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country report

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Geneva Barometer

Developments in Geneva's International Organisations

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The "Geneva Barometer" takes an occasional look at a few selected developments amongst the international organisations based in Geneva.

Things have been heating up in international Geneva since the middle of May: The World Health Organisation (WHO), which continues to fight COVID-19 and to implement the demands of the World Health Assembly (WHA), has had to absorb a serious blow with the US's notice of withdrawal. In the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the race to find a successor to the Director General Azevêdo, who is stepping down on the 31st of August, has gathered momentum. At the same time, day-to-day business is also gaining momentum in the Geneva organisations - among other things, there were several controversial debates at the Human Rights Council.

World Trade Organisation - Open race for leadership

Following the surprise resignation of WTO Director General Roberto Azevêdo on the 31st of August, focus shifted to the question of his successor. By the end of the application period on the 8th of July, a total of eight candidates, three of them women, had submitted their applications. No fewer than three candidates came from Africa: Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (Nigeria), Amina Mohamed (Kenya) and Abdel-Hamid Mamdouh (Egypt). Further candidates are: Jesus Seade Kuri (Mexico), Yoo Myung-hee (Republic of Korea), Tudor Ulianoschi (Moldova), Mohamed Maziad Al-Tuwaijri (Saudi Arabia) and Liam Fox (United Kingdom)¹.

The decision on the candidacy must be taken by consensus. According to the experts, the basic principle is that a candidate must be acceptable to the US, the EU and China at the same time, and must not be blocked by India - a tough obstacle. Accordingly, besides from professional qualifications and political weight, geographical considerations also play a significant role in the choice of candidate: After a Brazilian Director General in the shape of Mr.

Azevêdo, some countries called for a candidate from an industrialised country. Conversely it was not only the African group that argued that it was time for the first African Director-General of the WTO. Still others argued that it was high time for the first election of a woman.

Worthy of note: The EU is not putting forward any candidates although the names of several high-ranking people, both women and men, were under discussion. The Irish EU Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan (EVP), had also for all intents and purposes indicated his interest in the post. However, when the candidature was expected in Geneva, Hogan declared his renouncement. One thing is certain: He would probably have been the most promising European candidate and would also have been in the inner circle of favourites. His choice could not, however, have been considered a foregone conclusion either given the equally strong competition or due to geopolitical considerations. Moreover, there is the threat of an impasse. An agreement is not expected until late autumn or even early 2021 at the earliest. Even though it doesn't have its "own" candidate, it can be assumed that the EU will stand united behind a candidate at the end of the selection process. More than a few European capitals indicated that it was not so much the candidate's origin but above all their vision for a reform of the WTO that was of primary importance. Some observers assume that many EU countries could come out in support of an African candidate.

The race for the position appears to be completely open: Amina Mohamed and, for many, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala are among the easy favourites. Both, especially the former World Bank director Okonjo-Iweala, are political heavyweights. An important criterion: The future WTO leadership must be in a position to negotiate with the most important heads of state and government on an equal footing. However, the Nigerian candidate, who has long been

¹ Short biographies of all candidates are attached.

held as the favourite, is seen as having a lack of trade expertise. Amina Mohamed, on the other hand, has presided over the WTO Ministerial Conference 2015 in Nairobi as Foreign Minister. Both, however, will have to contend with the obstacle of having three candidates from the African group in the race. Yoo Myung-Hee is not far behind. She is followed by Mamdouh and Seade Kuri, both of whom are regarded as excellent specialists and WTO aficionados. In contrast, the comparatively less experienced Ulianovschi is considered an outsider. Al-Tuwajri and the British candidate Liam Fox are also seen as having a lower chance of selection. Although the latter enjoys Washington's demonstrative goodwill, this could actually be a cause for rejection by China, among others. In the EU, enthusiasm for the Brexit hardliner Fox will also be limited.

