

WTO: Accumulated Problems and Prospects after MC-13

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For citation: Portanskiy, A., 2024. WTO: Accumulated Problems and Prospects after MC-13. *Contemporary World Economy*, Vol. 2, No 1.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17323/2949-5776-2024-2-1-70-82>

Keywords: WTO, MC-13, globalization, reform, United States, China.

Abstract

Building on the occasion of the regular WTO Ministerial Conference (MC-13) held in early 2024, the author reviews the initial success of this institution and then analyzes the accumulated problems of the organization and its weakening in recent years. An effective solution to these problems involves reforming the WTO. However, this is hindered by numerous disagreements among the organization's members and, above all, by the significant difference in approaches to reform between the two main actors in the global economy and trade, the United States and China. So far, the reform has progressed in small steps, which are more of a technical nature. Despite the apparent weakening of the WTO in recent years and the accumulated problems, none of its members have ever spoken in favor of terminating or limiting its activities. In a worst-case scenario in the global economy, significant damage to the WTO cannot be ruled out. Subsequently, it would be much more difficult to revive the organization than to maintain the existing one.

Introduction

In late February and early March of 2024, the 13th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (MC-13), which is typically convened biennially, was held in Abu Dhabi. The WTO is one of the largest institutions of global governance, and

its membership continues to expand, reaching 166 countries following the MC-13. Concurrently, the WTO has been the subject of repeated critical commentary in recent years.

Nevertheless, virtually all international institutions, commencing with the United Nations (UN), are the subject of criticism in the present era. The inadequacy and inefficacy of its mechanisms are now being critiqued by both ordinary diplomats and world-renowned personalities. The UN in the form in which it has functioned since its foundation “no longer corresponds to the new realities,” Pope Francis wrote not so long ago in connection with the conflict in Ukraine.¹ There is a great deal of discussion surrounding proposals and demands for reform of the UN, particularly with regard to the Security Council. At the same time, there is no serious proposal to close or dissolve the UN on the grounds of its ineffectiveness. This is a reasonable position to take. However, in the case of other esteemed international organizations, such as the WTO, a similar balanced approach is not observed.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is often referred to as “the UN for world trade.” It is also noteworthy that, in terms of the number of members (166 since 2024), the WTO is comparable to the UN. Furthermore, if we consider the number of founding states, it is evident that the UN will be on the losing side, with 51 states against more than 100 at the creation of the WTO. In early March of this year, the esteemed Bloomberg agency, in a commentary on the underwhelming outcomes of the MC-13, deemed it appropriate to disseminate a report bearing the headline “The Death of the WTO Now Looks Inevitable.” Additionally, the subtitle of the message was noteworthy: “Few global institutions have been so beneficial—and so comprehensively neglected.”² It is challenging to refute this assertion. This leads to the question of why this occurred.

In the proposed article, the author aims to demonstrate that, despite the challenges encountered, the WTO should be preserved, although it will be challenging to implement the inevitable reforms to the organization.

How the WTO became a victim of its own success

At the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the notion was put forth that the GATT/WTO system had, over time, become “a victim of its own success.” The following is a summary of the factors that contributed to this success. In the 1920s, the world was struck by the Great Depression, the first global economic crisis of the 20th century. The realization of its lessons by the advanced countries by the early 1940s resulted in the formulation of the principles of non-discrimination. This represented a profound shift in the international economic order, marking a departure from the historical practice of pursuing one’s own prosperity at the expense of others. It became evident

¹ Mares, C., 2022. Pope Francis: We are witnessing the ‘impotence’ of the UN in the Ukraine war. *Catholic News Agency*. April 6. Available at: <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/250898/pope-francis-we-are-witnessing-the-impotence-of-the-un-in-the-ukraine-war>

² The Death of the WTO Now Looks Inevitable. *Bloomberg*. 2024. March 8. Available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2024-03-08/world-trade-organization-s-death-is-a-momentous-error?srnd=opinion>

that the economic interdependence between states in the twentieth century had reached a point where it was no longer feasible for individual countries to address economic crises in isolation. By the end of World War II in 1944, the Bretton Woods Conference, guided by the aforementioned principles of non-discrimination, set forth the objective of establishing international institutions that would safeguard the global community against the advent of economic crises with the potential to precipitate another war. Two institutions, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD),³ were established and commenced operations after 1945. The third, originally designated the International Trade Organization (ITO), was a more complex entity. First, a portion of the Charter of ITO (Trade Policy) was transformed into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT-1947), which was of a temporary nature. After nearly half a century, following eight rounds of intricate trade negotiations within the framework of GATT, it became possible to establish a comprehensive international institution: the World Trade Organization.

