



Report from Attending the World Trade Organisation Public Forum October 1-3, 2013

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The annual WTO Public Forum took this year place October 1-3, 2013 on the theme Expanding Trade through Innovation and the Digital Economy. The Forum was held in the WTO premises, Geneva.

The programme was extensive: two Plenary Debates, taking place in the mornings of October 1 and 2, 38 Working Sessions, and 16 Workshops. To this came 3 so called Mid-day Spotlights, each presenting a new publication/report. Except for the plenary debates, during which no working sessions or workshops were held, the working sessions and workshops were held in parallel with usually five sessions running at the same time.

The size of the panels for the various sessions varied from 3 to 8 speakers.

The full programme, including videos, brief summaries of working sessions and workshops, audio recordings, and transcripts of i.a. the speeches by Roberto Azevedo, WTO Director General, and Michael Froman, US Trade Representative, are available under "Programme" of the Public Forum on www.wto.org. As of October 9, 2013, such materials had not been published for all sessions, but materials were continuously being added.

I am not here going into that whole material. Let me just note that the said introductory speeches, as I understood them, both emphasized the critical importance for the WTO not only to modernise in a general sense but especially to deliver some substantial outcome at the upcoming Ministerial Conference to be held in Bali, Indonesia, December 3-6 2013. There was emphasis especially on the possibilities to conclude an agreement on Trade Facilitation. Failure of some sort of substantial outcome in Bali was indeed held out by Michael Froman as meaning that bilateral and plurilateral trade agreements would be the only way forward for future trade negotiations.

There was a large number of attendees from different sectors: representatives from Governments, Geneva diplomatic missions, multilateral organisations including WTO, WIPO, and UNCTAD, other international organisations, academia, and NGOs. However, the extent of possible networking and outreach was reduced by the lack of a list of participants. So in practice, the possibility to make contacts was limited, except of course in regard to persons you already knew, and in regard to speakers at the sessions you could attend.

I attended the two plenary debates and six of the working sessions/workshops. Even though the emphasis in the general programme was on innovation and its impact on trade, much of the presentations and discussions I heard dealt with neighboring issues like for example the functioning and the future of the WTO, the roles of governments, the roles of the private sector, the matter of

special and differential treatment under WTO agreements for LDCs/poor countries, and technology transfer.

While IP was not, I would say, a prominent aspect in the sessions I attended, let me mention three sessions where IP related issues were taken up:

Working Session 29, "Exploring the trade and innovation nexus", with a panel moderated by Carlos Braga and including Keith Maskus and Carsten Fink, all of course very well known economists: Keith Maskus, as noted from the panel, the "superfather" of studies on IP and economics, and Carsten Fink being the WIPO chief economist.

Workshop no. 1, "Managing knowhow and trade secrets in global value chains and the international transfer of technology", with a panel moderated by Antony Taubman, WTO Intellectual Property Division, and including Nuno Carvalho, WTO IP and Competition Policy Division, Shamnad Basheer, National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata, and Douglas Lippoldt, OECD

Working Session no. 17, "Promoting innovation and investments in LDCs: an impossible task?", with a panel chaired by Nicolas Imboden, IDEAS Centre, and including Padmashree Gehl Sampath, UNCTAD, Pedro Roffe, ICTSD, and Makiese Kinkela Augusto, LDC Focal Point for TRIPS, Permanent Mission of Angola to the WTO.

For details and materials on these sessions, see the WTO website as noted. Let me just note that among what was taken up by Keith Maskus was that inward flow of FDI definitively is responsive to patent law reform. He pointed generally to difficulties to measure IP related aspects, such as the impact of IP reform on exports, and for poor countries the difficulties to measure the extent of innovation, to find evidence on private sector R&D, and to what extent IPRs are used.

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