The high number of candidates as well as the rapid US endorsement of Fox could delay the selection process. It is not unlikely that the WTO leadership will in future be in the hands of a woman (from Africa). However, the selection of candidates could become a battle of attrition, from which a compromise candidate could ultimately emerge.

The candidates now have until the 7th of September to promote their candidacy to the WTO member states. The campaign began with individual press conferences with the candidates on the 15th-17th of July. A three-member panel chaired by New Zealand Ambassador David Walker (Chairman of the WTO General Council) will then hold consultations with member states to determine the most promising candidate. This phase should last a maximum of two months and would therefore end on the 7th of November. However, some observers expect a longer process. For the period following Azevêdo's resignation, the WTO General Council may appoint one of the four Deputy Directors-General as interim head. The frontrunner would probably be the German Karl Brauner.

The field of candidates is well cast overall - six of the eight candidates were previously ministers, the other two candidates are considered to have excellent knowledge of the subject. The competition is likely to be correspondingly tough. Expectations are high: The candidates must present a credible concept for the reform of the WTO at the round of interviews. Furthermore, Azevêdo's successor must reform the dispute settlement system and cut Gordian knots in difficult negotiation dossiers - overall a truly Herculean task. Many observers warn that the future of the WTO is at stake in the coming years.

In addition to the debate on personnel, there is also a gradual movement in negotiation dossiers: On the 25th of June, the head of the fisheries working group, Colombia's WTO ambassador Santiago Wills, presented an initial

negotiating text. The original aim was to reach an agreement on this dossier in 2020, which is crucial for the sustainability agenda (Agenda 2030).

Global health risks

The figures in the daily COVID-19 reports remain dramatic. More than 13 million cases and over 570,000 deaths have been confirmed worldwide, roughly half of which are in North and South America.

WHO - request for withdrawal from the USA

In the midst of the crisis, the WHO suffered a serious setback: At the 73rd World Health Assembly in May, President Trump threatened US withdrawal from the WHO - now the USA officially initiated the application for withdrawal of membership with UN Secretary-General António Guterres. In one year's time, on the 6th of July 2021, the USA would therefore leave the WHO. The USA has been a member of the WHO since the 21st of June 1948. The US Congress resolution on accession at the time stated that the USA reserved the right to withdraw - but with a twelve-month notice period, which means that this could be reversed under a new administration or if circumstances changed. If elected, Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden announced that he would reverse the decision on his first day in office.

US President Trump has accused the WHO of failing to inform the international community about the danger of coronavirus in due time and of being under the control of the government in China. The US President had already frozen payments to the WHO in April, thereby attracting heavy international criticism. However, one of the conditions for the enforcement of the withdrawal is the fulfilment of the US's financial obligations to the WHO. The USA - with more than USD 450 million per year the largest donor to the organisation - currently owes the WHO approximately USD 200 million in contributions.

Critics have accused Trump of trying to draw attention away from his own failures with his campaign against the WHO and China. The US State Department emphasised that the USA would continue its efforts to reform the WHO.

Growing role of Germany in Global Health

During the joint visit with his French colleague Olivier Véran, Federal Health Minister Jens Spahn sent a signal of both financial and political solidarity. Germany promised the WHO more than 500 million Euro for this year, and at the same time promised support for the reform of the WHO. During the visit, Mr Spahn also announced an additional 20 million Euro for UNAIDS. Global health will also be a central concern of the German EU Presidency.

Start of the implementation of the demands of the World Health Assembly

On the 6th of July 2020, the WHO sent a mission to China to prepare an investigation into the origins of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. The aim of the mission is to identify "the zoonotic source of the virus and the route of introduction to the human population, including the possible role of intermediate hosts", as required by an unanimously adopted resolution of the WHA. While the majority of researchers believe that the virus crossed the animal-human barrier in a wet market in Wuhan, some suspect its origin in a high-level virological laboratory. The low profile announcement underlines the political explosiveness of the investigation.

