



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
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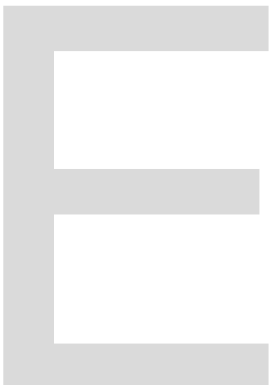
Governing Council  
Item 7

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## Reports on recent IPU specialized meetings

### (f) Annual 2015 session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO Geneva 16-17 February 2015

1. The Parliamentary Conference on the World Trade Organization (WTO) is a forum for exchanging opinions, information and experience, as well as for promoting common parliamentary action in the area of international trade and development. Driven by the synergies of the IPU and the European Parliament, the Conference oversees the effectiveness and fairness of multilateral trade agreements, serves to promote the transparency of WTO procedures, improves the dialogue between governments, parliaments and civil society, builds capacity in parliaments in matters of international trade and influences the direction of discussions within the WTO.
2. The annual 2015 session of the Conference took place on WTO premises in Geneva on 16 and 17 February. The session was attended by over 350 participants and observers from 65 countries and 11 international organizations, including 157 members of parliament. Also present at the session were representatives of 42 Permanent Missions to the WTO in Geneva, registered as observers.
3. The inaugural ceremony was addressed by Mr. K. Örnfjäder (Sweden), IPU Co-Chair of the Conference Steering Committee, Mr. O. Rehn, Vice-President of the European Parliament, and Ambassador F. De Mateo y Venturini (Mexico), Chairperson of the WTO Dispute Settlement Body. One of the highlights of the session was a hearing with the WTO Director-General, Mr. R. Azevêdo, which was followed with great interest not only by parliamentarians, but also by trade diplomats and the media.
4. Held under an overarching title "WTO at the age of 20", the session included a debate on the substantive theme "Trade as an enabler of peace and better living conditions". Its two-day work programme also comprised a dialogue with senior WTO negotiators on the theme "Policy, politics and trade: keeping the WTO negotiations on the right track" and a panel discussion entitled "Conveying the benefits of the WTO to the wider public: The case of consumers and young people".
5. At the closing sitting, the participants adopted by consensus an Outcome Document (see *Annex*) prepared by the rapporteur of the Steering Committee, Mr. Kil Jeong-woo (Republic of Korea), and amended through a process of broad consultations with other participants. The text recognized that the WTO was playing a pivotal role in strengthening multilateralism, establishing an inclusive world economic order and promoting an open, rules-based and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system.



6. The Outcome Document also reiterated the view that the WTO should make full use of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO, ensuring that parliamentarians have access to all the information they need to carry out their oversight role effectively and contribute meaningfully to trade policies. In this connection, the document emphasized the role of parliaments in bringing about speedy ratification of the Trade Facilitation Agreement concluded at the 9<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference in Bali.

7. The proceedings of the session will soon be made available on the IPU website in the form of an electronic publication entitled "Highlights of the 2015 session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO". In addition to numerous photos, it will include full texts of main documents, speeches and presentations as well as extracts of the debate.

### **Recommendations**

8. At a time when the Doha Round of multilateral trade negotiations has been unblocked and is finally moving towards the eventual conclusion, it is important for parliaments to ensure effective oversight of their respective governments' stances in WTO talks. The Parliamentary Conference on the WTO provides a suitable platform for such action. Both parliaments and WTO negotiators are encouraged to use it more proactively.

9. The Conference is one of the best examples of partnership and collaborative efforts of the IPU and the European Parliament to provide an effective parliamentary dimension to one of the most important intergovernmental organizations. This cooperation, including its cost-sharing dimension, is mutually beneficial and deserves to be deepened and enhanced.

10. The IPU should work closely with the WTO Secretariat to speed up the process of ratification of the Trade Facilitation Agreement concluded at the 9<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference in Bali. Expected to benefit the global economy by up to \$ 1 trillion per year, the Agreement will become legally binding only once it has been ratified by two-thirds of WTO Members.

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ANNUAL 2015 SESSION OF THE  
PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE ON THE WTO

