

parliamentarians from the major regions of the world to discuss parliamentary involvement in the ongoing work of the Organisation. Although both meetings called for further discussions among parliamentarians on the occasion of the WTO Ministerial Meeting, there are some noteworthy differences and competing "visions" for the role of parliamentarians in the future of the WTO.

Boiled down, one point of view, championed by the group led by the EuroParliamentarians, would see parliamentarians participate in some sort of permanent parliamentary assembly which, although having only consultative powers, would be representative of world citizenry and would play a role as a "parallel" deliberative body in bringing public concerns to the present intergovernmental structures.

The alternative, more minimalist conception, championed by the IPU and WTO senior officials, would provide national parliamentarians with a long-distance relationship with the WTO. Rather than a permanent standing body, the IPU favors a "parliamentary dimension" animated by occasional international meetings. According to the IPU declaration this June, "Parliamentary oversight at home keeps governments accountable, and through them, the international trade agreements they negotiate. Parliamentary involvement can also help make the trading system . . . more widely understood and supported." In other words, parliamentarians can play a useful role "selling" WTO agreements to a skeptical public as long as they leave the difficult negotiations and debates to governments and their diplomats.

In Doha, parliamentarians will meet November 11, on the basis of a joint invitation from the European Parliament and the IPU (see Appendix A).

NGOs have a stake in the outcome of this debate as well. On one hand, NGOs will oppose a weak parliamentary forum, fearing that WTO officials would cite their "consultations" with elected parliamentarians as an excuse to put off extending participation rights at the WTO to civil society representatives. However, most NGOs would welcome a well-structured parliamentary assembly. A strategic alliance between progressive parliamentarians and NGOs should be pursued.

At Doha, differences of views over what constitutes the optimal model of parliamentary assembly can remain unresolved for the time being. As long as acceptable language can be included in the Qatar Declaration and/or Programme of Action, then discussions can proceed on an official, intergovernmental level to develop proposals for actual creation of a parliamentary forum, proposals which might be considered for adoption, by governments at the next Ministerial Meeting.

Pat O'Brien, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for International Trade Pierre Pettigrew presented next.

Canada supports efforts to make WTO proceedings and other international trade discussions