

WTO: 2011 NEWS ITEMS

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GENERAL COUNCIL

Report by the Chairman of the Trade Negotiations Committee

Since the last meeting of the General Council, the TNC has held one informal meeting on 2 February. At that meeting, participants reviewed and assessed developments in the Doha Development Agenda since the beginning of the intensive process which the Negotiating Groups embarked on in early January. Similarly, as has become customary in late January and early February, the backdrop of our discussions was the informal gathering of Ministers organized by Switzerland in Davos.

My remarks at the informal TNC, including the overview of negotiating groups, were circulated to delegations in document JOB/TNC/7. I do not intend to repeat what I said then, but I would nevertheless like to place on the record the main message that I took from Geneva to Ministers in Davos.

In my intervention in Davos I noted that the activities in Geneva were showing a change of gear and approach in both legs of the negotiating process, that is in the Negotiating Groups as well as in the bilateral and plurilateral consultations. In the Negotiating Groups there is an overall sense of greater engagement and focus, with no single topic being left behind. Work is progressing on developing draft language and textual proposals as well as in removing brackets. Nevertheless, I stressed to Ministers that the pace of multilateral work was not only too slow, but also too short of the kind of substantive progress needed to reach the landing zone within the window of opportunity that leaders have identified.

Regarding the bilateral and plurilateral leg, I shared with Ministers my concern that this process is lagging behind, thereby risking to starve the multilateral negotiations of the oxygen required to make the next leap forward. Without an imminent transfer of energy from the bilateral and plurilateral processes, all the hard work done over the past few weeks in the multilateral track risks coming to a grinding halt. In other words, I said that the current multilateral momentum needs fuel, and it needs it urgently.

In Davos I sensed an unambiguous determination among Ministers to further accelerate the Geneva process to meet the 2011 window of opportunity identified by the G20 and APEC Leaders. Ministers present agreed to increase the pressure on their various bilateral and plurilateral negotiations so as to provide the necessary momentum and also agreed that our current work must build on progress reached thus far. They committed to instructing their negotiators to reassess positions, abandon comfort zones and engage in genuine "give-and-takes". Finally, Ministers emphasized their readiness to engage personally in the negotiating process at the appropriate moment. But they

were also quite clear that they expect the Geneva process to bring them a limited number of issues for them to crack.

At the informal TNC, delegations expressed wide support for our roadmap - texts in all areas by around Easter, a comprehensive package by July and finalization by the end of the year. In this context, a number of delegations re-emphasized that progress should build on what had already been achieved and that the acquis should not be unravelled. Delegations also highlighted specific areas of importance they wished to see advance in this end-game phase. Several participants stressed the importance of transparency and inclusiveness in the processes ahead and a number also emphasized the importance of respecting the development mandate of the Round.

As far as the bilateral and plurilateral discussions among Senior Officials which have taken place over the past couple of weeks, I understand that they have been constructive and have explored specific substantive issues in a number of key areas, including flexibilities and how to ensure overall balance across issues. I also understand that participants in these talks have emphasized the importance of the multilateral process. Although it is still early, I am encouraged by the direction and nature of these talks and I urge the participants to keep up the pressure, push harder and dig deeper in their efforts to find the common ground necessary to put the multilateral pen to paper.

It is clear from the level of activity planned in the various Negotiating Groups that we all face some intense and challenging weeks ahead. This includes collectively facing up to the fact that our current process — at each and every level — remains too slow. Throughout the Negotiating Groups we keep hearing that some delegations “have no instructions” and that “we still have time”. Such statements are not only unhelpful, they fail to respect the tremendous day-to-day efforts by our NG Chairs to move the process forward. In the Negotiating Groups we hear that “we will move when the plurilaterals move,” and in the plurilaterals we hear that “we will move when the bilaterals move” and, finally, in the bilaterals we hear that “I will move when the other does”. Ultimately, of course, this means that you are waiting for yourselves to move! I believe we will all agree that this vicious circle has to be broken!

At this point, I believe we need to collectively recall that we have agreed on a *modus operandi* for the current process, namely to produce elements of progress that Chairs can capture in texts, and to do so urgently. I must issue a serious warning that a major acceleration at all levels — multilaterally, plurilaterally and bilaterally - is needed in order to make this possible. Furthermore, the output of all these processes needs to urgently move up a level, to real progress on key issues of substance. The window of opportunity is still there, but it is narrowing every day.

Finally, for my part, I will continue my regular coordination meetings with the Negotiating Chairs, including ensuring that the schedule of meetings takes into account the constraints of smaller delegations and of course my own personal consultations. In the

interest of transparency and inclusiveness, I have also called for an informal TNC at HODs level on 8 March at which we can collectively evaluate the state-of-play across the board.