The decision-making process was based on consensus and the “single undertaken” principle, which ensured the reliability of the legal framework and the effectiveness of the dispute settlement mechanism. This distinction imbues the WTO with a singular character, as no other universal institution in the world has (or has yet to develop) such a mechanism. Since 1995, the WTO has recorded over 600 cases of trade disputes. Notably, the United States has been a prominent participant in these disputes, frequently raising objections to the WTO. The importance of the WTO’s dispute settlement mechanism is widely acknowledged, including by those who are opposed to globalization. It is this mechanism that ensures the realization of the task initially conceived at Bretton Woods: the assurance of security in international trade and economic relations.

Thus, the organization’s success can be attributed to its adherence to established rules and the efficacy of its dispute settlement mechanisms, which have contributed to its enhanced international prestige and rapid growth in membership.

The establishment of the WTO occurred concurrently with the “golden age” of globalization, which spanned the 1990s. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the barriers to direct and mutually beneficial collaboration between erstwhile ideological adversaries vanished. In his conceptualization of these epochal changes that occurred in the world on a philosophical level, Francis Fukuyama proposed the concept of “the End of History.” It is regrettable that the initial years of the 21st century have witnessed a shift in perspective regarding the uninterrupted, mutually advantageous international collaboration that characterized the globalization of the 1990s and the concept of a “win-win game.”

The success of the WTO, established by the end of the twentieth century, has not spared it from problems. Among the most acute are the following:

- crisis of the decision-making system in the WTO with a significantly increased number of members of the organization;
- as a consequence of the previous one—a serious slowdown in the WTO’s function of generating new rules needed by changing trade;

³ IBRD — International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, hereinafter the World Bank.

- Protectionism, especially its new forms, as well as economic sanctions inconsistent with the spirit and letter of the WTO have become the most serious challenge to the WTO since the beginning of the 21st century. The coming to power of D. Trump in the United States in 2017 was marked by an unforeseen surge of protectionism and a tendency to depart from the WTO rules for national security reasons [Portansky, *The Imperative* 2019].

Problems that remain unresolved

Crisis of the decision-making system in the WTO with a significantly increased number of members of the organization. The WTO has inherited from the GATT the system of decision-making through the consensus mechanism, which is currently the most sensitive problem facing the WTO.

In the context of consensus, member countries are able to assert their sovereign equality. This is not always the case in the context of voting, as the economic and political weight of a given state may influence the outcome. Nevertheless, the consensus mechanism allows each member state to prevent a decision from being made. The consensus mechanism functioned effectively during the GATT era, when the number of negotiators was limited to a few dozens. Among them, developed states held a dominant position, pursuing similar goals. The situation is markedly different when the number of participants exceeds 150, with at least two-thirds of them being developing states, often casting a protest vote. In such circumstances, the process of consensus-building has become a challenging and arduous one.

In 2003, at the regular Ministerial Conference in Cancun (Mexico), the issue reached a critical point. Due to the inability to reach consensus on pivotal agenda items, the conference concluded unsuccessfully. As Robert Zoellick, the then US trade negotiator, observed, the split in Cancun was not between rich and poor countries, but between those who are capable of real negotiations (*can-do countries*) and those who simply do not want to negotiate (*won't-do countries*). In other words, in recent years and decades, consensus has effectively transformed into an unrestricted veto right within the WTO. This enables any participant to obstruct a decision, despite the fact that a substantial number of member countries are in favor of it.

However, consensus remains a unique way to ensure the legitimacy of WTO decisions, especially in the dispute settlement procedure. As a result, there is a certain “institutional deadlock.” The way out of this impasse is obviously to be found through the institutional reform of the WTO.

The problem of a serious slowdown in the WTO's function of generating new rules for trade should be seen as a direct consequence of the crisis in the organization's decision-making system.