Just three days after sending the mission to China, the WHO also announced the establishment of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response (IPPR) to assess the global response to the COVID 19 pandemic. The Panel will be co-chaired by two internationally renowned personalities, former New Zealand Prime Minister and former UNDP Director Helen Clark and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and former President of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. They will work independently and will select other members of the panel and members of an independent secretariat to assist them. The Panel will provide regular progress and interim reports until the final report in May 2021.

Costs of inaction: Risk of Hundreds of thousands of additional HIV, TB and Malaria deaths

The potential of the pandemic to trigger a massive setback in the fight against HIV was the focus of the virtual AIDS conference attended by 20,000 people from 175 countries. The aim: to refocus efforts on the 40-year-old epidemic to ensure that recent successes are not lost.

If efforts are not made to mitigate the disruption to health services and care during the COVID-19 pandemic, a modelling group convened by WHO and UNAIDS expects a horror scenario: A six-month interruption of antiretroviral therapy in sub-Saharan Africa in 2020-2021 could lead to more than 500,000 additional deaths from AIDS-associated diseases, including tuberculosis.

This announcement is a wake-up call to find ways to maintain all vital health services. At the same time, global deliveries of tests and medicines to the most affected countries must be maintained. "The COVID-19 pandemic must not be an excuse to divert investment from HIV," said Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of UNAIDS. There is a risk that the hard-earned gains of the AIDS response will be sacrificed to the fight against COVID-19, but the right to health means that no one disease should

be fought at the expense of the other". 73 countries have warned of a shortage of antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) in their countries as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the causes lying behind the disturbances cited in the survey were untimely deliveries by suppliers and the discontinuation of land and air transport, as well as limited access to health services within countries as a result of the pandemic.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, not only make themselves felt with HIV. According to the Global Fund, not only could this lead to 10 years of progress in HIV being eliminated, but deaths from Tuberculosis (TB) could also increase by 525,000 in 2020. This would set the fight against TB back by 10 years. Malaria deaths could also increase by 382,000 by 2020, undoing 20 years of progress. In the countries most affected by HIV, tuberculosis and malaria, more people could die from other diseases caused by the pandemic than from the virus itself. The ultimate challenge, therefore, is to design strategies to combat COVID-19 in a way that minimises the overall loss of life.

New AMR Action Fund²

The AMR Action Fund, an initiative of the Geneva-based IFPMA, an international body representing the pharmaceutical industry for research & development (International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers & Associations), was launched virtually on the 9th of July. More than 20 leading bio-pharmaceutical companies are involved. The partnership aims to provide patients with two to four new antibiotics by 2030. These treatments are urgently needed to counteract the rapid increase in antibiotic-resistant infections, also known as antimicrobial resistance or AMR. The companies have so far raised nearly \$1 billion in new funding to support clinical research into innovative new antibiotics that target the most resistant bacteria and life-threatening infections. Through the AMR Action Fund, pharmaceutical companies will join forces with philanthropists, development banks and multilateral organizations to strengthen and accelerate antibiotic development. AMR is an emerging global crisis that has the potential to dwarf COVID-19 in terms of deaths and economic costs. In some of the worst-case scenarios it is estimated that AMR will be the cause of death of up to 10 million people per year by 2050.

"Unlike COVID-19, AMR is a predictable and preventable crisis. We must act together to rebuild the pipeline and ensure that the most promising and innovative antibiotics make it from the lab to patients," said Thomas Cueni, IFPMA Director General. With this investment from leading bio-pharmaceutical companies, the AMR Action Fund

² Further information can be found [here](#).

will be the largest collective enterprise ever created to fight AMR.

A crisis overlooked - new UNHCR re-port on global refugee trends

The UNHCR's annual report on global refugee trends³ shows a sharp increase in refugee numbers in 2019: Flight is not a temporary phenomenon and new conflicts, acute food insecurity or climate change threaten a further increase. With 79.5 million people, more than 1% of the world's population is fleeing for the first time, almost double the number of ten years ago. At the same time, the scope of options for solutions, such as return, resettlement in third countries or dignified integration in host countries, continues to diminish. Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, therefore repeatedly stressed the urgency of political conflict resolution.

