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BOOK REVIEW

WTO: New Database on Regional Trade Agreements

AQ1

Carsten Weerth*

Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) are growing more and more important in the global trade in goods and services. Between 1958 and 2005, 141 RTAs concerning the trade in goods were indicated to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) Secretariat (since 1995 the World Trade Organization (WTO) Secretariat); from 1958 to 1989, 25 RTAs were founded, from 1990 to 2005, 116 RTAs were founded.[1] The WTO is forecasting about 400 active RTAs in 2010.[2]

The WTO has now launched a new database on RTAs. This database on RTAs (the so-called RTA-Information System, RTA-IS) contains all the relevant documentation received by the WTO following notification by a WTO member that an RTA has been established.

The database, which is one of the requirements of the General Council's Transparency Decision on RTAs, contains all the notifications, links to the content of the relevant RTAs, legal provisions, and information on the WTO's assessments of the RTAs.

The database also contains more detailed information about the RTAs for which the WTO has prepared a 'factual presentation' or a 'factual abstract'. In these cases, the following information is provided:

- the timetable agreed in the RTA for the reduction of tariffs as well as data on trade in goods and services for the relevant countries at the time that the RTA enters into force (this only applies to RTAs where the WTO has prepared a Factual Presentation);
- a list of key provisions contained in the RTAs as well as links to brief descriptions of these provisions in the Factual Presentation or factual abstract prepared by the WTO.

AQ2

The database can be searched alternatively by country, region, legal provision, date of notification, or entry into force of the RTA.

Summary tables of all RTAs currently in force, containing various types of information, can be easily exported by users of the database by exporting the data into excel-documents.

To access the RTA-IS-database, please go to the URL: <http://rtais.wto.org/?lang=1>.

This free collection of data is an important new database for all researchers of the field of RTAs and WTO-negotiations in general.

Source: WTO Press Release. Press/548 as of 14 January 2009.

Notes

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1 See Crawford & Fiorentino, 'The Changing Landscape of Regional Trade Agreements', WTO Discussion Papers No. 8, URL: <www.wto.int/english/res_e/booksp_e/discussion_papers8_e.pdf> (visited 1 Nov. 2008), 2005, 7.

2 See WTO, Press release, General Direktor Pascal Lamy, Speech of 17 Jan. 2007 in Bangalore, India, and WTO, Regional Trade Agreements, 2008.

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