For the majority of the second half of the twentieth century, the GATT was well suited to the task of regulating trade, performing three basic functions: balanced mutual liberalization of markets; negotiated rulemaking; and diplomatic settlement of trade disputes. The fundamental structure of international trade can be described in a relatively straightforward manner: “Produce goods here, sell them abroad.” With the

advent of the 21st century, the nature of trade underwent a significant transformation. The movement of goods and services across borders, while still a prominent feature, gave way to a new phenomenon: the relocation of entire industries. Consequently, in addition to the movement of goods, there are also flows of investments, ideas, know-how, and labor across national borders. Furthermore, the advent of these new areas has highlighted the necessity for the establishment of trade rules that did not previously exist.

The WTO was established with the objective of setting up new rules in 1995. However, these expectations of it have not been fully fulfilled. In nearly three decades of the WTO's existence, member countries have only succeeded in concluding a single comprehensive multilateral agreement: Trade Facilitation Agreement.⁴ The absence of contemporary regulations is evident in a number of domains, including the governance of trade in global value chains (GVCs), the utilization of green energy, international investment, monetary policy, and, more recently, the regulation of digital markets and artificial intelligence.⁵

In order for these new rules to emerge within the WTO, it is necessary to prioritize the relevant issues on the Doha agenda and facilitate a change in the current structure. However, this is not a straightforward process, as it is impeded by a considerable number of member countries (predominantly developing countries) who are adamant that all items on the original approved agenda must be fulfilled before new issues can be addressed. Consequently, the absence of timely rule generation undermines the efficacy of the WTO, as it renders it less effective.

A new phase of rising protectionism after Trump came to power in the United States and the tendency to depart from WTO rules on national security grounds. The protectionist policy of the Trump administration has deviated significantly from the principles of trade policy pursued by all previous administrations, beginning with that of Franklin Roosevelt. These principles have historically included consistent liberalization of markets, respect for international trade rules, and the establishment of multilateral regulatory institutions, most notably GATT/WTO [The Economist 2017].

A series of statements by representatives of the Trump administration indicated Washington's willingness to disregard WTO rules if they impede the realization of the country's national interests. Additionally, Washington's highly subjective interpretation of the GATT/WTO provision on the threat to national security, which resulted in an increase in import duties on steel and aluminum in 2018, prompted a sharp negative reaction from the United States' closest trading partners [Portansky, D. Trump, 2019].

The United States' trade conflict with China, which was driven by Washington's objective of impeding China's economic ascendance, has underscored the question of whether the WTO is equipped to address the emerging challenges in global trade. The initial indication that a favorable response was unlikely emerged with the early resignation of the previous WTO head, Brazilian Roberto Azevêdo, in the spring of 2020, citing personal circumstances [DG Azevêdo 2020]. For experts, the rationale behind

⁴ The Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) was signed at the 9th WTO Ministerial Conference in Bali, Indonesia in December 2013.

⁵ In November 2022, the EU Digital Markets Act entered into force, and in March 2024, the European Parliament adopted the Artificial Intelligence Act.

this unprecedented decision was evident: the seasoned and esteemed diplomat, having discerned that the WTO's existing instruments were inadequate to halt the trade conflict between the United States and China, opted to depart discreetly, avoiding any further compromise to his reputation. Azevêdo was correct in his assessment that the WTO lacked the requisite authority to halt the trade conflict. This could be considered the moment when the WTO's relative weakness became apparent.

The US–China trade war provides perhaps the most compelling illustration of the dramatically increased influence of geopolitics on trade in the 21st century. Further evidence of this phenomenon can be observed in the consequences of technological decoupling between the US and Chinese economies; tensions between Washington and Beijing over Taiwan; and the negative impact of new industrial policies of major countries on trade. For example, the EU has expressed significant discontent with the US Inflation Reduction Act of August 2022, which has had a detrimental effect on the EU economy.

In the contemporary era, the most prominent economic actors are pursuing policies that directly contravene the established norms of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Such instances are not uncommon. Notable examples include the United States' restrictions on semiconductor supplies, China's restrictions on the export of rare earth metals, and the practice of "friendshoring," which involves limiting the trade of resources with specific countries. The aforementioned example is arguably the most striking. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has repeatedly stated her desire to follow the principle of "friendshoring,"⁶ that is, to trade with countries that share common values with the United States. Such actions, however, would constitute a direct violation of the fundamental principle of international trade, namely the mutual granting of Most-Favored Nation (MFN) treatment, as enshrined in the WTO's founding principles.

