

The Fate of 21st Century Multilateralism

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Abstract

As a successful conclusion of the Doha Round is highly improbable to materialize in the near future, preferential trade agreements increasingly fill the vacuum which the currently dysfunctional multilateral system leaves behind. Fuelled by various nations' craving for deeper integration, this most recent wave of preferential trade agreements has been gathering force over the course of the 21st century. Including bilateral, plurilateral and cross-regional initiatives as well as countries at different levels of economic development, this movement has additionally been engendered by supplementary motives such as the unprecedented economic growth in Asia, a race for market access and the emergence of global production chains. Moreover, I will provide some evidence whether preferential trade agreements represent "stepping stones" or "stumbling blocks" in the construction of the multilateral trade order. Anyway, the WTO is in desperate need of fundamental reform in order to retain its raison d'être and play a meaningful role in the long term. I am strongly convinced that a softening of the single undertaking approach must be at the heart of this reform.

Keywords: multilateralism; trade liberalization; preferential trade agreements; WTO; Doha Round

JEL Classification: F12; F13; F15

1. Introduction

The liberalization process, which had been unfolding under the aegis of GATT, has lost momentum with the ninth series in form of the so-called Doha Development Round after all. The ever-lasting Doha Round – initiated in the eponymous Qatari city at the fourth Ministerial WTO Conference on 9-13 November 2001 – basically aims besides further market opening at a better position of developing nations in the world trading system. To this end, its ambitious agenda – spanning over 20 subjects to be negotiated on in parallel in the framework of a single package – encompasses a broad range of issues such as improved market access for agricultural products and services, facilitation of customs procedures, environmental protection, elimination of behind the border measures, special treatment for emerging economies and so forth (WTO, 2017a). However, the Doha Round massively failed its initially envisaged completion date at the turn of the year 2004/2005 as it is figuratively languishing, considering its latest event in Buenos Aires on 10-13 December 2017 (WTO, 2017b). To make matters worse, this already eleventh Ministerial Conference ended in utter distress without a single substantial deal being struck (Mayeda, 2017). As a conclusion of the negotiations is highly improbable to eventuate in the near future, major players such as the US or the EU have increasingly sought out alternate fora outside the WTO to stipulate new conventions on international trade (Brzoska, 2016). In fact, they have acknowledged preferential trade agreements (PTAs) as an auspicious option which enable to "proceed faster and further in promoting openness and integration" than is presently the case at multilateral talks involving all WTO member states (EC, 2006).

2. Motives behind the Recent Hike in PTA Activity

Fuelled by various nations' craving for exhaustive liberalization, the most recent wave of PTAs has been gathering force over the course of the 21st century. The latest WTO figures indicate that 455 cumulative notifications of PTAs were in force by the end of 2017, denoting a startling seven fold increase since the institution's advent (WTO, 2018). This trend was not only boosted by the Western economic powerhouses but also involved several Asian nations which had previously counted amongst the fiercest proponents of multilateralism and non-discrimination (Maggi, 2014; WTO, 2011). One possible explanation for this phenomenon is the vast economic growth in Asia which put this part of the world in the limelight and elicited a race for markets (Langhorst, 2007). This did not only result in several bilateral trade agreements amongst these Asian economies but also yielded plenty of partnerships with countries from beyond the region. For instance, both the US and the EU have pursued on top of landmark trade agreements with South Korea also PTAs with other South-East Asian states, inter alia, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, etc (EC, 2013). Evidently, there is a movement beyond the traditional concept of regional integration among neighbouring countries towards a multitude of bilateral treaties which even transcend continental boundaries (Bouzas, 2005; Erixon, 2013).

Regional integration was traditionally accredited to its astounding achievements in internal trade liberalization, stimulating product differentiation synonymous with intra-industry trade. This contention veritably resonates with the scientific literature which universally suggests that productivity, income and consumption are closely linked to market size, trade openness and tighter economic integration (Alesina *et al.*, 1997; Rivera-Batiz and Romer, 1990). Krugman (1991) also acknowledges regionalism as a natural and mutually beneficial policy on mere grounds of transportation costs. The notable spread of cross-regional partnerships is premised on the circumstances that many plausible intra-regional links have already been exhausted (Fiorentino *et al.*, 2007).

