



**Post-Doha Negotiations in the WTO:
Advancing the Interests of South Asian Countries**

Report of the SACEPS Task Force on WTO

Executive Summary

**Task Force hosted by
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The Fourth Ministerial Meeting of the WTO held in November 2001 in Doha has launched a new round of trade negotiations, the first in the WTO, which is being called the *Doha Development Round*. As per the Decision of the Doha Ministerial Meeting, Nine Working Groups and Nine Negotiating Committees were established to look at a host of issues many of which are of crucial importance to South Asian countries. The discussions in Geneva on the *built-in* and *continuing agendas* as well as a number of *new issues* will continue till 2005, and the negotiating outcomes which are to be accepted by WTO member countries as part of the *Single Undertaking* are likely to have far-reaching implications for the external sector performance and economic development of all the countries in the South Asian region.

In the above context, the present study (a) examines and explores the possibility of designing a common South Asian agenda with respect to the ongoing Doha Development Round negotiations in Geneva; (b) Identify a set of issues which are of common interest to South Asian countries and (c) come up with suggestions about common positions which could inform the negotiating strategies of South Asian countries in the context of the Doha Development Round discussions.

The study first examines the factors which work for and against a common South Asian approach in the context of the ongoing negotiations. The study concedes that there are conflicts of interests within South Asia – the state of regional cooperation amongst countries of South Asia needs to be further strengthened for any cooperation at the global level to succeed, and the developing and least developed countries of South Asia have their own priorities and their own perspectives on many of the issues on the negotiating table. However, the study goes on to argue that with respect to many of the issues in the negotiating agendas there is a strong case for South Asian countries to gain from a concerted effort in identifying areas of common interest and subsequently pursuing them in the discussions in Geneva. The study refers to the Ministerial consultations of the SAARC Commerce Ministers which had taken place before the Seattle and Doha Ministerial Meetings that are suggestive of the synergies which can be drawn from such a concerted approach. The study points out that the lessons from the negotiating experience of the EU, African and other regional Groups in Geneva are rather instructive for South

Asia. The paper also argues that of a common perception and similar assessment about globalisation and as regards ways and means to make it work do allude to a conducive environment for a concerted effort to design a common South Asian approach and strategy in the context of the WTO.

The study then goes on to examine a number of key negotiating agendas which are of interest to South Asian countries and identifies a set of issues where South Asian countries have common interest and can get on with the task of designing common strategies. The study examines the agendas and issues under discussion in Geneva and the various positions and perspectives which inform these discussions. The study attempts to identify a set of issues where South Asian countries have common interest. The study then analyses those issues and comes up with proposals as regards approach and negotiating stance which could be pursued by the South Asian countries with respect to those issues. Thus, the study examines various provisions and proposals with respect to the ongoing negotiations in Geneva on Market Access Issues, Trade in Services (GATS), Implementation Related Issues, Special and Differential Treatment, Positive Agenda, Agreement on Agriculture, Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights, Industrial Tariffs, and Singapore Issues. With respect to each of these negotiating agendas the study identifies concrete provisions and issues in which South Asian countries have common interests, and stand to gain by designing common negotiating positions. The study attempts to articulate some of those positions with respect to specific ongoing negotiations.

The study comes up with a number of recommendations as regards the modalities to design a common South Asian strategy in the WTO. The study argues that South Asian countries should agree to work on the design of a *de-minimis* and *prioritised* common agenda. This will need to be implemented through intergovernmental consultations and expert group meetings. The study proposes that the cause of designing a common South Asian agenda should be supported through appropriate institutional mechanisms both within the region where strategies are formulated, and in Geneva where negotiations are carried out.