Controversies in the Human Rights Council

It was definitely a session to be remembered - with these words Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger concluded the 43rd Human Rights Council on the 23rd of June. Originally scheduled for four weeks, it was suspended on the 13th of March after its start at the end of February due to COVID-19. This was followed by lengthy negotiations regarding a resumption with a number of hardliner states. After this was finally achieved and the council resumed in a hybrid format by mid-June, the African group initiated a historic urgent debate⁴ on racism and police violence in the face of the murder of the American George Floyd. A first draft resolution provided for the establishment of an independent International Commission of Inquiry on Racism, particularly in the USA, which has not been a member of the Human Rights Council since 2018. Such a commission of inquiry would have been the first of its kind in the Western world. At the insistence of Australia, Italy, Poland, Germany and the EU, among others, the resolution was watered down by pointing out that a non-country-specific, broader approach would be more effective. The resolution⁵ adopted by consensus no longer explicitly mentions the USA. In addition, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Bachelet, is called upon to report regularly on the topic and to investigate, among other things, structural racism against Africans and people of African descent by law enforcement agencies, as well as government responses to peaceful anti-racism protests.

Furthermore, a fact-finding mission was established for Libya to investigate violations of international human rights standards and international law by all parties since 2016⁶.

The almost seamless kick-off of the 44th session began with a global update on human rights and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Bachelet, the pandemic resembles a heat-seeking device that exposes, and is fuelled by, systemic failures to uphold human rights. In particular, the restrictions on political rights in China, Russia, Kosovo, Nicaragua, Egypt and El Salvador are worrying. Bachelet was also critical of Belarus, Brazil, Tanzania and the USA. COVID-19 calls for more, not less rights and political leadership that is evidence-based and transparent. Measures for particularly affected groups in South Korea, Australia, Costa Rica and Panama, the European Commission's proposal for a multi-year response and Denmark's leadership in ensuring that the UN's guiding principles on business and human rights are respected in economic stimulus packages were positively highlighted. In low-income countries, especially Yemen, Syria, the Sahel region, Southern Sudan, Haiti and Zimbabwe, tens of millions of people are threatened with falling into extreme poverty. If the course is not changed rapidly, not only will development gains over several decades be at stake, but also the sustainability agenda⁷.

The Commission of Inquiry on Syria presented a new report⁸, which covers the period from November 2019 to June 2020 and accuses all parties in Idlib province and surrounding areas of potential war crimes and crimes against humanity. In particular, the systematic attacks by the Syrian and Russian sides on civilians and civil infrastructure, including the use of cluster munitions, resulted in a massive and predictable exodus of more than one million people within only three months. Attacks on schools, markets, clinics and health workers have become part of the war strategy. During the debate on the report, Syrian and Russian delegates questioned the objectivity of the findings and the Commission as a whole, while others argued for a relaxation or suspension of sectoral sanctions.

A resolution on the situation in Xinjiang or on Hong Kong has no prospect of a majority in the Human Rights Council - too many members would block or abstain, taking into consideration also their relations with China. Nevertheless, the UK used the council to voice criticism on behalf of 27 countries on what was happening in Hong Kong and

³ The report can be found [here](#). A summary of the most important trends can be found [here](#).

⁴ This urgent debate is the fifth since the Council was founded. Previous debates have dealt with the Turkish aid ship Mavi-Marmara (2010) and three with incidents in Syria (2012, 2013, 2018).

⁵ The adopted version can be found [here](#), the draft resolutions on the [Extranet](#).

⁶ The resolution can be found [here](#).

⁷ The final report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights (A/HRC/44/40) can be found [here](#).

⁸ The report is available [here](#).

Xinjiang. Cuba, on behalf of 52 countries, supported China's approach in Hong Kong and Belarus, on behalf of 46 countries, welcomed China's approach in Xinjiang⁹.