Enhanced market size represents definitely a fundamental motivation for instituting PTAs because it enables companies from member countries to capitalize on economies of scale and to reap a competitive edge over excluded firms. The telecommunications and financial services sectors in the US even engaged in active lobbying in their support for NAFTA (Bagwell *et al.*, 2016). Besides, "preferential access to a larger market may increase a country's attractiveness as a destination for foreign direct investment (FDI)" (WTO, 2011). Nations principally enter into PTAs because of auguring additional growth that economists attribute to both trade-creating and trade-distorting effects (Brzoska, 2016).

While exchanges between members of a free trade area or customs union are stimulated through clear rules and the removal of barriers, traditionally intensive trade relations with countries outside the PTA tend to suffer. The European Union for instance, whose roots date back to the aftermath of the 2nd World War, accomplished a quantum leap in integration through the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, paving the way for the launch of its own currency. The irrefutable success of the European integration and its ensuing trade distorting effects project put other countries on the spot to follow suit in the early 1990s, exemplified by NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), Mercosur (Common Market of the South) or ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). A PTA's formation caused trade diversion in turn exerts a multiplier effect by encouraging discontent "outsiders" to seek for their very own trade pacts in order to compensate for the afflicted losses. Empirical studies (Baldwin and Jaimovich, 2012; Chen and Joshi,

2010; Egger and Larch, 2008) on top of Baldwin's (1997) domino theory of regionalism underpin this proposition. They postulate that trade diversion caused by a PTA's formation instigates external parties either to apply for inclusion or – especially if it was confined to its original signatories – to conclude their own ones in response. For example, the threat of trade distortion has certainly incentivized the Europeans to conclude a PTA with Mexico following the establishment of NAFTA (Bagwell *et al.*, 2016).

Another central root cause for the recent rapid expansion of PTAs most certainly represents the stagnating progress of the Doha Round, provoking countries to opt for alternative avenues in the endeavour to expedite far-reaching trade liberalization (EC, 2013; Erixon, 2013; Sieksmeier, 2015). Bearing all the various aspects which have to be contractually regulated as well as subsequently monitored in mind, a smaller circle of parties undoubtedly greatly facilitates both negotiation and implementation of a trade agreement. In other words, with fewer colliding interests PTAs generally enable to obtain a larger common denominator in comparison to negotiating multilaterally or so to speak with the rest of the world. *“The emphasis of international cooperation has apparently changed (...), as there is a seeming momentum shift away from the multilateral and non-discriminatory framework of the GATT/WTO in favour of discriminatory arenas under new PTAs, and away from negotiations emphasizing shallow integration and toward negotiations stressing increasingly deep integration”* (Bagwell *et al.*, 2016). Modern PTAs therefore exceed the ordinary tariff cutting exercises and address diverse non-tariff policies including those that are imposed directly at (quotas, price undertakings, customs regulations, import valuation, etc) and behind the border (standards, norms, etc). Thereby, they delve into areas which conventionally fall under the sovereignty of domestic regulations such as investment and tax provisions or labour and environmental standards, etc (Egger, 2015; Lawrence, 2000). Table 1 classifies these deep integration elements into WTO+ and WTO-X policy areas.

The first category contains provisions which are per se covered to some extent by the WTO but where the contracting parties' commitments reach even farther, e.g. universally stipulating lower industrial and agricultural tariffs than the MFN level. More importantly, PTAs also exceed the WTO's basic coverage in those other policy areas depicted in Table 1, i.e. services (GATS), trade-related investment measures (TRIMs), public procurement, intellectual property (TRIPS), SPS measures, technical barriers to trade, etc. Primarily, the latter discipline targets the elimination, harmonization and coordination of the parties' trade-impeding domestic regulatory policies. Deviating national regulations, standards and conformance assessment imply elevated costs for foreign suppliers which could be averted through approximation or compatibility, for instance, when a number of domestic norms or standards are ideally substituted by one common international one (Sampson and Woolcock, 2003). In an analogous manner, mutual recognition of divergent performance standards supersedes repeated redundant conformity testing or certification. Abolishing technical barriers to trade thus enhances market access whose welfare gains are according to Hoekman and Konan (2000) truly capable of surpassing the ones derived from mere tariff reduction.

