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Professor Robert Wolfe

Reforming WTO Conflict Management

Why and How to Improve the Use of “Specific Trade Concerns”

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The incapacitation of the Appellate Body in December 2019 was a huge blow to the judicial arm of the WTO. When improving and reforming rule enforcement at the WTO, it is however vital not only to look at the top of the dispute resolution pyramid but equally at the bottom. In WTO committees, “Specific Trade Concerns” (STCs) are being used to raise concerns about certain trade policy elements of WTO member states. STCs can flag upcoming trade tensions and sometimes defuse them at an early stage before they become a formal dispute. They also bring about a closer interaction between proceedings in Geneva and trade policymakers in capitals. However, the use of STCs can and should be enhanced. This can be done by better planning and agenda setting, better documentation and transparency. This paper analyses the current use of STCs and makes suggestions for an improved practice.

Project

- Global Economic Dynamics (GED)
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Dr. Christian Bluth