



**Committee on Regional Trade Agreements  
Ninety-Third Session**

**NOTE ON THE MEETING OF 20 JUNE 2019**

*Chairman: Ambassador Carlos Mario Foradori (Argentina)*

**A. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

1.1. The 93<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Committee on Regional Trade Agreements (hereinafter 'CRTA' or the 'Committee') was convened in Airgrams WTO/AIR/RTA/18 and WTO/AIR/RTA/18/Corr.1 dated 7 June and 11 June respectively.

1.2. The Chairman welcomed Members to the 93rd Session of the CRTA.

1.3. The Committee adopted the following Agenda:

- A. Adoption of the Agenda
- B. Election of Officers

**B. ELECTION OF OFFICERS**

1.4. The Chairman said that as he had mentioned at the last meeting of the Committee and on the basis of consultations which he had held with several Members he wished to propose two colleagues as Friends of the Chair to help him in his duties. These were Ambassador Frances Lisson of Australia and Ambassador Cancela Gómez of Uruguay. He explained that the reason why he was making this proposal was because Members were firmly determined to resolve pending issues which had been on the Agenda, as Members were aware, for far too long. He had held meetings with some Members about the structural issues on the Agenda and he was of the opinion that if Members were determined there was the prospect to resolve these issues. However, the time factor ran counter to this. The Committee did not have much time to solve problems that had been on the Agenda for many years. The possibility of having two colleagues who were ready to help would allow the Committee to carry out many more rounds of consultations and make it possible to step up the work of the CRTA Chair which meant that there was a greater chance to meet the objective which was shared by all Members.

1.5. The representative of the United States thanked the Chairman for the suggestion of Friends of the Chair and for identifying the Ambassadors of Australia and Uruguay. She asked for more details on how the Chairman saw the process working and the responsibilities of the respective Friends of the Chairs.

1.6. The Chairman replied that of the two structural issues on the Agenda one related to the issue of notification, LAIA for instance, and the other was linked to notification as well, which was the GCC. Of course, the Committee had to look into all issues which is what he had been doing, but these two issues went back a long time and he thought the Committee needed to give them greater momentum with of course the cooperation of the countries involved, but also with the whole of the Membership. All Members had to take part in the exercise and be abreast of everything. Therefore, he believed that this was the best way given time constraints and a lot of time out, for instance the WTO was closed in the month of August although he would be working. There were very few months remaining and he had already started consultations and had had an exchange of views but time was very short. He was happy to see that colleagues were ready to step in and help. These were the two central issues amongst others that Members had to work on and those that the Committee needed

to give new momentum to as there were only a few months left before he handed over the Chairmanship and he wanted to do his utmost to solve these structural issues.

1.7. The representative of the European Union thanked the Chairman for his commitment and interest shown in making progress on some of the structural issues. The EU could accept the idea of Friends of the Chair as had been outlined. However, it needed clarification on the designation and responsibilities of the appointees. From the EU's point of view, in the case of LAIA, it would like to see both Uruguay and Australia involved to ensure geographical balance on the issue. She looked forward to continuing the discussion of the responsibilities and roles of the Friends of the Chair as envisaged by the Chairman.

1.8. The representative of the United States said that conceptually the United States had no difficulty with Friends of the Chairs. However, there was a lack of clarity in terms of which issues the Friends would cover. Her understanding and the guidance she had from capital had each Friend covering a specific issue. Her guidance was for the Ambassador of Uruguay to look at the LAIA issue and the Ambassador of Australia to look at the GCC. That was the extent of her guidance. Similar to her EU colleague she was happy to continue the discussion.

1.9. The representative of Brazil welcomed any initiative to improve the functioning of the Committee which Brazil could consider. As regards discussions about LAIA, he asked for some clarification about the relationship with the CTD.

1.10. The representative of Canada welcomed the Chairman's initiative in building momentum towards resolving some of the Committee's structural issues and expressed interest in hearing more about the roles and responsibilities that the Chairman foresaw for the Friends of the Chair.

1.11. The representative of Mexico thanked the Chairman for the initiative but shared the doubts raised by other delegations on the roles and responsibilities of the Friends of the Chair. Mexico was concerned by the fact that these issues had been unresolved for many years. Given that Uruguay was a member of LAIA, he wondered how it would work in its function as Friend of the Chair.

1.12. The Chairman replied that as regards the involvement of countries impacted, Argentina was also a member of LAIA, and the will to solve problems by members of LAIA, who were also WTO Members, showed the intense desire to resolve the problem. There was a need to look into the problems, to face up to them and then try and solve them. That was the objective. Regarding the links with other committees, all these issues were issues of substance and the idea therefore was to appoint the Friends of the Chair precisely because these issues required a lot of consultations and time and therefore more colleagues needed to be involved in seeking answers. It was important to bear in mind that Members often had clear and shared objectives but sometimes strategies were not shared which was why objectives were not reached. The reality was that Members were committed to achieving these objectives and there were strategies which Members could discuss but it could not take too long as time was one of the Committee's problems. It should be a step-by-step strategy, nothing should be seen as done and nothing should be presented as an imposed solution one way or another. The process needed to take place step-by-step with the broadest participation possible of all Members. It should take place gradually and be a transparent and highly participative process. He thought that this strategy was defined basically by the possibility of ensuring broad participation by the Membership which was the objective. That was precisely why with two more Members involved in the process the Committee could, in the short time before it, meet its objectives.

1.13. The representative of the United States welcomed the Chairman's insights with respect to how he saw the process working. She looked forward to having further discussions in that regard.

1.14. The representative of the European Union thanked the Chairman for his explanations, but as other Members had pointed out she thought that Members needed further discussions on the issue and she looked forward to participating in them.

1.15. The representative of Canada echoed the sentiments of his colleagues from the United States and the European Union and looked forward to further discussions on the topic.

1.16. The Chairman said that having heard the various opinions he thought it would be important to continue with consultations with a view to working and deciding upon the tasks, establishing a

more precise strategy and working on the various concerns expressed in a further meeting. His intention was to solve these structural issues and the main goal was to achieve the objective. A new round of consultations and another formal Session would be organized in order to consolidate his proposal.

1.17. The Committee took note of the comments made.

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