The Role of Advisory Centre on World Trade Organization Law (ACWL) in Supporting Developing Countries Regarding the Dispute Settlement Mechanism

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Abstract: Establishment of the WTO is considered as a greatest achievement for enhancing global trade at the end of the last century. The organization has designed a mechanism for solving trade disputed between members of the WTO peacefully. This mechanism is called dispute settlement mechanism and it governs by an independent board which is known as dispute settlement body. However, because there is not a same legal and financial capacity between developed and developing nations for involving this mechanism, the WTO has provided special rules to support developing nations. The organizing also created the Advisory Centre on World Trade Organization Law (ACWL) to maintain balance between its members. Since 2001, the ACWL has offered legal aid in three different areas which are Legal advice, Training activities and Dispute Settlement Support. The aim of this paper is to evaluate ACWL's role regarding offering legal advice and its trainings. It also examines ACWL's role in supporting developing and LCDs regarding dispute settlement mechanism.

Keywords: WTO, Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM), Advisory Centre on World Trade Organization Law (ACWL), Developing countries, Least Developed Countries LDCs, Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU)

1. Introduction

It is more than one century that all experts of economic and politics discuss the global economy term especially after the two world wars. In the interwar period, most governments took intensively the protectionism theory regarding their economy by protecting domestic products and putting tax on the foreign products. Therefore, there was a great concern about the future of the global economy. Establishment of World Trade Organization (WTO) was great step to look forward toward a new vision for trade between nations especially with Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU) which allow all developing and developed nations to participate in the process alike. However, developing countries faces many difficulties to participate actively in the process. This reason pushes the WTO to provide special rules and legal advice for them. Creating the Advisory Centre on World Trade Organization Law (ACWL) is a particular assistance for developing and least developed countries to engage with the process. The paper will discuss dispute settlement mechanism and special treatment of developing

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countries in the Dispute Settlement Understanding. Then, it will explain establishment of the ACWL, the role, services and activities of the centre for developing and least developed countries. Finally, the research will focus on the ACWL's role of involvement developing countries in the WTO dispute settlement process.

2. Dispute Settlement Mechanism

The Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM) is as a successful process which has run all disputes between members of the WTO after establishment of the WTO in January 1995 (Babu, 2012). All countries agreed to operate this kind of resolution because there was great experience for many decades of using it. This unparalleled process for resolving disputes creates an official and compulsory method which leads to settlement unsolved trade disputes between countries without damaging impacts of the international trade (Cheng, 2007). Significantly, it also alleviates the inequality of balance between greater and smaller economic powers because of all great privileges which grants to developing countries and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) through the process (Shadikhodjaev, 2009). For many proponents of the WTO, this goal has achieved by focusing on law rather than power in settlement of disputes between them during the process. They argue that this mechanism is one of the greatest accomplishments of the Uruguay Round because it has been used considerably by most of the WTO members since 1995 (Van den Bossche, 2008).

This mechanism is not just innovated to provide free market and resolve trade disputes between nations, but there are significant decisions for protecting environment. For instance, in the 'shrimp-turtle' case United States want to impose certain measures to prohibit importation of shrimps in 1998 from countries India, Malaysia, Pakistan and Thailand (Koivurova, 2013). The US claimed that other countries should use specific technology and program for protecting sea turtle during harvesting shrimps. The US claimed that they wanted to protect environment by protecting sea turtle from extinction. The DSB of the WTO refused the United States' claim because they said the US attention was not to protect environment, but it was for protection their economy (de La Fayette, 2002). Moreover, for the first time WTO enforced their members to take measures for protecting environment and Appellate Body stated "... We have not decided that the sovereign nations that are members of the WTO cannot adopt effective measures to protect endangered species, such as sea turtles. Clearly, they can and should. ..." (Body, 1998, p. 185). The significant point in the case was WTO recognized that sovereignty and trade should not be viewed as an obstacle for environment protection and WTO offered a greater role for environmentalist to express their opinion of WTO cases. This case explains the importance of the DSB's legal decision not just in trade disputes, but for creating customary in international environmental law, too.

The dispute settlement process is not new. It did not start with establishment of the WTO, but it roots are returned to more than half a century (Warburton, 2010). The mechanism is considered as a continuing of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) as article 3:1 of the DSU mentioned that. "Members affirm their adherence to the principles for the management of disputes heretofore applied under Articles XXII and XXIII of GATT 1947, and the rules and procedures as further elaborated and modified herein". It means that the GATT 1947 obligated countries to follow the DSM, but the GATT did not contain many details regarding the method of processing or implementing disputes. In additions, there are only two short articles mentions dispute settlement obviously in the GATT which are articles

(XXII and XXIII). Thus, it is better to concentrate on the legal rules of the DSU. The DSU was signed by those countries which participated Marrakesh meeting in 1994 (Stewart, 1999).