A recent development has been the emergence of a concerning trend in the perceptions of leading countries regarding the practice of imposing trade barriers. In late March and early April of 2024, the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) published a report on "Foreign Trade Barriers" [Office of the United States Trade Representative Ambassador Katherine C. Tai 2024]. As indicated in the report, the USTR has adopted a revised methodology for identifying trade barriers. The report acknowledges that all countries, including the United States, possess the sovereign right to pursue an independent trade policy that is guided by national interests. This thesis is clearly indicative of the recent trade policy approach adopted by the Trump administration, which has been characterized by a flagrant disregard for WTO norms. The USTR report serves to confirm the tendency for countries to freely interpret GATT/WTO national security provisions [Smeets 2014]. Such an approach could result in the uncontrolled proliferation of trade barriers imposed under the pretext of substantial national security interests, which would undoubtedly give rise to a significant new problem. In the absence of prompt action by the WTO, the international trading system is at risk of being subjected to further disruptive influences.

⁶ Yellen calls out China's trade practices during South Korea visit. 2022. July 18. Available at: https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/yellen-calls-out-china-s-trade-practices-during-south-korea-visit-122071801525_1.html

The question thus arises as to whether there is a way out of this situation. There is a solution, but it will require a lengthy process of reforming the WTO. It is widely acknowledged that this is a necessary step. However, the initiation of reform is currently precluded by the absence of a fundamental prerequisite: the convergence of the United States' and China's positions on the substance of the proposed reforms.

Why reforming the WTO is harder today than it was yesterday

The need to reform the WTO was discussed shortly after the organization began functioning at the turn of the twentieth century. All WTO participants are interested in WTO reform, and the issue has been on the agenda of all recent WTO Ministerial Conferences in one way or another.

The stalemate in the Doha Round negotiations, the inability to resolve the US–China trade dispute through the WTO's existing instruments, and the new areas of trade that have emerged over the three decades of the WTO's legal framework in the form of the Uruguay Round agreements all call for new rules to be agreed at the multilateral level. But different countries have different economic priorities and approaches to solving these problems, and finding compromises in WTO negotiations tends to be a lengthy process. At the same time, the later one starts to reform the WTO, the more time-consuming it will be, as the organization's legal framework grows and becomes more complex over time.

In the second decade of the 21st century, it has become clear that the state of the global economy and trade is largely determined by two players—the United States and China. Accordingly, it is possible to raise the question of the practical start of WTO reform only in the event of a significant convergence of approaches to the issue of these two parties. So far, no such convergence has been observed.

The US has repeatedly expressed its dissatisfaction with the existing rules and their application in areas such as competition policy and intellectual property rights, which Washington believes are being violated with respect to US business in China. The US is particularly concerned about the position in the WTO of a large group of countries that once joined the organization with developing country status and continue to consider themselves as such, even though many of them have made significant progress in a number of economic sectors and have even surpassed some developed countries. At the same time, a number of developing countries have opaque trade policies. As a result, these WTO members enjoy *de facto* privileges that are unjustified from Washington's point of view, blocking progress in the development of new WTO rules and further liberalization. And the main US claims among this group of countries are directed precisely at China. The Chinese economy, as representatives of the US administration have repeatedly emphasized, has huge advantages over the US economy because of the privileges it has acquired earlier [Meltzer 2023].

By insisting on its demands, the US side is actually blocking from the very beginning any progress in the consultations on WTO reform, which have barely begun, and making their fulfillment a condition. This is undoubtedly contrary to the very spirit and traditions of multilateral negotiations within the GATT/WTO framework that have developed over many decades, not to mention the fact that it once again calls into question

the long-term leadership of the United States in these negotiations. At the same time, the US position has some merit. In this regard, the example of the suspension of the Appellate Body (AB) in the WTO dispute settlement system from the end of 2019 is characteristic. As Vladimir Ilyichev, Deputy Head of the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, commented on the results of MC-13, it cannot be said that the US criticism of the Appellate Body is completely unfounded. Some of the American arguments are valid: at the Appellate Body stage, the conclusions of arbitration panels were easily refuted, and sometimes interpretations of WTO rules were made that were far from the original meaning of the rules. And this stage itself has often been used by the losing party simply as an opportunity to prolong the proceedings, while leaving in place the measures found to be inconsistent with WTO rules during the course of the dispute. However, the tactic chosen by the US to “suspend” the appointment of arbitrators in the AB, thus freezing its work, made all other participants of the organization hostage to its ambitions [WTO Documents Online 2024].