WTO-X on the other hand refers by definition (“X” as an acronym for “extra”) to policy domains which have hitherto not been embedded in WTO agreements at all. Intellectual property rights (IPR), competition policy, environmental laws, labour market regulation, data protection, FDI and movement of capital – just to name a few of the most prominent WTO-X provisions displayed in Table 1 – signify a testimony to the mounting relevance of behind the border measures in contemporary PTAs (Egger, 2015; Horn *et al.*, 2010). This may partly be ascribed to the overwhelming expansion of transfrontier production

networks whose effective operability strongly relies on the intergovernmental alignment of these mainly regulatory issues (Baldwin and Seghezza, 2010; Yi, 2003). Free movement of corporate personnel, investor’s access to a dispute settlement mechanism or the protection of pivotal firm specific assets such as intellectual property (patents, blueprints) against expropriation via a PTA’s investment chapters are only a couple of several crucial requisites for international fragmentation of the value chain (Beck, 2014; Markusen, 1998). Competition policy in its own right is not only directed to thwart the abuse of market power but is – unlike traditional market access provisions – also inherently non-discriminatory in nature (Dawar and Holmes, 2011; Teh, 2009). Competition policy obligations enshrined in PTAs weaken the pricing clout of domestic incumbents and hence raise the prospects of foreign companies independent of their membership status.

Table 1. WTO+ and WTO-X policy areas in PTAs

WTO+ policy areas	WTO-X policy areas	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PTA industrial goods • PTA agricultural goods • Countervailing measures • Anti-dumping • State aid • Public procurement • TRIMS measures • GATS • TRIPS • Customs administration • Export taxes • SPS measures • State trading enterprises • Technical barriers to trade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-corruption • Health • Competition policy • Human rights • Environmental laws • Illegal immigration • IPR • Illicit drugs • Investment measures • Industrial cooperation • Labour market regulation • Information society • Movement of capital • Mining • Consumer protection • Money laundering • Data protection • Nuclear safety • Agriculture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximation of legislation • Public administration • Audiovisual • Regional cooperation • Civil protection • Research and technology • Innovation policies • SMEs • Cultural cooperation • Social matters • Economic policy dialogue • Statistics • Education and training • Taxation • Energy • Terrorism • Financial assistance • Visa and asylum • Political dialogue

Source: adapted from Horn *et al.* (2010)

In addition to the urge for deeper integration, PTA’s arise from a government’s intent to send a signal of policy predictability to investors (Ethier, 1996; Fernandez and Portes, 1998). “*Since future administrations might have policy preferences that differ from those of the current administration, a government may sign a PTA in an attempt to lock-in its policies (for example, a pro-open trade policy) and to diminish the likelihood that they might be reversed*” (WTO, 2011). In a similar vein, the commitment theory professes that legislators tap into PTAs as a means to tie their hands against their own citizens and lobbies (Bagwell *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, the EU and the US in particular utilize trade agreements in order to liberalize markets elsewhere (Kaya, 2006). This was the case with NAFTA which triggered domestic reforms in Mexico (Baldwin, 1999). Notably, PTAs are not just a medium of exporting the EU’s and the US’s sophisticated finished products because trade sits at the heart of their creation in the first place due to the rise of global value chains and corresponding exchange in intermediates. PTAs are thus key to the evolution of EU and US businesses’ vital global value chains, reinforcing those

companies' competitiveness to sell their goods abroad. Aiming at a permanent leadership position in the fragmentation of value chains, Brussels aspires to not solely further liberalize the trade in goods but also in services, facilitate digital trade, support the mobility of professional, tackle regulatory fragmentation, protect innovation, ensure sustainable development, safeguard access to raw material, the swift management of customs and thwart aggressive tax avoidance practices (EC, 2015). PTAs in fact turned also out to be a vehicle of Washington's and Brussels' foreign policy for rewarding strategic partners and reinforcing key alliances (Capling, 2008; Higgott, 2004; Rosen, 2004; White, 2005), like the US- South Korea or the EU-Japan partnership.