Humanitarian situation

More than 170 signatories have now endorsed the UN Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was also supported by numerous Geneva-based organisations. Most recently, the UN Security Council also endorsed the appeal on the 1st of July. Actual ceasefires were, however, only declared temporarily and unilaterally in 19 cases and bi-/multilaterally in 2 cases¹⁰. In most conflict regions, such as Syria, Yemen, Nigeria, DR Congo or Afghanistan, fighting continues unabated or is even picking up speed, as can be observed in Libya in particular. One reason for this may be the relatively comprehensive and preventive character of the COVID-19 ceasefires, which, unlike humanitarian ceasefires, are not limited in time and space and are difficult to monitor.

An update of the Global Humanitarian Response Plan on COVID-19 is also expected later this week. A draft already indicates that the appeal will increase by over 50% to over \$10 billion compared to May (\$6.7 billion). Until now only 1.7 billion US dollars have been received. According to a spokesperson for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Geneva, the response so far has been insufficient, given the scale of the crisis - the worst in half a century.

Online summit on the future of work

The 5th International Labour organisation's COVID-19 monitor again presents dramatic numbers: 93% of all employees are affected by lockdowns and in the second quarter the working hours fell by 14% (about 400 million full-time jobs). Even in the best case scenario, the pre-crisis level will not be reached by the end of the year. Accordingly, the ILO invited employers, employees, more than 50 heads of state, government, ministers and representatives of international organisations to the largest ever online gathering held in early July. The focus was on the needs of people working in the informal economy, as well as the need to put poverty reduction, gender equality and climate change at the heart of the recovery process and to recommit the international community to the implementation of the Agenda 2030. In her welcoming address, Chancellor Dr. Angela Merkel stressed the importance of the involvement of the social partners, something which is also regularly postulated by the ILO, and

also praised the guidelines on occupational health and safety issued by the ILO in the context of the pandemic.

Comment and outlook

The timely forging of alliances and of majorities is pivotal in multilateral Geneva in order to successfully assert personnel policy ideas and interests. Consequently, many European representatives in Geneva are aware of the importance of strategic coordination with, for example, the African group, which is formidable in Geneva. Thus underlying the renunciation of a separate candidate for the post of Director-General of the WTO and the support of a non-European (perhaps African?) candidacy is not a lack of global ambition on the part of the EU, but a long-term strategic consideration: Whoever becomes the next Director-General of the WTO will in any case depend to some extent on the room for manoeuvre that the Member States wish to give them. It will also be crucial, according to informed observers, that in the face of growing US-China rivalry in multilateral fora, the supporters of rules-based trade and an ambitious WTO agenda are better coordinated. Not least because of its reputation in the WTO, as well as its high share of the WTO budget, the EU is perhaps more of an absolute key player in the future than ever before; Geneva observers estimate that it has not yet exhausted its potential in this respect.

The German EU Council Presidency in Geneva also faces high expectations: German political and financial commitment is highly valued in many international organisations in Geneva, especially during this time of crisis. This applies not least to the WHO, where Jens Spahn's visit was an important signal. At the same time, however, Germany expects the WHO to play a constructive role in demanding reforms and critically evaluating crisis management. Germany's considerable political and financial commitment is in any case an important lever with which it can and should emphasise its own values and reform ideas.

Interesting to note are the efforts of the United Kingdom to make its global ambition clear in the multilateral arena, especially following Brexit. This is perhaps the framework within which the candidature of Liam Fox for head of the WTO, which came as a surprise to many observers, should be understood. London is also trying to position itself visibly in a number of other institutions. In the Human Rights Council, the United Kingdom often appears as a prominent defender of the values of the global West, at this time with the China-critical statement on Xinjiang and Hong Kong.

⁹ A graphic representation with an overview of the respective countries can be found [here](#).

¹⁰ A COVID-19-Tracker, which links progress in ceasefires with current infection rates can be found [here](#).