Thus, the essence of Washington’s approach to WTO reform is to eliminate the unjustified, outdated privileges of a group of developing countries, which today effectively paralyze trade negotiations and the multilateral trading system as a whole. This approach is understandable, but only partially justified. At the same time, Washington is trying to maintain its image as a staunch supporter of WTO reform.

Regarding China’s position on WTO reform, in late November 2018. China’s Ministry of Commerce published a document explaining its position. It emphasizes three main principles: safeguarding the fundamental values of multilateral trade, protecting the interests of developing member countries, and respecting the practice of decision-making through a consensus mechanism [Zhu 2019]. Particular attention is paid to the second principle. Trying to remain the main defender of the interests of developing countries in the WTO, China emphasizes the need to preserve its privileges, in particular the SDT regime⁷ in the WTO, which directly contradicts the main demand of the United States, supported by the European Union.

Despite the impressive size of its economy, China remains a developing country, Chinese representatives insist. The country has yet to lift millions of its citizens out of poverty.

In response to Washington’s repeated accusations that China does not meet the criteria of a market economy and that its market is closed, Beijing, on the one hand, recognizes the importance of further deep reforms and expanding openness in the economy, but on the other hand, rejects the US recommendations on “three zero trade,” meaning zero tariffs, zero market barriers and zero subsidies, qualifying them as completely unfair to China as a developing country [Ghosal Singh 2019].

At the same time, China, not wanting to remain in the position of an apologist, makes a number of claims against the United States. For example, according to the Chinese side, the slogan of the US administration under Trump “America First” undermines the basic principles of the WTO—MFN and National Treatment. Similarly, the Chinese

⁷ SDT—Special and Differential Treatment, which was established for developing countries when the WTO was created, allowing them to reduce the level of their obligations (for example, on import duties) upon joining the WTO.

side criticizes Washington's well-known abuses with national security exemptions from trade rules and unilateral measures to protect its market, which is essentially outright protectionism. All of this is incompatible with WTO rules and undermines the established rules-based system in trade, according to the Chinese government [Zhong Nan, Ren Xiaojin 2019].

According to the above-mentioned government document, the PRC attaches the utmost importance to preserving the principle of consensus in WTO decision-making, which is in principle consistent with its position on preserving the privileges of developing countries. This approach undoubtedly provides Beijing with support from the latter. On the contrary, the approach of the developed countries to the WTO reform, especially the European Union, is to overcome the consensus mechanism or to transform it into a form of voting. As many studies have shown, the WTO will not be able to function effectively in the future without transforming the consensus mechanism [Elsig, Cottier 2011].

While expressing support for WTO reform, the Chinese side has so far confined itself to rather general statements emphasizing the importance of the inviolability of the WTO's basic principles and rules. It seems unlikely that Beijing will be willing to respond unconditionally to Washington's demands to abolish existing privileges for developing countries that are WTO members. On the contrary, China is more likely to emphasize the need to fight against protectionism that threatens free trade.

It is also important to note that there are different views among Chinese scholars on China's participation in WTO reform. For example, according to Pan Zhongying, director of the Institute of Maritime Development at the Ocean University of China and professor emeritus at the Macau University of Science and Technology, China should not insist on developing country status and privileges in the WTO because it is not in the country's interest to remain in the position of India and other developing countries. Instead, it should turn to positive and constructive coordination of WTO reform efforts with the United States, the EU and Brazil, which would undoubtedly promote China's greater participation in global governance as a whole [Ghosal Singh 2019].

Analyzing the approaches of the US and China to the WTO reform, one cannot but mention the initiative of the European Union, which can be considered as reconciliatory in the context of the existing contradictions between the US and China.

A list of concrete proposals (the Concept Paper) for WTO reform was put forward by the European Union in late summer and early fall 2018 [European Commission 2018]. This position was supported by Canada and a number of other states that formed the so-called Ottawa Group. The proposed concept outlines three key areas of reform:

- Aligning WTO rules with today's global economy;
- Strengthening the role of the WTO in monitoring trade;
- Overcoming the looming impasse in the WTO dispute settlement system.

As noted above, the search for compromise in WTO negotiations is not an easy task and usually takes a long time. This directly affects the organization's "reform" agenda. However, some progress has been made. In the two years since the last MC-12, serious progress has been made in reforming the so-called day-to-day work of the WTO. This involves, for example, making it easier for members of the organization to access information on newly adopted regulatory measures affecting trade. New digital tools are

being introduced and user-friendly electronic databases are being created. Of course, all this is rather technical and does not address the fundamental problems of reform. Nevertheless, small steps are being taken toward the goal.