3. PTAs: Stepping Stones or Stumbling Blocks for Multilateral Liberalization?

The continuing proliferation of PTAs puts the WTO's *raison d'être* increasingly under critical scrutiny: Are we still in need of this institution to achieve multilateral free trade? However, the question of whether "discriminatory liberalization" within the context of PTAs advances liberalization of world trade is controversial either. In fact, two schools of thought have manifested themselves in the political and academic debate, judging PTAs either as "stepping stones" or "stumbling blocks" in the construction of the multilateral trade order (Bagwell and Staiger, 1999; Baldwin, 1993; Bhagwati, 1991; Freund, 2000; Levy, 1997).

I intend to demonstrate that one reason for this ambivalence is the two antagonistic effects of PTAs which were already introduced by Jacob Viner back in 1950: trade creation and trade diversion (Viner, 1950). Trade is created because some domestic production is substituted by lower-priced imports from affiliated countries. With custom unions at the forefront, Magee (2008) reckons an increment of 3% on average. On the other hand, trade diversion occurs when more efficient supplier in third countries are displaced by less competitive firms within the agreement only due to selective tariff removal between the signatories. Below the line, the vast majority of empirical studies seem to conclude that PTAs generate more trade than they distort (Krishna, 2003, Lee, 2006).

Since free trade zones – unlike customs unions – allow for different external tariffs, they resort to so-called rules of origins (RoOs) in order prevent the channelling of third country imports via the lowest rate member state as a gateway. RoOs are correspondingly designed – by a set of prerequisites or usually at least a minimum threshold for local production and content – to prove that a good originates from a member state and therefore deservedly merits preferential tariff treatment. At the same time, they can exert a pronounced trade-deflecting effect because the more restrictive these rules of origin are, the more likely it is for companies to shy away from employing lower-priced third party inputs. RoOs are thus particularly relevant in the context of global production networks which rely on inputs from several countries in the manufacture of a single final good. Especially the lack of compatibility between different RoOs in multiple, overlapping PTAs – commonly referred to as "spaghetti bowl problem" – poses a serious impediment to unobstructed international trade in intermediates (Estevadeordal, 2000; Wignaraja *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, enterprises obviously incur additional bureaucratic costs for administering these disparate RoOs regimes (Hirastuka *et al.*, 2009; Manchin and Pelkmans-Balaoing, 2007; Tumbarello, 2007).

Majluf (2004) rightly claims that it requires much energy to optimize trade and minimize costs in adherence to the inconsistent rules of the numerous PTAs currently in place. SMEs which are only equipped with scarce resources are indubitably hit the hardest. By the same token, “competing PTAs with incompatible regulatory structures and standards may lock in members to a particular regime, undermining the principles of transparency and predictability of regulatory regimes and making movement towards multilateral trade opening costly” (WTO, 2011). Those circumstances paradoxically concur with the advent of global value chains, actually making a truly global set of rules more imperative than ever before.

Another cause of concern is the coexistence of the WTO dispute settlement system and the surging number of PTA dispute settlement mechanisms. This inevitably undermines the WTO’s significance and could potentially even lead to extreme cases where both fora issue conflicting rulings (Kwak and Marceau, 2004). While Tussie and Woods (2000) predicate that the propagation of economic openness through the mushrooming of PTAs is not necessarily conducive to multilateralism, liberal institutionalists contradictorily deem multilateralism and openness as complementary movements.

From a historical point of view, we may actually infer that regional integration tendencies have repeatedly fertilized the GATT order. The tariff reductions in the Kennedy Round are often interpreted as a reaction to the founding of the EEC (Ziegler, 2002). Similarly, the EC single market program appears to have decisively contributed to the inclusion of new disciplines (dispute settlement, services, intellectual property rights, etc) into the WTO’s statutes during the Uruguay Round. PTAs indisputably offer the opportunity for deeper integration between a limited number of homogeneous members, rendering them “laboratories” for further liberalization. Ferrantino (2010) certifies their ability to undertake and develop concrete regulation regarding WTO+ and WTO-X policy areas where the multilateral community still struggles to form a consensus.

The rather disappointing outcome of the Buenos Aires Round in December 2017 constitutes the latest demonstration that the effectively dysfunctional WTO system is not ready for these sensitive issues yet. In this connection, some academics propose PTAs as building blocks of international trade liberalization, i.e. to “multilateralize” bilateralism whereby existing PTAs are either fused or extended in a non-discriminatory manner to additional parties (Baldwin, 2006; 2008; Baldwin and Thornton, 2008). Deep integration provisions of PTAs are indeed frequently non-discriminatory by their very nature, once laid down in broader regulatory frameworks which de facto also apply to non-members (WTO, 2011). To recap, “*simply demonizing bilateralism is of no use for politics. I rather propose a more pragmatic approach that is needed to employ the benefits of selective economic integration and at the same time to vitalize multilateralism*” (Langhorst, 2007).

