

WTO Symposium 25-27 May 2004

Report on the panel:

Does the WTO Still Enjoy Priority?

Organised by UNICE and BDI<sup>1</sup>

Participants: Peter Naray (ITC): Chairman  
Reinhard Quick (UNICE): Speaker  
Herbert Oberhaensli (Nestlé): Speaker  
Rodolphe Munoz (University of Liège): Speaker  
T.S. Vishwanath (CII<sup>2</sup>): Speaker

The power point presentations by Reinhard Quick, Herbert Overhaensli and Rodolphe Munoz are available by contacting [avh@unice.be](mailto:avh@unice.be)

#### Presentation by Rodolphe Munoz

Mr Munoz began his presentation by stating the simple fact that while most countries profess that the WTO is their priority in trade policy, they are also engaging in a large number of bilateral trade negotiations. The end result is a large “spaghetti bowl” of trade agreements which could, over time, undermine the objectives of freer trade due to problems with rules of origin, for instance. For Mr Munoz, the slowness of the WTO and its inability to address many of the problems in trade, such as technical barriers to trade, forced WTO members to look for solutions at the bilateral level. Mr Munoz made some provocative suggestions for reform of the WTO to ensure that it would have the ability to remove trade barriers and thus reduce recourse to bilateral solutions.

#### Presentation by T. S. Vishwanath

Mr Vishwanath was happy to be “provoked” by his friend from UNICE, Reinhard Quick, who lamented India’s lack of commitment to ambitious DDA negotiations. Mr Vishwanath told the audience that India was committed to the DDA negotiations and that it would contribute to trade liberalisation. However, the CII representative emphasised the importance of special & differential treatment for developing countries in the negotiations. While the WTO remains a priority for Indian industry, Mr Vishwanath also believed that India needed to explore possible synergies with trading partners in the Asian region to help foster south-south trade.

#### Reactions/comments from the audience

- Some business representatives (from Canada) agreed with the panellists that the WTO was important for establishing a framework of rules for the multilateral trading system. However, it is more difficult to keep business engaged in following the negotiations at the WTO when the progress is so slow and when the agenda gets narrowed down.