A modest but important outcome of MC-13

At the MC-13, held in Abu Dhabi at the beginning of the year, no new agreements were signed, and this was not unexpected given the known weakening of the WTO in recent years. This weakening is due to a number of factors, including the accumulation of problems, existing disagreements between members of the organization, and current geopolitical risks. In light of these circumstances, the mere adoption of the final Ministerial Declaration (which was not achieved at the MC-11 in 2017) and the positive decisions on select agenda items should be regarded as an acceptable outcome.

Consequently, the MC-13 adopted a decision acknowledging the advancements made toward the establishment of a comprehensive and efficacious dispute resolution system, accessible to all members by 2024. The Ministers directed their Permanent Delegations in Geneva to expedite deliberations on this matter.

The subject of electronic commerce has been a significant item on the WTO agenda for several decades. The negotiations on the pertinent agreement are conducted in a plurilateral format, which implies that not all WTO members are involved. The drafting process has been relatively slow in recent years, given the novelty of this area for the WTO. Concurrently, numerous jurisdictions (the United States, the European Union, and China, for example) have already established national regulatory norms in this domain. However, these norms frequently contradict one another at the conceptual level. Toward the end of 2023 and the beginning of 2024, the pace of negotiations accelerated considerably, with a potential for completion by the end of this year.

Russia, like numerous other members of the organization, has put forth the proposition of either establishing a moratorium on customs duties on electronic transfers as a permanent measure or, at the very least, extending it, as has been the case at several previous ministerial conferences in succession. Nevertheless, a number of significant developing countries, including India, have thus far impeded the progression of such resolutions. The Indian representatives have advanced the argument that the termination of the moratorium would create opportunities for developing countries to increase their fiscal revenues, which could then be utilized for industrialization purposes. However, a significant challenge lies in the fact that there is no consensus among member countries regarding the precise definition of “electronic transmissions,” which is the actual subject of the duties in question. Consequently, there is a concern that such duties could be employed as an instrument of unfair competition. As a consequence of the deliberations at MC-13, it was resolved that the moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions should be extended once again until the next conference. As V. Ilyichev elucidated, the aforementioned moratorium is currently the sole “special” WTO agreement pertaining to the domain of electronic commerce.

Another significant item on the agenda is the formulation of an accord on investment facilitation, the drafting of which commenced at MC-11 in Buenos Aires. The document

to be elaborated should serve to supplement the WTO legal package in the form of a plurilateral agreement. As articulated by the Russian delegation, the objective is to facilitate access for Russian investors to the markets of developing countries by reducing the burden of unnecessary administrative barriers. Concurrently, Russia's involvement in this agreement will contribute to enhancing the confidence of investors from allied countries in the Russian market. Nevertheless, some of Russia's BRICS partners (India and South Africa) remain circumspect about the prospect of an agreement. The work on the investment facilitation agreement will continue in Geneva.

The anticipated advancement on fisheries subsidies for the implementation of the associated agreement and the agreement on agriculture was not attained. Negotiations on these and other matters will likewise continue in Geneva.

As anticipated, the MC-13 endorsed the accession of two new members to the WTO, namely Comoros and East Timor. Among the post-Soviet republics, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are currently engaged in the accession process to the WTO.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that despite the criticism of the WTO in recent years and its apparent weakening, no representative of a member state has ever advocated the termination or restriction of the organization's activities. When such statements, including those of a scandalous nature, about the impending "death of the WTO" are made by individual politicians, it is important to understand the context in which they are made. Rather than focusing on the organization's activities, it is more useful to examine the specifics of the current political situation in that country. For example, in the United States, Trump's statements against the WTO during his first mandate, which were used again in 2024, can be understood in the context of the nuances of the pre-election presidential race.

It is, of course, not impossible that the WTO could suffer significant damage in the worst-case scenario. The potential for such an outcome is heightened by the possibility of global trade fragmentation and the likelihood of Trump assuming power in 2025. He has already articulated positions that could have a detrimental impact on the system of international trade rules [Stein 2024]. Such an outcome will inevitably result in significant losses for states and the global economy. Should the WTO suffer, the question of its revitalization will inevitably arise. Nevertheless, it will be considerably more challenging to achieve this than to maintain the status quo of the existing organization.

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