

Washington Tariff & Trade Letter

Vol. 44, No. 4

wttonline.com

January 29, 2024

US Envoy Promotes Viet Nam Investment

Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment Jose W. Fernandez met with Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh in Hanoi on January 25, 2024.

In their meeting, Under Secretary Fernandez "reaffirmed the United States as an enduring partner" and expressed support for the rapid development of Vietnam's semiconductor ecosystem as part of the U.S.-Vietnam Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

This effort includes cooperation to launch workforce development initiatives. "The US will work with Việt Nam in supporting Vietnamese schools to have over 50,000 engineers in this field in the next few years. That's important for Việt Nam's development of a semiconductor industry," Mr. Fernandez stated. [READ MORE](#)

WTO: DG & EU Rep. See Limited Outcomes for MC13

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General of the World Trade Organization, forecast that the forthcoming 13th ministerial conference could yield "two or three agreements," notably on harmful fisheries subsidies, a moratorium on customs duties for electronic transmissions, and enhanced flexibilities for developing nations.

In a dialogue with Valdis Dombrovskis, European Commission Vice President, at the European Civil Society event, Okonjo-Iweala also advocated for an agreement on investment facilitation, currently under negotiation by 110 countries on a plurilateral basis. [READ MORE](#)

WTO: Dispute Settlement Body Meeting

Since there is no consensus on formalization of the informal process at this point in time, the Chair suggested that members allow the informal process on reform to continue to do as much work as possible to achieve a successful outcome.

The prospects for restoring the World Trade Organization's (WTO) two-tier dispute settlement system, particularly its final adjudicating limb, the Appellate Body, appear dim at the upcoming 13th Ministerial Conference. Nonetheless, there seems to be an effort to declare a partial victory at MC13, with expectations of continued negotiations post-conference. [READ MORE](#)

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[WTO: E-Commerce JSI Talks Intensify](#)

The Joint Statement Initiative on electronic commerce co-convenors – Australia, Japan, and Singapore – have escalated negotiations, aiming for a decision at the World Trade Organization's 13th ministerial conference. They race to announce a decision concurrent with the proposed plurilateral Investment Facilitation for Development at MC13, issuing a draft chair's text.

The co-convenors released two restricted proposals (INF/ECOM/84 and INF/ECOM/85), reviewed by WTD, for intensive negotiations at the upcoming meeting from January 30 to February 2. [READ MORE](#)

[WTO: Ditch TRIPS, Senators Say](#)

A bipartisan group of Senators, led by Finance Committee Ranking Member Mike Crapo called for President Biden to reject the proposal before the World Trade Organization (WTO) that would waive intellectual property (IP) protections for COVID-19 diagnostics and therapeutics. [READ MORE](#)

[Hill Calls for Firearms Export Reforms](#)

A group of Democratic lawmakers has called for the Commerce Department to strengthen export controls and end-use checks for firearm exports.

The letter comes as Commerce prepares for the expiration of its 90-day pause on export approvals of certain firearms and related components. [READ MORE](#)

[BIS Broadens Russia Sanctions](#)

The Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) has expanded the scope of the EAR's Russian and Belarusian Industry Sector Sanctions by adding 95 6-digit Harmonized Tariff Schedule (HTS) codes to the list of items requiring a license for export, reexport, or transfer (in-country) to Russia or Belarus.

The expanded list of items includes certain chemicals, lubricants, and metals, and it covers the entirety of Chapter 88 of the HTS (aircraft, spacecraft, and parts thereof). [READ MORE](#)

[EU: Export Control Dual Use Guidelines & White Paper Issued](#)

The European Commission has issued new Guidelines on data gathering and processing on export controls. This follows the Commission White Paper on export controls, released Thursday 25 January, which highlights the need to fully implement the EU's dual-use regulation.

The Guidelines set out in detail the process for the collection of licensing data by the European Commission and the competent authorities of the Member States.

The White Paper suggests several measures, including the reinforcement of uniform controls in the EU, establishing a forum for political coordination on export controls, enhancing the coordination of new National Control Lists, and moving forward the evaluation timeline of the Dual-use Regulation. [READ MORE](#)

GAO: Farmland Ownership Data Needs Work

While foreign ownership of U.S. agricultural land has grown nearly 50% in the past six years, USDA and national defense agencies may not have all the information they need to know about which countries are investing and where, according to a report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO).

Foreign investors in U.S. agricultural land are required to submit forms describing their transactions to USDA, as required by the Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act of 1978 (AFIDA). But the GAO notes AFIDA was not designed as a national security program, and "AFIDA forms are focused on data collection rather than identifying potential national security concerns." [READ MORE](#)

Bill Bans Funds for Chinese Biotech Collaboration

Legislation barring federally-funded medical providers from signing contracts with foreign adversary biotech companies has been introduced in both the Senate and the house of Representatives.

The Prohibiting Foreign Access to American Genetic Information Act of 2024 would ban all biotechnology companies that are owned or controlled by a foreign adversary, such as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and whose business practices threaten national security, from receiving U.S. taxpayer dollars through federal contracts, grants, and loans. [READ MORE](#)

USMCA: More Work to be Done

The third mid-year meeting under the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement concluded with trade officials from the three countries agreeing that more work need to be done to fully implement the trade deal.