2.1 Dispute Settlement Process and Special Rules for Developing Countries

The DSM in the WTO is ruled by the dispute settlement understanding and there are four main stages in the DSM which are: consultations stage, panel stage, appellate review stage and the enforcement and implementation stage (Busch & Reinhardt, 2003). Importantly, there are special provisions and privileges in all stages in the process to support developing countries LDCs. Because it is a legal complicated process, the DSU took different method of treatment with developing nations to acclimate with the Dispute Settlement Mechanism (Van den Bossche, 2008).

The first stage of the DSM is consultation stage. In this stage members of the WTO start their dispute between them. If a member realizes that another member breach the WTO rules and regulation, this member has a right to claim in front of the DSB. In this stage, they have sixty days to reach agreement which satisfy both parties (Cheng, 2007). However, there is flexibility for developing countries about consultation as Article 4:10 of DSU stated that "During consultations Members should give special attention to the particular problems and interests of developing country Members". In addition, there is also flexibility for developing countries regarding duration of the consultation as Article 12:10 mentioned that "in examining a complaint against a developing country Member, the panel shall accord sufficient time for the developing country Member to prepare and present its argumentation". These paragraphs are considered as significant privileges for developing countries because they bind developed countries to be patient and grant extra time for consultation with developing countries.

Then, if there is not agreement between the complaint parties, each party has a right to request for panel processing. The panel assembles parties in a meeting with a third party which can join meetings if there is a substantial interest for the third party (Hartigan, 2009). Article 8:10 of the DSU insists that one of the panelists should be from the developing countries as minimum. In any dispute during the panel process which discusses between two members one of the developing nation and another one from developed nation, if the developing country demand that (Rules, 1994).

After that, the parties can discuss the points that will be offering by the panel if there is not any solution, the panel decides on the ultimate report which will be adopted by Dispute Settlement Body later (Johannesson, 2016). After that both parties have a right to appeal the panel report and if it happens, the case will be supervised by the Appeal Body which has authority to issue final decision (Hartigan, 2009). In addition, there is also special solicitude of developing countries in the panel processing as Article 12:11 clarified that should differentiate between developing countries and other countries and it should apply more favor treatment for the developing countries (Rules, 1994). Finally, if it is discovered that the defendant violates WTO rules or agreement of the WTO, there are implementation and enforcement as a final stage in the dispute settlement mechanism and the defendant should implement recommendation which is espoused by the dispute settlement Body (Cheng, 2007).

All there above articles and provisions are taking account developing countries and LDCs' situation because they cannot comply with the WTO rules and regulations as the same as developed countries. The WTO intends to support these countries do not have the same legal and financial capacity like

developed countries. However, despite that all these articles and rules reaffirm treating developing countries different with other developed countries and give them advantages to involve more in the dispute settlement process, many of these countries claim that these rules have never implemented. Moreover, they criticize these rules because they thought that the provision have written just for exhortation and warning (Van den Bossche, 2008).

3. The Advisory Centre on World Trade Organization Law (ACWL)

It was obvious from the inception of the WTO that the developing and the LDCs will face many difficulties regarding implementation and enforcement of various WTO agreements (Gupta, 2008). It is argued that the DSU assumed as magic stick in the trade policy of the WTO. This could be true in theory, but it is not quit successful mechanism in practice from perspective of LDCs and developing countries, as it was expected (Ragosta, Joneja, & Zeldovich, 2003).

The DSU contains 27 intricate provisions including 143 paragraphs in total with four appendixes. These complicated and vague legal language cannot be understood easily by developing nations (Palmeter & Mavroidis, 2004). These legal texts have been negotiated and discussed for more than half a century between developed countries without significant participation of developing nations. Thus, developing countries and LDCs do not have enough knowledge and skills compare to developed nations to participate actively in the process (Bethlehem, 2009). It is hard for developing countries to understand the DSU rules in particularly with the lack and restricted capacity in the field of international trade law. This makes developing nations to be subordinate of developed nations regarding treatment of trade disputes (Palmeter & Mavroidis, 2004).

According to Schunken developing countries face two main challenges when they want to participate in the dispute settlement system effectively. Firstly, they are not like developed countries because they do not have enough legal skills with deficiency of experiment. Therefore, it will cost a large amount of money because they need to relay on leasing a foreign legal consultant. Secondly, Developing countries do not have ability to obtain enough knowledge to engage with dispute settlement actively which makes domestic firms in these countries do not realize breach of their obligations in the WTO. With deficiency of knowledge and lack of information about the WTO laws, their capacity to utilize the system will be limited (Schunken, 2008).

