



Addressing trade-related challenges of the 21st century: Making parliamentarians fit for action

Seminar for members of parliaments of Latin America and the Caribbean, organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the European Parliament, in collaboration with the World Trade Organization and with the support of the National Congress of Argentina

**21 and 22 November 2019
National Congress of Argentina, Buenos Aires**

Concept note

The well-being of citizens largely derives from the economy, growth and prosperity, to which multilateral trade makes a substantial contribution. As such, trade is a powerful engine of development that contributes to socio-political stability. However, this powerful driver of development is being weakened by a set of challenges that must imperatively be addressed so that trade can play a leading role in social peace.

Many countries and people have benefited from global trade. Yet, the benefits have not been equally distributed, leading to a sense of frustration among those who feel left behind. The challenges range from continued sluggish international economic growth to the ever-present danger of a return to protectionism. The threat of protectionism has been intensified by a growing backlash against globalization and free trade which are often portrayed as being responsible for job losses and lingering economic hardship. The increase in current trade tensions makes the situation all the more delicate, as the World Trade Organization (WTO) must now tackle challenges that are threatening to obstruct its ways of working, including delivering on its mandate.

Parliaments represent people and are committed to defending citizens' interests. As such, legislatures should contribute substantively on trade issues by using their important prerogatives to promote inclusive international trade and allow for an equal redistribution of the profits generated.

The Parliamentary Conference on the WTO (PCWTO) promotes this substantive contribution. It brings together legislators that lead on international trade and finance in their respective parliaments; it facilitates the exchange of opinions, information and experience; and it promotes common action where parliaments have a role in addressing trade issues. The Conference also aims to build capacity in parliaments so that legislatures can make appropriate and targeted contributions on international trade. These contributions are urgently needed, especially during the hard times that global trade and the WTO are currently experiencing.

This is the context of the regional seminar for parliaments of Latin America and the Caribbean region. The seminar has been organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the European Parliament Committee on International Trade (INTA), in collaboration with the WTO and with the support of the National Congress of Argentina.

Objectives

In general, the seminar will aim to provide first-hand information on the functioning of the WTO and the PCWTO, both of which require the support of parliamentarians to follow up on their respective recommendations.

Specific objectives

- To review the outcome of the 11th Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires so as to provide parliamentary input to the discussion of the 12th Ministerial Conference in Nur-Sultan in June 2020;
- To encourage participants to ratify and/or implement the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA);
- To share parliamentary good practices on contributing to trade issues in the region, including the implementation of the TFA;
- To explore the role that parliamentarians could play in supporting the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through inclusive and multilateral trade;
- To examine parliamentary support to recent trade-related topics (including digital trade and small and medium enterprises) that could potentially promote global trade and benefit the region.

Expected results

- Better knowledge of the functioning of the WTO and the PCWTO with a view to enhancing parliamentary support for their activities;
- Greater awareness in parliaments of the current challenges to global trade and the substantive contribution that trade makes to development;
- Higher priority given to trade issues on parliamentary agendas;
- Well-equipped and informed parliamentarians who can contribute more effectively to the promotion of global, inclusive and beneficial trade;
- Wider ratification of the TFA;
- Strengthened cooperation within the region's parliamentary community and with other stakeholders so as to harmonize strategies that lead to targeted actions on global trade issues;
- Increased parliamentary engagement with WTO and PCWTO activities.

Participants

The seminar is open to parliamentarians from Latin America and the Caribbean. Other stakeholders involved in trade issues will also be invited.

Debates

The seminar will use an interactive approach. Experts will deliver presentations of around 12 minutes by way of a question-and-answer session with a moderator. A discussion will follow, including questions, comments and reflections on past experiences from the seminar participants. Where there are a large number of questions, experts will answer them in batches of five. The debates will be held in English and Spanish; interpretation between these languages will be provided.

Date and venue

21 and 22 November 2019

National Congress of Argentina, Buenos Aires (Argentina)