Summary

IIBEL’s first Trade Opinion Poll was designed to gauge the extent to which the WTO’s Fifth Ministerial Session (Cancun, September, 2003) is likely to be “successful” in the sense of moving the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) forward toward a meaningful conclusion on time in 2004. On the basis of the answers received in this first poll, it looks like the Cancun meeting is in some trouble. Not only do we already know that a number of the DDA deadlines and milestones have been missed but the poll also shows a generalized expectation that important future deadlines are unlikely to be met. Many issues that should be resolved prior to Cancun now look as though they will still be on the table at the time of the meeting. In the last week of March, the Institute will re-test opinion on many of these issues.

Methodology

Seventy people were included in the survey. A number of those originally requested to participate declined and were replaced by others in order to keep the number reasonably large. The survey population included Geneva Ambassadors and other government negotiators, WTO Secretariat officials, and private sector, government and academic representatives in Geneva, Brussels, Paris, Washington, Ottawa, Tokyo, Canberra and Wellington. Participation in the poll is confidential and anonymous. Ten propositions were put to respondents who were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed / disagreed the propositions were likely to hold true.

Results*

Part 1: DDA Negotiations

Agriculture: An impressive 97% of respondents thought it unlikely that the end-March deadline for agreement on modalities for the agriculture negotiations would be met in a way satisfactory to all participants in the DDA. Three percent thought it possible, but not very likely.

Dispute Settlement: Sixty percent of those polled doubted that the negotiation aimed at clarifying and improving the DSU could be brought to a successful conclusion by the end of May, with 23% indicating a 50/50 chance of success and 10% giving the negotiation a reasonable chance of success.

Trade & Investment: Forty-three percent of respondents thought it unlikely that an explicit consensus would be reached in Cancun on the modalities of negotiations for an investment agreement, while 33% gave consensus a 50/50 chance. A further 17% thought there was a reasonably good likelihood of success.

Trade & Competition: Slightly more people doubt the chances for success on competition than on investment. Fifty-one percent doubt a consensus on modalities will be reached, 28% give consensus a 50/50 chance and just 7% think things look good for Cancun. Fourteen percent of respondents had no opinion on this issue.

* Where totals do not add to 100%, the difference reflects “no opinion” responses.
Trade & Environment: In what some might see as good news for the DDA, 73% of those polled thought it unlikely that the mandate for trade and environment would be revisited and expanded. Twenty-three percent thought the issue might be re-opened at Cancun.

Industrial Tariff Negotiations: Seventy percent of respondents believe that industrial tariffs will be a major element of the DDA and another 20% think tariffs could be an important aspect of the negotiations.

Part 2: Other Issues

TRIPS & Public Health: Notwithstanding the missed deadlines, there appears to be an optimistic view on this question. Forty-three percent of respondents thought it reasonably likely that a resolution would be found well before Cancun and another 33% gave early resolution a 50/50 chance.

Russian WTO Accession: It looks like Russia will need to wait awhile longer. Eighty-seven percent of those polled thought it very unlikely that accession negotiations with Russia would be completed by the time of the Cancun meeting.

GMO Dispute Settlement: Sixty percent of respondents think a GMO-related dispute settlement action is likely in the WTO in 2003. Another 27% give a 50/50 chance to such a dispute. Thirteen percent say a dispute this year is unlikely.

The DDA and RTAs: Fifty percent of those polled do not believe that regional trade agreement (RTA) negotiations threaten progress in the WTO DDA, while 33% of those in the poll see RTAs as a potential problem. A large number (17%) had no view on the issue.

I hope that this first opinion poll is of some value to those interested in the WTO negotiations and the run-up to Cancun. Many thanks to those who kindly took the time to participate in the survey.

Andrew L. Stoler
Executive Director
IIBEL

© Institute for International Business, Economics & Law, the University of Adelaide