

Multilateralism and Its Options **A Multi-Stakeholder Approach**

IMD, Lausanne, Switzerland
26 – 28 November 2004

Trade has been fundamental to the unprecedented growth and prosperity of the last six decades. Yet, in recent years, the global multilateral trading system (GMTS) has come under increasing strain. This is partly due to the rapid increase in new members of the WTO – from 90 to 148 in less than a decade – and to the new areas that it is made to cover. There is also dissonance between the speed of technological change, market developments, business responses on the one hand, and the cumbersome and protracted nature of the global economic policy process on the other. Technology and markets are moving at full throttle, while the “system” seems to be stalling, as it did quite spectacularly in Cancún in September 2003.

Equally dramatic has been the sudden entry of new major players. Even only ten years ago, China was still at the early stages of its economic surge, India was begin to implement the economic reform programme set out by its then finance minister, Manmohan Singh, Fernando Henrique Cardoso was in his first term in Brasilia, while South Africa was just emerging from the long night of apartheid. These four countries teamed up to establish the G-20, insisting on their intention to become more actively involved in setting the rules.

New actors, new technologies, new business strategies, all within a rapidly changing geopolitical global context have combined to make a considerable impact on the global economic chessboard.

Apart from these major forces and trends, the GMTS has been subjected to a number of developments. These include:

Regionalism: The last decade has witnessed a spectacular increase in the number of RTAs (Regional Trading Agreements), with the question of whether they represent “building blocs” or “stumbling blocs” in the development of a more globally integrated market economy unresolved.

Bilateralism: Bilateral negotiations have expanded exponentially, with the US especially embarked on a spree of bilateral deals following the collapse of Cancún.

Unilateralism: This too has been a feature mainly of US trade policy, notably the unilateral imposition of additional tariffs on steel in early 2002 when the ink on the Doha Declaration was still wet.

Along with these policy developments, the GMTS has been the target of antagonism, ranging from disappointment, to heated controversy, to outright assault. Issues include the impact of trade and the WTO on environmentalism, human rights, labour standards, inequality, unemployment and a number of other social, political and economic ills.

Much of the discussion on these extremely complex and challenging questions has tended to take place within established professional communities and/or between essentially likeminded parties. The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Evian Group initiative in convening this meeting on *multilateralism and its options - a multi-stakeholder approach* aims to broaden the parameters of discussion by bringing together all key stakeholders from different countries at different stages of economic development to determine the options and implications in designing the global trading framework for the 21st century.

Program

Friday, 26 November

- 15:30 – 16:30 Registration
- 16:30 – 17:00 Welcome and Introduction
Erfried Adam, Director, Geneva Office, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Jean-Pierre Lehmann, Professor, IMD, Director, The Evian Group
- 17:00 – 19:00 *Panel I*
Where do things stand? Risks and Opportunities
- 19:15 – 21:30 Drinks & Dinner, Hosted by Peter Lorange, President, IMD
Keynote speech

Saturday, 27 November

- 09:00 – 10:45 *Panel II*
Regional Agreements, Integration and South-South Cooperation
- 10:45 – 11:15 Break
- 11:15 – 13:00 *Panel III*
The Social Impact of Trade Liberalisation & Options to Multilateralism
- 13:00 – 14:30 Lunch
- 14:30 – 16:15 *Panel IV*
RTAs – Building Blocs or Stumbling Blocs?
- 16:15 – 16:45 Break
- 16:45 – 18:45 *Panel V*
A WTO at Variable Geometry?
- 18:45 – 21:00 Dinner at Le Viel Ouchy

Sunday 28 November

- 09:00 – 11:00 *Panel VI*
Cohesion in Global Economic & Social Policy
- 11:00 – 11:30 Break
- 11:30 – 12:15 *Closing Session*
Erfried Adam, Director, Geneva Office, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Jean-Pierre Lehmann, Professor, IMD, Director, The Evian Group
- 12:30 – Buffet Luncheon at Mövenpick Hotel