



FES/WTO Regional Dialogue on
“Current and Future Challenges for the
Multilateral Trading System –
Development Perspectives from the MENA Region”

Cairo, 10-12 May 2009

Background:

The world economy is witnessing serious difficulties due to the unfolding food, energy, financial and economic crises. Headlines have been dominated by dark prognoses on falling world Gross Domestic Product (GDP), shrinking trade flows, wage deflation and increasing unemployment. Various protectionist measures have been adopted and the world risks starting a new “beggar-thy-neighbour” process, which would have disastrous economic, social – and even political – consequences.

The crises have painfully confronted the world with the more systemic reasons behind them. Many renowned economists did not foresee such a crisis and had to conclude that their models were not adequate to explain the processes occurring. This is why governments, institutions, business and unions alike are frantically looking for solutions that will not only repair the damage done, but also better prepare the international community for the future.

These crises have various repercussions on the multilateral trading system. The World Trade Organization (WTO) forecasts a dramatic trade decline of 9 per cent in 2009. Contrary to earlier affirmations, G20 governments are starting to apply a number of protectionist measures, and although still in conformity with their WTO commitments, vigilance is required. The WTO reacted actively to the crisis and came forward with a report that analyzes trade developments as a result of the financial and economic crises. The current protectionist tendencies do not bode well for the future of the WTO Doha Round of multilateral trade negotiations, launched in Doha, Qatar, in 2001.

Against this background, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and the WTO Secretariat jointly organize a regional dialogue on “Current and Future Challenges for the Multilateral Trading System – Development Perspectives from the MENA Region”. This dialogue aims at bringing together different stakeholders from the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, fostering a regional exchange of views and ideas, and debating the following questions:

- What do the current financial and economic crises mean for the multilateral trading system and the development perspectives of the MENA region?
- What are the costs and benefits of WTO accessions of the MENA countries?
- What role plays the increasing number of preferential trade agreements?
- How are trade policy formulation processes working in the MENA region?
- What role will the WTO play in the economic and financial crises and in the future global economic governance system? Which new topics will gain importance?



Conference Venue:

Hotel Marriott
16, Saray El Gezira Street
Zamalek
1211 Cairo, Egypt
Phone: +202 272 83 000
Fax: +202 272 83 001

Participants:

Participants come from the following countries:

WTO members: Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates

WTO accession countries: Algeria, Lebanon, Yemen

Language:

The seminar will be held in English and Arabic with simultaneous translation between both languages.

Organisation:

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Program

Sunday, 10 May 2009

Arrival of International Participants

20.00 Informal Welcome Dinner at
‘**Egyptian Nights**’ Restaurant (Marriott Garden)

Monday, 11 May 2009

10.00-10.30 **Opening Ceremony**

Welcome Remarks

Mr. Gerd Emil Lieser, Resident Representative, FES Egypt
Office

Mr. Bernard Kuiten, Head of External Relations, Information
and External Relations Division, WTO

Keynote Address

Mr. Waleed El Nozahy, Head of the Central Department for
WTO Affairs, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Egypt

10.30-11.00 Coffee/Tea Break



11.00-13.00

1st Panel “The current financial and economic crises: reactions from and implications for the MENA region”

The world economy is witnessing serious difficulties and headlines have been dominated by dark prognoses on falling world Gross Domestic Product (GDP, shrinking trade flows, wage deflation and increasing unemployment. Various protectionist measures have been adopted and the world risks starting a new “beggar-thy-neighbour” process with disastrous consequences. What are the reactions from and implications for the MENA region concerning trade, foreign direct investment, employment, and development perspectives?

Chair: **Mr. Bernard Kuiten**, Head of External Relations, Information and External Relations Division, WTO

Mr. Ahmed El Sayed Al Naggar, Editor in Chief, Economic Strategic Direction, “Al Ahram” Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, Egypt

Mr. Adnan Al-Hajj, Journalist and Head of the Economical Page, Al-Safir, Lebanon

Mr. Mustapha Ben Ahmed, International Relations Department, Tunisian General Union of Labour, Tunisia

Discussion

13.00-14.30

Lunch Break

14.30-16.30

2nd Panel “WTO’s role in the current crises and implications for the Doha `Development` Round”

As part of its trade policy review functions, the WTO reacted actively to the crisis and came forward with a report that analyzes trade developments as a result of the financial and economic crises. It set up a monitoring mechanism to track, review and discuss trade policy developments (i.e. protectionist measures taken by WTO members) during the crises. The current protectionist tendencies do not bode well for the future of the Doha Round. This panel discusses the measures taken by the WTO and the prospects of the Doha Round under the new circumstances.