However, in the Human Rights Council in particular, China's enormous influence once again made itself felt during the session as the Beijing-friendly statements by Cuba and Belarus clearly demonstrated. China is simultaneously continuing its strategy of occupying leading positions in "technical" organisations that receive little public attention as for example in the newly created technical committee for global lithium standards of the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) which will soon also be headed by China.

Appendix

Candidates for the post of WTO Secretary-General

Jesús Seade Kuri (Mexico)

Jesús Seade Kuri (born 1946) has many years of experience in GATT, WTO, IMF and the World Bank. Seade was Mexican Ambassador to the GATT and also represented Mexico as a negotiator in the Uruguay Round. From 1994 to 1998, Mr. Seade held the post of Deputy Director General of the WTO. He is currently Under Secretary of State for North America in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iwela (Nigeria)

Ngozi Okonjo-Iwela (born 1954) is a member of the People's Democratic Party. She has many years of experience in global finance, economics and international development in Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin and North America. Okonjo-Iwela was Minister of Finance (2003 to 2006, 2011 to 2015) of Nigeria and served as Foreign Minister in 2006. In her 25-year career at the World Bank, she has held the positions of Managing Director and President. Since 2015, she has been the Chairperson of the Gavi Vaccine Alliance, among others.

Tudor Ulianoschi (Republic of Moldova)

Tudor Ulianoschi (born 1983) was Moldova's Foreign Minister from 2018 to 2019. Prior to that, he completed a 15-year career as a diplomat in Washington, Doha and Geneva. From 2016 to 2018 Ulianoschi was Moldova's permanent representative to the UN and WTO, as well as ambassador to Switzerland and Liechtenstein.

Abdel-Hamid Mamdouh (Egypt)

Abdel-Hamid Mamdouh (born in 1953) has many years of experience with the GATT and the WTO. He was appointed Egypt's trade negotiator for the GATT in 1985 and assistant to the Deputy Director General. Mr. Mamdouh held the post of Head of the WTO's Trade in Services and Investment Department. He has also worked in the Egyptian Embassies in Ethiopia, Australia and Switzerland and in the Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade in the Bilateral Trade Relations Department (1976-1979). He currently works as a senior consultant for the American company King & Spalding in Geneva.

Yoo Myung-Hee (Republic of Korea).

Yoo Myung-Hee (born 1967) has many years of experience at the South Korean Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Energy. There she was, among other positions, deputy minister in the FTA negotiations and took over the management of WTO affairs. Yoo has held the post of Trade Minister since 2019. Furthermore, Yoo worked as a senior secretary and later as a consultant at the Korean representation in China (2007-2010). She led the renegotiation of several regional and bilateral trade agreements, including a trade agreement with the USA.

Amina C. Mohamed (Kenya)

Amina C. Mohamed (born 1962) is a member of the Jubilee Party. She was previously Kenya's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Relations. In this capacity she chaired the WTO Ministerial Conference 2015 in Nairobi. She currently holds the post of Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage. Mohamed was already Kenya's Permanent Representative to the WTO (2000-2006) and was the first woman to chair the General Council and the Dispute Settlement Body.

Mohammad Maziad Al-Tuwaijri (Saudi Arabia)

Mohammad Maziad Al-Tuwaijri has held several management positions in local and international banks and in private and public institutions. He was also Secretary General of the Finance Committee at the Royal Court and Chairman and member of various committees and government councils. Al-Tuwaijri was also Vice-Minister of Economy and Planning from 2017 to 2020. In March 2020, he was appointed Advisor to the Royal Court.

Liam Fox (United Kingdom)

Liam Fox (born 1961) is a member of the British Conservatives. He has been a member of the British House of Commons since 1992 and was Co-Chairman of the British Conservatives from 2003 to 2005. Fox was Minister of Defence (2010-2011). As international trade minister (2016-2019) Fox advocated a tough Brexit course.

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