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Autoliv Plant USMCA Complaint Resolved

The United States and Mexico today announced the successful resolution of the USMCA Rapid Response Labor Mechanism (RRM) matter at the Autoliv Steering Wheels Mexico facility in El Marqués in the state of Querétaro, Mexico, where workers were previously denied their freedom of association and collective bargaining rights.

After the United States requested Mexico's review of the matter, Mexico and the company took several actions to address violations of labor law, including reinstating dismissed workers and correcting other employer interference in union activities. [READ MORE](#)

[Brits Cheesed at Canadian Dairy Policy](#)

CBC Reports British negotiators walked away from trade talks with Canada Thursday — a dramatic development that taps the brakes on a bilateral trade deal between the two Commonwealth nations that has been years in the making.

A major sticking point between the two sides remains how much tariff-free access U.K. producers should have to the Canadian cheese market. [READ MORE](#)

[Burma Business Advisory Issued](#)

Six U.S. Departments published a Supplemental Advisory, reminding businesses and individuals of the compliance and reputational risks associated with trading with the military regime in Rangoon. While North American companies continue to engage in Burmese extractive industries, the growing ring of sanctions means firms in the Rare Earths, Timber and Precious Metals trade run an increasing risk of negative legal, financial, or reputational consequences. [READ MORE](#)

[Uyghur Act Not Enforced Lawmakers Say](#)

The leaders of the House Select Committee on China are questioning whether the US government is effectively enforcing a law aimed at keeping out of the US market products made in China by forced labor.

Committee Chairman Mike Gallagher (R-Wisc) and ranking Democrat Raja Krishnamoorthi (Ill) have sent a letter to Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, calling for immediate action to strengthen enforcement of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act. [READ MORE](#)

[EU Proposal to Ban Force Labor Advances](#)

The Council of the European Union adopted a position on a regulation to ban products made with forced labor from the EU market. This mandate aims to combat forced labor, introducing improvements to the initial proposal.

The proposal defines forced labor per International Labour Organization standards and requires authorities to assess risks from various sources, including civil society submissions and a forced labor risk database. If forced labor is suspected, investigations may be initiated, leading to product withdrawal and market/export bans. [READ MORE](#)

[Biden Vetoes EV Chargers Bill](#)

President Biden announced last week his decision to veto and return to Congress a resolution (SJRes 38) to eliminate the domestic manufacturing standards for electric vehicle chargers under Buy America rules.

In his veto message, the President said the resolution would weaken Buy American requirements by reverting to the Federal Highway Administration's general waiver for manufactured products. [READ MORE](#)

[Liz Cannon Named Commerce Tech Security Policy Chief](#)

Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) announced that Elizabeth "Liz" Cannon will serve as the first Executive Director of the Office of Information and Communications Technology and Services (OICTS) beginning on Monday, January 22, 2024.

OICTS is charged with implementing a series of Executive Orders (EOs) under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) focused on protecting domestic information and communications systems from threats posed by foreign adversaries. [READ MORE](#)

[DDTC: Michael J. Vaccaro is New Chief](#)

Michael Vaccaro is the new permanent Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Defense Trade, responsible for The Directorate of Defense Trade Controls (DDTC). [READ MORE](#)

[Sen. Brown Pans Cunningham DUSTR Bid](#)

Ohio Democrat Sen. Sherrod Brown is opposing the nomination of Nelson Cunningham for the position of Deputy US Trade Representative, citing Mr. Cunningham's past support for the TransPacific Partnership.

"My values have always been clear: I will only support trade nominees who have rejected the failed policies of the past and have a demonstrated record of standing on the side of workers," Sen. Brown said in a statement. [READ MORE](#)

[DOJ puts \\$15M Price on Head of Sanctions Evader](#)

Rewards for Justice is offering a reward of up to \$15 million for information leading to the disruption of financial mechanisms of the U.S.-designated terrorist organization Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

Hossein Hatefi Ardakani is Iranian businessman who has helped acquire and supply sophisticated technology that has supported IRGC weapons production and sales. U.S.-origin flight guidance components procured by the Ardakani network have been identified in recovered wreckage of Shahed drones in Ukraine and other conflict zones. [READ MORE](#)

[AML: Locke Lord Partner gets 10 Years](#)

Former Locke Lord, LLP Equity Partner Mark Scott was sentenced to 10 years in prison by U.S. District Judge Edgardo Ramos for laundering approximately \$400 million of proceeds from the massive international fraud scheme known as "OneCoin." The sentencing followed Mr. Scott's conviction on all counts at trial on November 21, 2019.

Beginning in early 2016, Mr. Scott formed a series of fake private equity investment funds in the British Virgin Islands known as the "Fenero Funds." He then disguised incoming transfers of approximately \$400 million into the Fenero Funds as investments from "wealthy European families," when in fact the money represented proceeds of the OneCoin fraud scheme. [READ MORE](#)