GLOBAL TRADE OPINION POLL
SURVEY No.5 (Post-Cancun, 2003)

SUMMARY

This poll sampled impressions in the wake of the failed Cancun Ministerial Conference. Participants in the poll, most of whom had been in Mexico for the meeting, were given until 30 September to respond – meaning that they had time to reflect on what happened and where the Doha Round was heading. As with previous polls, nearly 100 negotiators, policy-makers and experts in Geneva, Paris, Brussels, London, Washington, Ottawa, Tokyo, Canberra and Wellington took part in the survey.

The poll show us that nearly everyone has now abandoned hope of concluding the Doha Round on its original schedule and only about a third of respondents are optimistic about getting the Round back on track by mid-December. Participants in the poll think it will be important now to re-focus on agriculture. Some interesting observations are possible about the G-21 and its role in Cancun where its strategy may have been misunderstood. Seventy-two percent of respondents think investment and competition policy are effectively off the negotiating agenda in the wake of Cancun. Interestingly, while the Cancun meeting ended early, most people seem to think Chairman Derbez was right to close the meeting when he did because another 36 hours of talking would probably not have produced a different outcome.

Results

Did the meeting end prematurely? While many people accepted that the discussions could have continued for another thirty-six hours, a large majority (63 percent) agreed with Minister Derbez’ decision to end the meeting when he did. Many respondents expressed the view that even an extra day and a half would not have permitted participants to reach a positive outcome. Clearly, the “chemistry” wasn’t right for a success in Cancun.

Agriculture v. Singapore Issues: A reasonable majority of all respondents (59%) felt that the focus of the Cancun meeting should have been on agriculture, not the Singapore issues (26% disagreed and 15% were unsure). Interestingly, 79 percent of capitals-based respondents thought agriculture should have been the focus compared to 50 percent of Geneva-based respondents holding the same view.

Role of the G-21: We asked whether the G-21 Group made a positive contribution to the dynamics of the agriculture negotiation. More than any other question, this one evoked complex responses from poll participants. Overall, those who thought the G-21 made a positive contribution are in the plurality (48%), with 28 percent holding the contrary view. Geneva-based respondents were more favourable to the G-21 (54%) than capitals-based participants (42%). A fair number of respondents included supplemental views in their response to the effect that they believed the United States misread the strategy and intentions of the G-21 and that this American hostility undercut the chances for the group to make a positive contribution.
Investment & Competition Post-Cancun:  In the light of Commissioner Lamy’s explicit concessions on investment and competition policy in Cancun, it is not very surprising that 72 percent of all respondents now consider these topics to be off the Doha agenda. That view is more strongly held in capitals (80 percent) than in Geneva (69 percent) where a full 30 percent of respondents hold the view that there is still hope for these subjects.

Re-focus on Agriculture for Progress:  Nearly three-quarters of all respondents (73 percent) believe the Doha talks need to re-focus on agriculture as part of an effective post-Cancun strategy. Capitals and Geneva are in broad agreement and just 15 percent of respondents would disagree with this approach.

Developing Countries in Cancun:  We asked respondents whether they felt that developing countries might have over-played their hand in Cancun. I am not very comfortable trying to draw conclusions from the poll on this question because Geneva and capitals differed so widely in their reactions and because nearly all of the poll’s developing country-origin respondents are in Geneva while capital-based officials are all in developed countries. Probably what we can say is that the poll results show us prevailing attitudes coming out of Cancun. Only forty-two percent of Geneva respondents felt developing countries might have over-played their hand in Cancun while 68 percent of capitals-based participants hold this view.

Back on Track by December?  Few respondents are optimistic about the prospects for getting the Doha Round back on track by the time of the mid-December Senior Officials meeting in Geneva. Overall, just 34 percent of respondents believe there are good prospects for breathing life into the Round by December, 46 percent are doubtful and the remaining twenty percent give success a 50-50 chance.

Zoellick, Lamy & the Round:  Interestingly, respondents are not generally willing to support the poll’s proposition that neither USTR Zoellick nor Commissioner Lamy were likely to spend much time on the WTO in the wake of Cancun. Only 38 percent of all respondents thought this likely with many adding supplemental observations to the effect that irrespective of what might be their personal inclinations, the two trade ministers would be pushed by others to stay involved in the WTO Round.

WTO and Regional Agreements:  Sixty-five percent of all respondents agreed that the Cancun outcome would give new impetus to the negotiation of bilateral and regional free trade agreements and arrangements. Geneva and capitals were in agreement. Another 28 percent thought there was a 50-50 chance this could be the case.

Doha Round Time Frame:  It is unlikely to surprise anyone to hear that 85 percent of all respondents now believe that it will not be possible to finish the Doha Round by the end of 2004. This view was held by 96 percent of capitals-based respondents.

Andrew L. Stoler
Executive Director
IIBE&L