4. The WTO at a Crossroads

From my point of view, it is virtually impossible to conceive a more appropriate manifestation of the Doha’s Round impasse than the latest Ministerial Conference convened in Argentine capital. The representatives of the WTO’s 164 member countries left the Argentine capital empty handed without a single deal being struck since they had failed to obtain full consensus on any of its, to put it mildly, unambitious goals (Mayeda, 2017; Zeit, 2017). Not to mention, that its participants did not even manage to agree on a collective final declaration. Corresponding disillusioned remarks – inter alia “That is sad

reality” by EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmström, “*The sobering outcome marks a low point in the history of the WTO*” by German delegate Matthias Machnig or “*I think we need to do some real soul searching*” by Director General Roberto Azevedo – unequivocally express that the WTO is at a crossroad now.

Already in 2015 at the preceding 10th Ministerial Conference in Nairobi, some industrialized nations – spearheaded by the US – suggested a cancellation of the Doha Round for the very first time, albeit only vaguely hinted at as “different views” regarding prospective negotiations in its final declaration (WTO, 2015). Despite the official reaffirmation of a “strong commitment” of all members to the Doha Development Agenda, this diplomatic rhetoric could hardly obscure the fact that some countries have long since turned to other negotiating fora as I elucidated above. In this light, we may investigate the underlying root causes of the WTO’s current obstacles.

Firstly, the US and the EU no longer leverage their tremendous market sizes to actively promote trade liberalization under the WTO’s auspices. Fascinatingly, the WTO in its own right still epitomizes a “living proof” of this past era when both operated in unison as the main engines behind the notion of multilateralism, whereby successfully propelling the institution’s foundation. In stark contrast, the White House has nowadays resorted to protectionism instead. President Trump’s latest announcement of levying hefty import duties on aluminium and steel did not only spark huge consternation across the political spectrum but also provides fertile soil for escalating altercations. By contemplating retaliatory sanctions, the EC for instance is already bracing itself for an imminent transatlantic trade war. Such a dispute will eventually unfold to the detriment of all parties involved (Breuss, 2005; Spamann, 2005), marking above all a bitter setback to the WTO’s endeavours. Brussels on the other has been occupied with its internal affairs. Apart from the all-consuming refugee crisis, excessive indebtedness of several member states has put the cohesion of the union and the survival of the Euro at stake. While debating the vision of deeper political integration as a consequence, Brexit and the associated negotiations around the future trade relationship with Britain are momentarily demanding the utmost attention of European diplomats. To add to existing woes, they are grappling with secessionist movements in Italy (Lombardy, Veneto, etc), the UK (Scotland, Wales), Belgium (Flanders, Wallonia), France (Brittany, Normandy, Corsica, etc) and most prominently Spain (Catalonia, the Basque Region, etc). In fact, this regional separatism is becoming more vocal because “*ethnic and cultural minorities feel that they are economically “viable” in the context of a truly European common market, thus they can “safely” separate from the home country*” (Alesina, 2003; Alesina *et al.*, 1997). In summary, we shall not bank that the US and the EU would throw their weight behind the WTO and reenergize the Doha Round in the near term.

Secondly, the overwhelming number of presently 164 WTO signatories – as compared to the 23 GATT founding members in 1947 – extensively complicates to find common ground at Ministerial Conferences, aggravated to their development status dependent opposing interests (BMZ, 2014; FAZ, 2014). Moreover, the WTO system ceased to reflect global economic reality, i.e. it has missed so far to take account of the tangible shift in relative economic powers towards large NIEs (newly industrializing economies), causing an imbalance between their contribution to the multilateral trading system and the benefits they derive from it (EC, 2015). I infer that this represents a source of conflict since their mounting economic clout is implicitly accompanied by a more pronounced eagerness to assert one owns national interests. Developed countries on the other states denounce their persevering entitlement to advantages in resemblance to destitute nations in spite of NIEs’ record-breaking GDP estimates (Moses, 2017; Zeit, 2017).

