

Trade and the Environment: Dialogue of the Deaf or Scope for Cooperation?

The task of statesmanship is ... to attempt to guide the nations, with all their differences in interest, power and fortune, towards a new system more capable of meeting the 'inner limits' of basic human needs for all the world's people and of doing so without violating the 'outer limits' of the planet's resources and environment.

*The Cocoyoc Declaration*¹

Is it possible for a trade negotiator and an environmental regulator to work together on the same file? This may strike some as a flippant question. It is not meant to be. Indeed, over the past few years, it has become a pressing question that deserves serious consideration.

In suggesting that environmental regulators must learn to share their file with trade negotiators, our purpose is not to be presumptuous but practical and realistic. It is through the medium of trade that national economies relate to each other and it is the framework of rules negotiated by trade specialists that govern the nature of that relationship. Because of the potential impact of environmental regulation on international competitiveness as well as the desire of environmental regulators to influence behaviour beyond national borders through trade measures, there is now a pressing need for environmental regulators to learn from trade negotiators and vice versa.

For trade negotiators, working with other subject specialists is nothing new. Fifty years ago, trade negotiations dealt largely with tariffs and quotas, i.e., government policy measures applied at the border. Trade negotiators, therefore, were usually drawn from among those people who had some experience in dealing with these matters. But as the boundaries of trade negotiations have expanded, trade negotiators have of necessity learned to deal with a much wider range of issues. Doing so required that they learn to "share" their file. Over the past few years, they have learned to work with industrial policy specialists, government procurement experts, competition lawyers, service industry regulators,

¹ The Cocoyoc Declaration was adopted at the Cocoyoc Symposium on "Patterns of Resources Use, Environment, and Development Strategy," held in Cocoyoc, Mexico, October, 1974.