



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
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# 138<sup>th</sup> IPU ASSEMBLY AND RELATED MEETINGS

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Item 7

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## Reports on recent IPU specialized meetings

### (d) Buenos Aires session of the Parliamentary Conference on WTO

**Buenos Aires (Argentina), 9-10 December 2017**

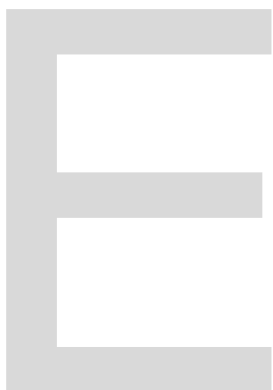
The Parliamentary Conference on the World Trade Organization provides the medium through which parliaments exercise oversight of that organization, forming, in fact, the parliamentary dimension of the WTO.

A joint initiative of the IPU and the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO provides parliamentarians with a forum for reflecting on the major challenges facing international trade and for sharing best practices for the improved management and promotion of trade.

Organized on the occasion of the 11<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference (MC11), the Buenos Aires session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO was held on 9 and 10 December 2017 and was attended by about 650 participants, including nearly 300 members of 55 parliaments.

It enabled parliamentarians to get first-hand information on the proceedings of MC11 to discuss the status of trade negotiations and matters requiring the intervention of parliamentarians with government negotiators and WTO representatives. At the same time, the participants in the Buenos Aires session were able to exchange views with their peers from other parliaments and to engage in dialogue with representatives of civil society.

An outcome document summing up the proceedings was adopted following the discussion and is annexed to this report.



#IPU138

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## BUENOS AIRES SESSION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE ON THE WTO

Buenos Aires (Argentina), 9-10 December 2017

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*Organized jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the European Parliament  
with the support of the National Congress of Argentina  
in connection with the 11<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference (MC11)*

### **OUTCOME DOCUMENT**

***Adopted on 10 December 2017***

1. On the eve of the 11<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO), to be held in Buenos Aires between 10 and 13 December 2017, we urge WTO Members to make every possible effort to achieve positive results that consolidate and strengthen the multilateral trading system, with the WTO as its cornerstone.
2. We believe that a multilateral trading system – rule-based, open, and non-discriminatory – plays an important role in promoting global economic growth and sustainable development, in creating jobs and wellbeing. Trade should be a key element to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We also recognise that trade can cause positive disruption. Trade reforms must contribute to inclusive economic growth and support economic diversification, industrialisation and structural transformation, particularly in developing countries.
3. Trade has contributed to the increased participation of developing countries in the global economy and has contributed significantly to strengthening their constructive engagement in an evolving system of global rules. We remain committed to multilateralism and to sustaining WTO's role within the multilateral system. Strengthening the WTO means building its capacity to deliver reforms to the international trading system, helping more people to participate and spreading the benefits of trade more widely, fairly and equitably.
4. International trade is a tool to support development. Changes in trade flows with the incorporation of new countries into the multilateral system show the benefits of defending the multilateral system so that all countries have the same opportunities to safeguard their rights and assume obligations compatible with their capabilities. In 2001, total imports amounted to US\$ 6,320 billion and in 2008 reached US\$ 16,350 billion, an increase of 158 per cent. In 2016, total imports were at US\$ 16,039 billion after having been at US\$ 19,000 billion in 2014. The fall in trade values has undermined the belief of trade as the engine of growth. The deceleration of GDP growth in Europe, the United States and Japan has eroded optimism about the benefits of globalization and greater integration of economies. However, the increased presence of developing countries in the international trading system has been positive because, as a result, there is more balance and equity in the distribution of the globalization process that will benefit the multilateral trading system.
5. The Bali and Nairobi Ministerial Conferences renewed the negotiating spirit through the commitments of the WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), the simplification of rules of origin and the provision of preferences for Least Developed Countries' (LDC) services and providers, and the elimination of agricultural export subsidies. In this regard, we applaud the coming into force in February 2017 of the TFA, the first multilateral trade reform agreed by the WTO since it was established in 1995, paying attention to the particular needs of developing LDCs and Members in implementing this Agreement. Adequate technical and financial support to assist the implementation of the TFA will still need to be provided. We also welcome the Members into force, on 23 January 2017, of an amendment to the TRIPS Agreement to help developing countries access generic medicines at more affordable prices. We urge governments that have not yet ratified these two agreements to do so as speedily as possible.

6. The last twenty years have witnessed an extraordinary advance of information and communication technologies, which have revolutionized the way of doing business with products and services and of exchanging information, giving a strong impetus to the increase of productivity in industry, agriculture and services. These new technologies have opened up the possibility of a new productive revolution that will improve the standard of living of the world's population by providing opportunities for developing countries. Technology is knowledge and drives innovation and productivity with greater horizontal and participatory transparency. However, it is believed to be one of the causes of the loss of jobs in the old modes of production, so it is necessary to envisage inclusive and balanced mechanisms to manage the development of both production models to avoid marginalization and uncertainty. It is essential that the development tools seek to include affected people and do not become forms of assistance that keep them out of the system. The Parliamentary Conference promotes the search for equitable mechanisms for the distribution of taxes, universal access to the use of knowledge technologies, solutions to the growing impact of global value chains on domestic and rural economies, on themes ranging from digital trade and connected themes like cyber security, addressing the digital divide for opening up of opportunities and social inclusion, keeping also in view the environmental concerns.

