

Conference Conclusions 28 November
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So, what have we learned over the past day and a half of simulating discussions?

I believe the first thing we have learned, more by implication through discussion on the presentations than explicitly, is that at least for the medium term, prospects for further multilateral trade liberalisation through the WTO is virtually nil, leaving an FTA as a major option for 'Bringing Australia and the EU closer together' in trade terms.

My second conclusion would be that of the 'new generation' FTAs concluded by the EU with trading partners since the 2006 'global Europe' initiative, the CETA agreement with Canada is the most relevant example for the EU/Australia relationship.

There are important similarities;

- Canada is the 11th largest global economy. Australia is the 13th
- The EU constitutes the second or third major market for both Australia and Canada
- Both Canada and Australia are federations with sub-federal entities (provinces in the case of Canada and states in Australia) having similar regulatory powers impacting on trade.

I would also conclude that the elements of CETA most relevant to an Australia/EU FTA are;

- The 'negative listing' liberalisation of bilateral services trade, drilling down to the 'sub-federal' level in both Canada and the EU
- Arrangements embedded in CETA for achieving the 'mutual recognition' of professional qualifications plus the movement of labour (mode 4) provisions to provide services in both the EU and Canada
- Increased market opportunities for agriculture and processed food products in both Canada and the EU.
- The regulatory co-operation chapter of CETA with embedded 'living agreement' structures aimed at the ongoing liberalisation of regulatory NTBs and,
- The chapters on Public Procurement (again drilling down to sub-federal levels) and Investment (notwithstanding problems over ISDS)

To these conclusions I would add;

- the 'trade diversion' argument, made by Rod Abbott in the final session, that the EU should be more interested in an FTA with Australia in order to protect its trade position in Australia as a likely result of the conclusion of the TPP negotiations.
- The regulatory problems on both sides that could be tackled and dealt with in an EU/Australia FTA.

- The point that an FTA with Australia would enhance the 'geopolitical footprint' of the EU in Asia, both points also made by Rod Abbott
- The fact that the EU is too big for Australia to ignore, a point made by Bruce Gosper in his presentation in the concluding session of the conference.
- The need to give more attention to maximising Australia's trade and investment interests in the EU.
- The need to take up the EU as the major missing link in Australia's current FTA policy and,
- That agriculture would no longer be a 'deal breaker' in an Australia/EU FTA, all points also made by Bruce Gosper in his presentation

These then are the summary conclusions I would like to offer at the end of this very interesting day and a half. The conference organisers will now consider next steps, which will include a book based on contributions to this conference.