Therefore, establishment of the Advisory Centre on World Trade Organization Law (ACWL) was inevitable necessity for involving developing countries and LDCs in the dispute settlement. The agreement for creating the center was signed by 29 countries in 1999, it went to force in 2011. The ACWL is offering free or lower cost legal aid for these countries. The center is funded significantly by European Union. The membership fee from developing countries is another financial source for the center (Georgiev & Van der Borght, 2006).

Heretofore, the advisory centre of the WTO contains 74 members including 31 members from developing countries and 11 members are from developed country. Another 43 parties from LDCs are member of the ACWL or they are under procedure to be a member in the centre and the services will be available for them in near future. The ACWL can serve all these countries now (Meagher, 2015). The centre has three main aims for supporting developing nations including legal advice, training activates

and dispute settlement support. The paper evaluates each of them regarding benefits for developing countries in the DSM.

3.1 Legal Advice

The centre serves all kind of advices for its' members regarding any issue or cases in the WTO law. According to the centre, there are three types of legal advices which can provide by the centre and all advices and opinions are free for the members (Meagher, 2015). However, other developing countries which are a member in the WTO can use the services in the centre, but they do not have opportunity to utilize these legal serves for free and they should pay to the centre when they seek for advice (Schunken, 2008).

As Meagher (2015) illustrates the ACWL provides three types of legal advice. The first class is including opinion and legal advices regarding the problems or issues will face members during negotiations and inside the WTO decision making. These opinions will reinforce the developing countries capacity to preserve their interests and encourage them to participate in the system actively (Islam, 2012). The second type of opinions is providing legal advice for member countries which seeking advice about concerns in harmonize their trade policy with the WTO law (ACWL, 2012). These opinions help them to avoid any disputes in the future regarding domestic trade policy including subsidies, anti-dumping, SPS tariffs and other trade measures. The third type covers legal opinions regarding concerns and challenges of developing countries about measures of other countries in the dispute settlement mechanism (Meagher, 2015). In respect with legal advice fee, there is a logical division for countries depending to their financial ability. According to the per capita income and GDP the centre has divided the countries into four classes or categories which are category A, B, C and LDCs. There is different fee for each category according per capita income (Shaffer, 2006).

The ACWL's ability has improved in a great way regarding providing legal opinions and there is a sharp increasing in quantity and quality of legal opinions which has been provided. The centre only provided 96 legal opinions in 2006 and the number increased to 231 opinions in 2012 (ACWL, 2015, p.11). In addition, increasing legal opinions continued to 175 legal opinions in 2008, 194 in 2009, 206 in 2010, 218 in 2011 and 231 legal opinions in 2012. The most important point is that the majority of these legal opinions were provided for category C (ACWL, 2012). In addition, the ACWL provided support in ten disputes in 2015 which is the highest participation in the dispute settlement (ACWL, 2015).

Despite that, the center has been criticized because the border of ACWL's mandate is limited regarding the scope of the legal services which can be serviced to members. Developing countries may not allow achieving a particular knowledge in respect with legal consultant service because of nature of privacy in the legal advice if the service located outside of the nature of the advisory centre's mandate. It means that the centre cannot engage with political trends of any issue regarding the WTO law. In addition, developing countries cannot obtain actual strategy and effective requirement for all trends of the issues when arising during the Dispute settlement mechanism (Schunken, 2008, p. 71).

3.2 Training

Training is one of the significant sector of the ACWL. The centre prepares different kinds of training every year. This training courses assist developing countries to build capacity for their officials who

dealing with the WTO rules and regulations (Bown & McCulloch, 2010). There are three main types of training activities which can provide by the centre: Annual Training Courses, Secondment Program and Occasional seminars. Importantly, only developing countries and LDCs can benefit from these activates which cover the WTO law, legal doctrine and dispute settlement mechanisms (Publications, 2005).

One of the major training activities in the centre is training courses. The foremost six-month training courses was started for two hours every week in 2012 for government officials from LDCs and developing countries. Many issues will be discussed during these courses and continuous of increasing is proof that the courses are more common between these countries now (ACWL, 2012). The ACWL provides eleven training courses yearly and two of third of entrants are awarded certification. The centre has granted certification for 389 participants so far. In addition, The ACWL has provided complimentary training courses for government officials of developing countries, if they cannot schedule with the specific time of training (ACWL, 2015).