7. The past decade has witnessed a proliferation of multilateral, regional and bilateral agreements. These agreements may open markets in areas only partially or not even covered by the WTO. The impact of these agreements at the multilateral level remains unclear. While they could promote liberalization at the multilateral level, they could also undermine an inclusive multilateralism by fragmenting the system. But there must be coherence and convergence between such agreements and the multilateral trading system, and the role played by multilateral agreements in international trade should not be disregarded or undermined. Plurilateral, regional and bilateral deals in goods and services should not pose obstacles to the conclusion of multilateral negotiations as part of the WTO Doha Development Agenda. It is only if there is progress in these negotiations that there can be real developmental gains for all Members, rich and poor. Development should be at the heart of multilateral trade negotiations and priority should be given to the concerns and interests of developing Members and LDCs. Developing members and LDCs should continue to enjoy flexibility both when making trade commitments as well as when implementing them. We call on WTO Members to continue to accompany trade liberalisation with trade-related technical assistance and capacity building.

8. Trade ministers must respond to challenges by setting out a clear vision on how to surmount the current period of uncertainty and how to conclude and implement the Doha Development Round's outstanding issues. We deeply regret that progress in overall trade negotiations has been very slow. We urge all WTO Members to show flexibility and the willingness to compromise in order to conclude the trade round that has already lasted too long.

9. The Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), recognizing in its Article 20 that substantial and progressive reduction of subsidies and protection is an ongoing process, required its Members to resume negotiations on sector reform one year before the end of the period of implementation. However, it was only at the 10<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference in Nairobi that the elimination of export subsidies was approved with immediate effect for developed Members and by the end of 2018 for developing Members. The Parliamentary Conference urges all Members, especially developed Members, to implement the Nairobi Conference's commitments and to advance in sector negotiations as provided for in Article 20 of the AoA. This can create new opportunities for developing Members and a better distribution of the benefits of the multilateral system of international trade through substantial and progressive reduction of trade distorting agricultural subsidies. The Parliamentary Conference also recognizes that food security is vital for developing Members and that WTO rules must support the fight against hunger; increased global production and the opening of reliable supply channels are an appropriate mechanism to provide access to safe and affordable food.

10. We also urge WTO Members to find a permanent solution on the issue of public stockholding for food security purposes in line with the mandate and timelines as per the decision taken at the 10<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference.

11. The Parliamentary Conference confirms that the prohibition and elimination of certain forms of subsidies to fisheries under the WTO, and in accordance with the commitment set out in SDG14.6 of the *Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development*, will be an important step forward in promoting the sustainable development of marine fishery resource, while controlling indiscriminate fishing and preventing the depletion of this marine resource. Appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least-developed Members should be an integral part of the WTO fisheries subsidies negotiations, taking into account the importance of this sector to development priorities, poverty reduction, and livelihood for food security concerns. Establishing disciplines for the prohibition and elimination of certain forms of subsidies, technical assistance to developing Members, and reviews of implementation, will help to achieve this goal.

12. The Parliamentary Conference noted the establishment of the Global Forum on Steel Excess Capacity. We recognize that excess capacity in steel and other industries is a global issue which requires collective responses. It is important for countries to take measures to avoid price distortions and to promote the restructuring of the sector based on market orientation.

13. Given the growing importance of trade in services in global trade, all efforts should be made to revive services negotiations at the WTO including on a framework for facilitating trade in services. We also need to safeguard against growing protectionism particularly in the area of temporary movement of professionals.

14. We also welcome the growing interest among WTO Members in other areas of the international trade agenda of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) account for a large proportion of employment, notably of women and young people, in many domestic economies, but they need to gain similar importance in international trade and need further support from the WTO. E-commerce could significantly reduce the costs of doing business across borders, particularly for MSMEs. We stress the need for the WTO to promote specific policies to encourage more widespread and inclusive MSME participation in global markets. We take note that investment and trade are mutually reinforcing engines of global economic growth.

15. We encourage policymakers to incorporate the importance of women into macroeconomic policies; women's empowerment can accelerate the eradication of poverty.

16. The WTO's Aid-for-Trade initiative is an important vehicle for helping poorer developing Members to face supply-side and trade-related infrastructure obstacles that limit their ability to engage in, and benefit from, international trade. We welcome the fact that disbursements reached US\$ 39.8 billion in 2015, the latest year for which figures are available. This is the highest figure to date for a single year. We stress the need to maintain this momentum and maximize the impact of this support.

17. However, we remain deeply concerned about growing economic inequalities, notably within countries. Developing countries, particularly LDCs, must have the freedom to apply appropriate domestic policies to ensure that increased trade efficiency results in more job opportunities. Trade policies must be accompanied by appropriate fiscal and monetary measures to generate jobs, boost productivity and promote sustained and inclusive economic growth. Other supportive policies for skills development and technology transfer are necessary and the international community should assist developing countries in this regard.

18. We call on all WTO Members to move forward with the nomination of the Members of the Appellate Body, in order to ensure a proper functioning of the WTO Dispute Settlement System.

19. Addressing the challenges facing the WTO requires the continued involvement of parliamentarians. As elected representatives of the people, parliamentarians are well placed to listen to and convey the concerns and aspirations of citizens, businesses and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), thus enhancing the transparency of the WTO and strengthening public acceptance of, and support for, fair and equitable trade for all. We urge the WTO to make full use of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO and to ensure generally that parliamentarians have access to all the information they need to carry out their oversight role effectively and to contribute meaningfully to trade policies that must include the active involvement in the formulation and implementation of WTO policies, by the WTO and its Members. New trade policies have to be properly scrutinized in the interest of their citizens.