Thirdly, is it not fairly alarming that core themes of the Doha Development Agenda such as dismantling the protection of agricultural products in the "North" and industrial goods in the "South" have remained unresolved over the last 17 years? The deadlock of the Doha Round comes as no surprise to the objective observer, though, considering the fatal attempt to negotiate over 20 delicate issues in parallel in the framework of a single package which has to be approved by each of the presently 164 WTO member nations with an overarching signature in compliance with the single undertaking approach. As if reconciling the conflicting interests of this sheer number of member states across would not prove difficult enough by means of piecemeal tactics, the single undertaking accord dictates, to make matters worse, that no individual outcome can be agreed until all the items of a vast agenda are agreed. In this light, the Doha Development Agenda rather reminds our unbiased spectator of a futile venture which was doomed to failure in the first place.

5. Conclusion

Since a successful conclusion of the Doha Round is highly unlikely to materialize in the near future, countries increasingly opt for PTAs as an alternative route to achieve far-reaching trade liberalization. Having additionally been triggered by supplementary motives such as the vast economic growth in Asia, a race for market access and the rise of global production chains, "this most recent "wave" of regionalism covers a much wider network of participants – including bilateral, plurilateral and cross-regional initiatives – and encompasses countries at different levels of economic development – including "developed - developed", "developing - developing", and "developed - developing" alliances" (WTO, 2011). It is noteworthy that the impact of "discriminatory liberalization" is a contentious subject as PTAs are, depending on the perspective, either appreciated as "stepping stones" or denounced as "stumbling blocks" in the construction of the multilateral trade order. Anyway, "*what is on the line is a choice over which international institutions will set the future rules of globalization and shape the trade-offs we face in a globalized world economy*" (Bagwell *et al.*, 2016). In other words, the WTO is in desperate need of fundamental reform in order to retain its *raison d'être* and play a meaningful role in the long run.

I am convinced that a softening of the single undertaking approach must be at the heart of this reform. The 2013 Bali Ministerial Conference symbolizes a beacon of hope in this context, when all member states settled on the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). This outstanding accomplishment was owed to a more focused approach where officials tackled each issue on its own merits, which is why issues-based negotiations represent a more pragmatic procedure than broad and complex rounds in order to push the WTO agenda forward (EC, 2015). Another possible way to reinvigorate the WTO is to pursuing critical mass agreements (CMAs) or plurilateral agreements (PAs), whereby only a subset of WTO member countries advance in a WTO+ or WTO-X policy area, wherefore whose benefits must or must not be extended to all WTO members on a MFN basis, respectively (Bagwell *et al.*, 2016). Hoekman and Mavroidis (2015a; b) underlined that a PA's achievements in deep integration beyond traditional GATT/WTO disciplines apply on a non-MFN basis akin to PTAs, yet keeping the door open for interested WTO members to accede further down the line. Adopting this strategy offers the possibility to launch new PAs directly under the WTO umbrella and would also facilitate to embed externally

negotiated ones – e.g. TiSA (Trade in Services Agreement) – in the organization (EC, 2015; Lawrence, 2006; Levy, 2006). Similarly, implementing the critical mass methodology would enable to “multilateralize” trade rules – closely related to Baldwin’s proposition to “multilateralize” bilateralism described earlier – without enmeshing the entire WTO membership withal (Cottier, 2009; Elsig, 2009; Low, 2011; VanGrasstek and Sauv , 2006). The ability to move forward in negotiations without being held hostage by single opponents would moreover bestow the much-needed dynamism upon the WTO and improve the coherence between PTAs and the multilateral trading system at the same time (Davey, 2011; Low, 2008). Overall, both recommended alternatives to the obsolete consensus accord are desirable whenever a subject of sweeping trade liberalization is widely but not necessarily unanimously endorsed, whereby this “coalition of willing” can effectively draft the rules governing international trade within the WTO instead of rather being forced to circumvent it via PTAs.

These proposed changes will, however, not be sufficient to fully revitalize the WTO. “*The real obstacle in the negotiations so far is not institutional, technical or even related to the content of the agenda, but rather to the will of the participants to find a compromise*” (EC, 2015), which was only just confirmed once again by the latest events in Buenos Aires.

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