GLOBAL TRADE OPINION POLL
SURVEY No. 14 (January 2007)

SUMMARY

Putting together the right questions for the latest poll was complicated by the almost total absence of public transparency in terms of what is actually being discussed by major participants in the Doha Round. Still, the answers to our main propositions do seem to give us guidance as to the experts’ attitude toward the prospects for outcomes in important areas.

In some of the main findings, the latest poll finds a clear majority in agreement with the need for a breakthrough early in 2007 but only a small minority convinced that such a breakthrough might be possible. Everyone agrees that the EU and USA need to do more in agriculture before progress can be achieved (probably a “no-brainer” at this stage). What else has made movement in Doha difficult? A considerable number of our poll participants blame the relatively healthy global economy (if there’s no crisis, why make concessions?) and a flawed August 2004 Framework Agreement.

It is not possible to tell how they influenced the results, but the Davos WEF and WTO-related ministerial meetings took place in the middle of our survey period with about two-thirds of responses received prior to Davos and the remainder after the meetings in Switzerland.

Overall, we had a good response rate in this GTOP, with 133 people responding from our regular pool of negotiators, policy-makers and trade experts (from both developed and developing countries) located in Geneva and a number of key capitals.

RESULTS

Pascal Lamy has said we need a breakthrough by the end of March if the Doha Round is to be eventually concluded successfully. Recognizing that there could be many ways to interpret “breakthrough”, a majority of survey respondents (55 percent) agreed with this proposition. However, only fifteen percent are convinced there will be such a breakthrough with fifty-eight percent doubtful on the question and another 25 percent who see it as a toss-up. Geneva-based respondents are curiously almost twice as pessimistic as those in capitals.

There were some points covered in this poll where respondents were unanimous or very nearly so in their responses. All respondents believe that the United States will need to make deeper agricultural domestic support cuts and ninety-eight percent think the EU will need to improve its agricultural market access offer before a breakthrough can be possible. In addition, 89 percent of all respondents believe an eventual result in the Doha Round will bring with it the elimination of all agricultural export subsidies and similar measures by a date certain.

Eighty-two percent of poll participants doubt that other WTO Members will ever agree to the extensive carve-outs of special products sought by the G-33, with just 7 percent of respondents believing that such massive carve outs would be possible to achieve.
There is some good news on the important trade facilitation front. Seventy-six percent of those surveyed see a meaningful agreement on trade facilitation resulting from the Round and another 14 percent give such a result a fifty-fifty chance of success.

Are there some reasons why the Doha Round negotiations have been so difficult to move forward over the years? We asked about the economic environment and also about the impact of the August 2004 Framework package. Out of all those responding to the poll, 46 percent thought that the relatively healthy global economy has made progress harder in the Round and another 30 percent find themselves on the fence on this question. Geneva-based poll participants gave much less weight to this influence than did those in capitals (29% compared to 57%).

In a very interesting response, 48 percent of all respondents and 57 percent of capitals-based respondents thought that – in retrospect – the August 2004 Framework package probably did more harm than good. Just 27 percent of survey participants were convinced that the Framework was a good thing.

Finally, we asked whether an eventual result in the Doha Round would need to reflect a lower level of ambition than that foreseen in the August 2004 Framework package. Fifty-eight percent of our respondents believe that to be the case, compared to 17 percent who believe an equal or higher level of ambition to be achievable.

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