Chair: **Mr. Waleed El Nozahy**, Head of the Central Department for WTO Affairs, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Egypt

Mr. Bernard Kuiten, Head of External Relations, Information and External Relations Division, WTO

Dr. Reyadh Y. Faras, Economics Department, College of Business Administration, Kuwait University, Kuwait

Mr. Trineesh Biswas, Advisor to the Chief Executive, International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development, Switzerland

Discussion



16.30-17.00 Coffee/Tea Break

17.00-19.00 **3rd Panel “WTO accession processes: costs vs. benefits”**

The World Trade Organization is a multilateral organization with 153 members, but still falls short in terms of membership compared to the United Nations system. Currently, around 30 countries are in the process of acceding to the WTO, among them Algeria, Lebanon and Yemen. How is the accession process working? What are the costs and benefits of WTO accession? What are the experiences of MENA countries in this process?

Chair: **Mr. Steffen Grammling**, Program Officer for Trade and Development, FES Geneva Office, Switzerland

Mr. Said El Hachimi, Counsellor, Information and External Relations Division, WTO

Dr. Hamoud Ali Al-Najar, Chief of the Communication and Coordination Office with WTO, Ministry of Industry and Trade, Yemen

Dr. Sofian M. Abhari, Professor for Economics, Faculty of Economical Sciences, University of Algiers, Algeria

Discussion

Tuesday, 12 May

9.30-11.30 **4th Panel “Preferential Trade Agreements: building or stumbling blocks for the multilateral trading system and the development perspective of the MENA region?”**

Since the mid 1990s, the number of Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) has been exploding. Currently, around 300 PTAs are in force, another 100 are under negotiation or waiting for ratification. Moreover, various countries in the MENA region signed bilateral trade agreements with the US and the EU in particular; the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is the dominant regional trade agreement. What does this mean for the relevance of the WTO? What are the costs and benefits of PTAs for the development perspective of MENA countries?

Chair: **Dr. Eckart Woertz**, Program Manager Economics, Gulf Research Center, United Arab Emirates

Mr. Said El Hachimi, Counsellor, Information and External Relations Division, WTO

Dr. Riad Al Khouri, Economist, Jordan

Mr. Waleed El Nozahy, Head of the Central Department for WTO Affairs, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Egypt

Discussion



11.30-12.00 Coffee/Tea Break

12.00-14.00 **5th Panel “Transparency and decision-making processes in national and multilateral trade policy: actors’ perspectives”**

The trade policy of each WTO member is being reviewed regularly under WTO’s Trade Policy Review Mechanism (TPRM). Comprehensive information on countries’ trade regimes is available at the WTO website. How is the trade policy formulation process in MENA countries working? How is the decision-making process at the WTO working? What can be learnt from examples of other countries and regions?

Chair: **Dr. Ahmed Ghoneim**, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University, Egypt

Dr. Arne Klau, Consultant, based in Egypt

Mr. Ahmad Awad, Director, Phoenix Centre for Economic and Informatics Studies, Jordan

Mr. Lahbib Kabbou, Espace Associatif, Morocco

Discussion

14.00-15.00 Lunch Break

15.00-17.00 **6th Panel “WTO’s role in the future global economic governance system and topics that will gain importance”**

One recommendation of the Warwick Commission Report 2007 was to start a “process of reflection” over the challenges and opportunities of the multilateral trading system. On 29 April, WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy presented his vision for the future of the WTO. This session aims at contributing to the debate on the reform of the WTO and its future role in the global economic governance system, taking into account current developments and reflecting the perspectives of the MENA region.

Chair: **Dr. Alia El Mahdi**, Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University, Egypt

Mr. Steffen Grammling, Program Officer for Trade and Development, FES Geneva Office, Switzerland

Dr. Abdeljelil Bedoui, Professor, Tunis University, Tunisia

Mr. Abdel Fattah El Gibali, Head of the Economic Research Unit, “Al Ahram” Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Egypt

Discussion

17.00-18.00 **Closing and Outlook**

Mr. Bernard Kuiten, Head of External Relations, Information and External Relations Division, WTO

Mr. Steffen Grammling, Program Officer for Trade and Development, FES Geneva Office, Switzerland