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Couple Dancing In Mexico

by Keld Louie Pedersen

"Chemistry" between two men will be decisive for the result of the Cancún negotiations.

Although more than 150 ministers will meet at the 5th Minister Conference in the WTO, Pascal Lamy and Robert B. Zoellick, the leading parts, will have top attention.

Basically, the negotiations in Cancún are depending on the "chemistry" between these two men. And fortunately it is good.

Pascal Lamy is an experienced EU Commissioner for foreign trade. He knows the European Union better than most people. From 1984 till 1994 he worked as Head of Staff for Jacques Delors, former President of the European Commission. In 1999 he became member of the European Commission and Commissioner of Trade, a most important appointment.

Educated at the Ecole Nationale d'Administration, leading French civil servants university, followed by a career in the French central authorities, e.g. as counsellor to Pierre Mauroy, former Prime Minister, Pascal Lamy is a typical Frenchman.

His proficiency in English is a comfort to the outside world, and more than most Frenchmen he is able to detect when to behave as a European instead of as a Frenchman.

And these chameleonic traits have made Pascal Lamy a respected negotiator, tough at times, but also flexible and reliable. A good deal of humour and a distinct feeling for foreign cultures makes him more friends than enemies, a rare experience for a leading European Union Commissioner.

Economy and Agriculture

Robert B. Zoellick, the American foreign trade Head Negotiator, is the contrast to Pascal Lamy.

However, any comparison between the two jobs is difficult.

The work of the European Union Commissioner is laid down in treaties, and his mandate is currently being negotiated and renewed among the EU Ministers, while Robert B. Zoellick has a unique appointment within American governmental authorities.

He is not a minister, and his mandate eventually rests with the goodwill or the dislike of the Congress, i.e. a "fast track" mandate, enabling the Government to negotiate new trade agreements with a subsequent Congress approval.

When the "chemistry" between the White House and Congress is tense the Head Negotiator must currently report to Congress in order to have his mandate of negotiation renewed, which in fact leaves USA out of action in the international trade negotiations.

Robert B. Zoellick is a Harvard Law School graduate and MA in political science of the Kennedy School of Government of Harvard University. Zoellick's career goes back to the first President Bush, for whom he worked as a Deputy Foreign Secretary for economy and agriculture under Foreign Secretary James A. Baker III. Robert B. Zoellick worked as Deputy Foreign Secretary during the negotiations on the Nafta treaty between USA, Canada, and Mexico, the Uruguay negotiations from 1986 till 1993, and the APEC negotiations on the establishment of the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation.

In 1992 Zoellick was appointed Deputy Head of Staff to the White House and Counsellor for President George Herbert Walker Bush. Following the presidential election in 2000 President George Walker Bush re-appointed him to the White House and took his oath as Head Negotiator of Trade.

Formal and correct

Privately Robert Zoellick is relaxed and cheerful. However, at the negotiation table he lacks Pascal Lamy's twinkle in the eye, probably stemming from his permanent fear of insulting people.

Recently quite a number of American diplomats have demonstrated a conspicuous lack of feeling when it comes to behaviour in international relations. To many this has confirmed American arrogance lacking feeling and understanding for requirements of nations of less wealth.

Robert B. Zoellick is aware of that, so beyond rules he is almost overdoing his efforts to be formal and correct. The fact that behind closed doors together with Pascal Lamy he is more himself has prevented more than one commercial policy disagreement from running amok.

This "chemistry" may very well prove decisive for the result of the Cancún negotiations.