Bertelsmann Stiftung (Hrsg.)

Is World Trade Organization Information Good Enough?

How a Systematic Reflection by Members on Transparency Could Promote Institutional learning

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The World Trade Organization (WTO) has three primary tasks, to negotiate new rules, monitor implementation, and settle any disputes that arise. It is not fulfilling any of these tasks very well at the moment. Should Members just muddle along, hoping for the best, or seek external advice on how to change the WTO operating system? This paper suggests a third possibility: a systematic discussion of transparency by encouraging institutional learning could help Members to recover a shared sense of collective purpose. On the basis of such a detailed vertical review, Members might be able to come to a consensus on how to improve the functioning of the system.

Some may see in any discussion of information an attempt by large countries to impose new obligations. Better information might help Members navigate

current negotiation impasses, but that is an incidental benefit of a discussion in each committee about whether the organization is doing as well as it can monitoring current obligations.

This paper discusses the meaning of institutional learning, and whether other international organizations have lessons for the WTO on how to do it, with particular emphasis on the OECD In-depth Evaluation of Committees process. It then suggests reframing the debate on transparency by asking first whether WTO information is good enough then why Members do not notify as much as they might. If Members think that they lack information on the trading system, the trade policy review process might help. After a review of previous efforts to improve WTO transparency, including the processes launched by the Nairobi ministerial declaration, the paper concludes with a proposal on how WTO can encourage institutional learning by a systematic discussion in each committee of whether WTO information is good enough.

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- Global Economic Dynamics (GED)

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