

some saw continuing negotiation as furnishing a ready-made excuse to avoid making decisions.

The level of ambition

The aims of the Doha Round were thought by a number of observers to be actually quite modest, including (a) completing the Uruguay Round's unfinished business; (b) refining the rules in light of seven years experience (which makes it much easier technically than the Uruguay Round where the rules had to be developed) in areas such as TRIPs, DSU, services etc.; and (c) deepening liberalization as was foreseen when the Uruguay Round concluded by negotiating the cuts that were postponed then. The greater technical simplicity does not, however, make liberalization in this round any easier politically.

The level of ambition in this round must be considered in the context of what is left to do, after eight multilateral rounds and considerable regional deepening through preferential trade agreements. To mix metaphors, "cherry picking" in previous rounds has left the hardest nuts to crack to the last. The Doha Round will accordingly, in the opinion of some of those present, be harder to move forward than its predecessors.

The EU and US have little to give and what they do have to give is very sensitive and hard to move on. While negotiators may understand that positions must change, whether that is appreciated by the political class is not clear to observers. This difficulty was in a sense inescapable: the agreement on agriculture reached in the Uruguay Round was made possible precisely because the difficult phase of making significant cuts to agricultural protection was deferred to be taken up in the built-in agenda (which called for negotiations to begin in 2000).

On the key agricultural negotiation, some argued that the opening positions of the main parties are so far apart that there does not at present appear to be the basis for an agreement on modalities. On both sides of the Atlantic, the key farm lobbies are presently quite content—US farmers with the current farm bill and the EU farm constituency with its support programs—