***WTO at the age of 20***

Geneva, 16-17 February 2015

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

**OUTCOME DOCUMENT**

***Adopted by consensus on 17 February 2015***

1. We congratulate the WTO and its Members on the Organization's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In its first two decades, the WTO has played a pivotal role in strengthening multilateralism, establishing an inclusive world economic order and promoting an open, rules-based and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system. We remain convinced that a fair and equitable international trading system helps foment global economic growth and sustainable economic development, creating jobs and welfare.
2. Open trade has increased the participation of developing countries in the global economy and contributed to strengthening their constructive engagement in global governance, as is evidenced by their combined weight in the G20. In the year marking the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II, it is equally important to underscore the role of trade in maintaining peaceful relations and cooperation among nations.
3. We acknowledge the part played by the WTO in hushing the siren call of protectionism in the aftermath of the financial and economic crisis of 2008. Despite an increase in protectionist measures in some areas, there has been no repeat of the tit-for-tat and widespread adoption of defensive barriers. By having trade rules in place and an effective dispute settlement mechanism to back them up, the WTO has helped keep global protectionist pressures in check.
4. The WTO provides a platform for global negotiations aimed at freeing up world trade and extending its benefits to developing and developed countries alike. We regret that progress in negotiations in the last two decades has been slow and urge WTO Members to redouble their efforts to conclude successfully the Doha Round, which was launched over 13 years ago and has become the longest running round of trade negotiations ever. We call on all parties to show the required flexibility and make the necessary breakthroughs.
5. In this regard, we applaud the recent approval by the WTO's General Council of the decisions taken at the ninth Ministerial Conference in Bali in December 2013, in particular the one on trade facilitation, aimed at cutting red tape and streamlining customs procedures. The new accord, which will become legally binding once it is ratified by two-thirds of WTO Members, should benefit the global economy by between US\$ 400 million and \$ 1 trillion per year. We therefore urge WTO Members to ratify the agreement as soon as possible. As parliamentarians, we undertake to contribute to this process from our side.
6. We appreciate the General Council's decision on public stockholding for food security purposes and call for the conclusion of negotiations on finding a permanent solution to the issue, in keeping with the decision. We believe that the issue of food security is vital for developing countries and that WTO rules should support fighting hunger.
7. We believe that a review of the working practices of the WTO to achieve greater efficiency will contribute to better rule-making in the trade forum. We recognize the consensus rule as the fundamental principle of the WTO and call on all Members to continue to honour this principle, including in final decisions adopted at the ministerial level.

8. Now that the post-Bali stalemate has been broken, WTO Members must seize the opportunity and press ahead quickly with implementing all elements of the Bali Package, including drawing up a “clearly defined” work programme for the remaining Doha Round issues. Members have no time to waste if they are to meet the end-July 2015 deadline. In order to ensure that the Round is concluded as early as possible, there is a need to build on the relevant results already achieved through years of negotiation as contained in the draft modalities texts. Too many deadlines have already been missed. The work programme must find a balance between the key components of the negotiating package, namely agriculture, non-agricultural market access and services, and keep the special needs and interests of developing countries at the heart of the process.

9. WTO accords must bring tangible benefits to the poorest of its Members first and foremost. With this in mind, we urge the negotiators to intensify their efforts to convert Bali decisions into concrete economic gains for the least developed countries (LDCs), including through the creation of new export opportunities for LDC services providers and simplification of regulations governing rules of origin. At the same time, we urge WTO Members that have still not met the 97 per cent target for duty-free, quota-free access for exports from LDCs to do so as quickly as possible.

10. The launch of the Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility should further help LDCs reap the benefits of the new accords. Together with the World Bank, the World Customs Organization and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the WTO should scale up technical assistance to LDCs. As parliamentarians, we undertake to work with our governments in order to ensure their active participation in these efforts.

11. Poorer developing countries can face supply-side and trade-related infrastructure obstacles that limit their ability to engage in and benefit from international trade. The WTO’s donor-funded Aid for Trade initiative aims to overcome these hurdles. We welcome the fact that the figures for 2012 show a rise of 20 per cent in donors’ commitments year-on-year. We feel concerned, however, that most of the increase went to middle-income countries, while contributions to LDCs fell slightly. We call on donors to maintain support for this important initiative and ensure that a fair share of assistance is directed to LDCs. In this regard, we look forward to the Fifth Global Review of Aid for Trade, to be held in Geneva in July 2015 under the overall theme “Reducing Trade Costs for Inclusive, Sustainable Growth”.

12. Trade is a necessary but insufficient condition for achieving economic prosperity and well-being. We observe with apprehension the growing economic inequalities, notably within countries. We continue to insist on the need for coherent and integrated national trade and industrial, labour market and social policies to strengthen productive capacities and create decent jobs. Developing countries, particularly LDCs, must have the freedom to apply the appropriate domestic policies so as to ensure that increased trade efficiency results in more job opportunities. Trade policies have to be accompanied by appropriate fiscal and monetary measures to generate jobs, boost productivity and promote sustained and inclusive economic growth.

13. In order to meet international challenges and obligations in other areas such as the environment and climate change, we emphasize that our aim is to strengthen trade relations and cooperation in ways that promote sustainable development. We further reiterate the principle in the preamble of the WTO Agreement that actions to protect and preserve the environment and means for doing so shall be consistent with the respective needs and concerns of WTO Members at different levels of economic development. Accordingly, given the holding of the 10<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference in Nairobi as well as key United Nations Summits in 2015 and the expected adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, we call for the closest possible cooperation through exchange of information between the WTO and specialized UN bodies that deal with social, economic, environmental and health issues. Without such cooperation, sustainable development will prove illusory.

14. We further recognize that any unilateral trade measures against imports of goods and services on any ground related to environmental protection or climate change should not be taken in a manner that constitutes arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination or a disguised restriction on international trade, although environmental protection in itself is not necessarily unjustifiable.

15. Recent years have witnessed a surge in plurilateral, regional and bilateral trade accords, motivated in part by the lack of progress in the Doha Round. Such accords can stimulate trade between participants, open up areas of trade that are only partially covered by WTO agreements, and provide useful negotiating experience that can be subsequently applied in a multilateral context. We stress, however, that these agreements cannot eliminate or undermine the role of multilateral accords in international trade, in particular in some sensitive areas.

16. The challenges facing the WTO show the need for the continued involvement of parliamentarians with this uniquely important world trade body. Parliamentarians not only ratify the results of negotiations, but they are a crucial point of contact between the WTO and the people they aim to serve. We urge the WTO to make full use of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO, ensuring that parliamentarians have access to all the information they need to carry out their oversight role effectively and contribute meaningfully to trade policies.