTA), since its establishment in 1996. As a result, the CRTA has been unable to delivering any assessment of the consistency of individual RTAs notified to the WTO with the corresponding provisions, and has only partially fulfilled its transparency role.

This represents an important challenge for the WTO, in particular at a time when nearly all Members are engaged in RTAs or actively pursuing the regional road. Clearer and more coherent principles and guidelines are required to channel the growing level of Members' involvement in RTAs, and to harmonize trade policy-making at the multilateral and regional level.

The Seminar is policy oriented. It is designed to assist Members in shaping the conceptual framework for the Doha negotiations in this area. In particular, it aims at raising awareness on the meaning and significance of RTAs for world trade; and on the impact of RTAs' market access provisions and trade regulatory functions. It also provides for an exchange of views about how better ensuring the coherence of regional and multilateral trade initiatives, so as to minimize any distorting effects on international trade relations; and about how better use the WTO institutional framework, in particular the CRTA, to achieve that aim.

This one-day Seminar will comprise two sessions in the morning, where speakers will focus on the main technical questions underlying the issues under negotiation. In the afternoon, a roundtable of experts will explore ways to improve the WTO-RTA relationship, this leading to a general debate (with participants, speakers and panellists); a moderator will summarize the main points discussed and coordinate the general debate.

The event will be open to WTO Members and Observers and will include as guest participants senior representatives from regional institutions. The WTO will incur participation costs for the guest participants from developing countries and for the speakers not based in Geneva.



PROGRAMME

Friday, 26 April 2002

Council Room I – Centre William Rappard

- 09:00-09:15** **WELCOMING WORDS**
- 09:15-09:45** **SESSION ONE**
THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF THE GLOBAL TRADING SYSTEM
 New developments in the WTO and in RTAs
- 09:45-10:00** *COFFEE BREAK*
- 10:00-12:30** **SESSION TWO**
RTA MARKET ACCESS AND REGULATORY PROVISIONS
 Frontiers of trade liberalization in RTAs: the treatment of "sensitive" products and the role of origin rules
 Significance of standards, technical regulations and SPS provisions in RTAs
 Contingency provisions in RTAs
 Economic integration in trade in services
 Other regulatory provisions in RTAs (investment, competition, trade facilitation)
- 12:30-14:00** *LUNCH BREAK*
- 14:00-16:30** **ROUNDTABLE**
WHICH RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MULTILATERAL TRADING SYSTEM AND RTAs?
- 16:30-17:00** *COFFEE BREAK*
- 17:00-18:00** **GENERAL DEBATE**
- 18:00** **CONCLUDING REMARKS**
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ANNOTATED PROGRAMME

Friday, 26 April 2002

09:00 WELCOMING WORDS

09:15-09:45 SESSION ONE

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF THE GLOBAL TRADING SYSTEM

The objective of this session is to introduce the concept of RTAs and to assess its significance in today's global trading system.

❑ **New developments in the WTO and in RTAs**

Clemens Boonekamp, Director, Trade Policies Review Division, WTO

09:45-10:00 COFFEE BREAK

10:00-12:30 SESSION TWO

RTA MARKET ACCESS AND REGULATORY PROVISIONS

The objective of this session is twofold: it looks at the correlation between market access and regulatory provisions in RTAs and to whether the nature and depth of this relationship facilitates or hinders trade liberalization; and it considers specific RTA regulatory regimes and discusses whether they operate in a manner which may be considered to be WTO-plus or -minus.

❑ **Frontiers of trade liberalization in RTAs: the treatment of "sensitive" products and the role of origin rules**

Antoni Estevadeordal, Senior Trade Economist, Integration and Regional Programs Department, Inter-American Development Bank, U.S.A.

❑ **Significance of standards, technical regulations and SPS provisions in RTAs**

Joel P. Trachtman, Professor of International Law, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, U.S.A.

❑ **Contingency provisions in RTAs**

Dean Spinanger, Senior Research Associate, Kiel Institute of World Economics, Germany

❑ **Economic integration in trade in services**

Aaditya Mattoo, Senior Economist, International Trade Unit, World Bank

❑ **Other regulatory provisions in RTAs (investment, competition, trade facilitation)**

Ken Heydon, Deputy Director, Trade Directorate, OECD

12:30-14:00 LUNCH BREAK



14:00-16:30 **ROUNDTABLE**

WHICH RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MULTILATERAL TRADING SYSTEM AND RTAs?

Panelists will exchange views on possible synergies between regional and multilateral approaches to trade policy-making and trade liberalization, and on appropriate institutional and legal structures for the management of differing trade regimes, ranging from the multilateral to the bilateral.

Panel: *Muchkund Dubey*, President, Council for Social Development, India
 Jeffrey Schott, Senior Fellow, Institute for International Economics, U.S.A.
 Patrick A. Messerlin, Director, Groupe d'Economie Mondiale, Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris, France
 Robert Scollay, Director, APEC Study Centre, New Zealand
 Ramón Torrent, Director, Observatory of Globalisation, University of Barcelona, Spain

Moderator: *Miguel Rodríguez Mendoza*, Deputy Director-General, WTO

16:30-17:00 **COFFEE BREAK**

17:00-18:00 **GENERAL DEBATE**

Moderator: *Miguel Rodríguez Mendoza*, Deputy Director-General, WTO

18:00 **CONCLUDING REMARKS**
