

## Introduction

Now in its fourth year, the Doha Development Agenda, the ninth round of multilateral trade negotiations under the auspices of the GATT/WTO, is already well on its way to being as storied as its immediate predecessor, the Uruguay Round, which took eight years and the overcoming of many trials and tribulations to complete. After a surprising plot twist which saw the Doha Round revived from an ignominious collapse at Cancún in September 2003 by an agreement on negotiating modalities in Geneva in July 2004, the questions of the moment have become, first, whether negotiators can take advantage of renewed life in the Round to bring it to completion; and second, whether an outcome in the present Round can be built up to match that of its predecessor.

In good measure, the rather pedestrian answer to these questions is that much will be determined by the extent of progress in the negotiations during 2005 and, most importantly, by the results of the December 2005 Hong Kong ministerial meeting. A successful outcome in this context will depend on factors as varied as:

- The preparation of a good first approximation of the text of a potential final agreement by mid-2005.
- The avoidance of fractiousness in the selection of a new Director General of the WTO to replace the incumbent, Supachai Panitchpakdi, whose term expires on 1 September 2005.<sup>1</sup>
- A smooth assumption of the burdens of trade leadership by Robert Portman and Peter Mandelson, the successors of US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick and EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy, two individuals who combined tireless advocacy of trade liberalization with the technician's command of the substance of negotiations.
- Substantively, finding a way to unlock meaningful offers on agriculture, services and non-agricultural manufactured

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<sup>1</sup> The transition was indeed smooth: Pascal Lamy became the fifth Director-General of the WTO, as of 1 September 2005 for a four-year term.