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Abstract

Country Classification Reform and Stalled Negotiations in the World Trade Organization – How to Break the Stalemate?

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WTO law does not offer definitions of “developed” and “developing” countries and the status of its members is determined on the basis of self-selection. As a result, there are countries with diverse levels of economic development that are considered “developing” in the WTO. Unsurprisingly, this causes discontent among developed country members, most notably the US, who are now unwilling to extend Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT) provisions to all self-declared developing countries (DCs) and therefore, call for bifurcation among developing WTO members. In contrast, developing countries, most notably the upper layer of DCs like China and India, support current status quo. For any change to happen within the WTO, it is of utmost importance that the member states come to a consensus through negotiations. With this in mind, in this paper I explore the grounds for possible trade-offs that could serve as bargaining chips in the negotiations for a rearrangement of the existing country classification and the power structure that comes with it.

Keywords: country classification, developing countries, negotiation, S&D treatment, WTO

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