Another activity which has been run by the Advisory centre of the WTO is presenting casual seminars for representatives of all developing and LDCs countries. In these seminars many experts in the WTO is invented by the centre to share their experiences with the delegates from these countries (Meagher, 2015). Many issues regarding Dispute settlement process, interest issues of these countries and legal problem of the WTO are discussed and they led by specialist in these areas as a visitor speaker (Bown & McCulloch, 2010).

The last important activity in the centre is Secondment Program for lawyers in the developing country and LDCs which runs nine month training every year. The Secondment Program for trade lawyers has started in March 2005. In this program, lawyers work and engage with expert lawyers and they have a chance to learn from them. They can obtain knowledge from them because they are engaging effectively with dispute settlement mechanism and all issues regarding WTO law (Meagher, 2015). Liang-rong Lin former participant in the Seconded Lawyer of the ACWL may considered as an example for trade lawyers who gain enough expertise in the program. She explains positively her experience in the centre as she states "It was truly a privilege to engage in highly intellectual and inspiring discussions with a maestro in WTO law in such a small class. The greatest contribution the ACWL made was to train us in the skill of identifying legal issues " (ACWL, 2011). She also explained how was benefited from the training after she returned back home. She contributed in the dispute (DS377) about ITA to help Taiwanese team just after one month of finishing training. In addition, she participated to draft the second submission for the panel. She was the representative of her country in the second panel hearing because she obtained enough information to involve her country in the dispute settlement process. She is training lawyers in her country now and share with them all knowledge and experiences that collected from the ACWL's Secondment Program (ACWL, 2011). Thus, these type of programs and activities can be used to train domestic lawyers and government officials from developing countries and LDCs by benefiting from domestic lawyers who participate in the ACWL's program and training activities.

All these training activity are definitely useful for developing countries LDCs. While, Schunken is not optimistic about the location where all these trainings operate because most of these trainings are holding in Geneva as the head office of the centre (Schunken, 2008). Furthermore, because of the majority of the developing countries LDCs do not have delegations there, these activates may not be very useful for them and they are most wanted for these services. With respect of Secondment Program,

there is no doubt it is quite necessary to increase legal skills of trade lawyers in the developing countries. However, the center can offer only three training position each year because of the financial and structural situation (Schunken, 2008).

3.3 Dispute Settlement Support

According to Article 2:1-2 of Agreement on establishing the Advisory Centre on WTO Law, supporting and advising developing countries and LDCs during the dispute settlement process are one of the major objective of the Advisory centre (WTO, 1999). The centre can provides legal support during all stages of the dispute settlement mechanism, if a country participates as respondent, complainant or third parties. The ACWL's service includes the following points in the DSM: (1) primary preparing and estimation of the case (2) preparing request for consultation (3) preparing questions and answers during the consultation stage (4) preparing request for establishing a panel or meeting of the DSB; (5) providing legal advice on formation of the panel and sending a request to the Director General of the WTO regarding formation of the panel (ACWL, 2007, p. 17). "(6) drafting panel submissions and responses to written questions of the panel and other parties in the proceedings; (7) advocacy at panel meetings, including answering questions from panels and parties at the meetings; and (8) drafting notices of appeal and notices of other appeal, Appellate Body submissions and advocacy during Appellate Body hearings, including responses to questions" (ACWL, 2007, p. 17-18).

4. Role the (ACWL) to Involvement of the WTO Dispute Settlement Process

The great achievement regarding article 27.2 of DSU is a suggestion which was presented by Venezuela. The preposition was about establishment an independent body from the WTO contains of five consultants. These consultants not comprise just developing countries, but it also should cover all members in the WTO. This separate unit from the WTO secretariat will assist it to work effectively and help all members without interference of the secretariat. Thus, the ACWL was created as an independent body of the WTO in 2011 (Van der Borght, 1999).

All developing and least developed countries are benefited free legal advice by the ACWL, but the centre cannot provide advices for free in the dispute settlement processes. These countries will be charged by the centre, but there is a discount for them and thee service available in a low cost for them (Roberts, 2003). The centre offers legal support for developing countries with 30 per cent discount, while least developing countries have 43 per cent discount when they request for a legal support during the dispute settlement procedures (Meagher, 2015).

When these countries seek for advice, they need submit their request to the centre. The expert staff in the centre determines both strong point and weak points of the issue (Davis & Bermeo, 2009, p. 1039). Furthermore, the centre has offered support for developing countries and LDCs in the 41 disputes directly and the ACWL also provided support for these countries in five deputes indirectly through external counsel between 2001 and 2011. In addition, the centre participated almost in fifth of all new disputes in the dispute settlement system (ACWL, 2012).

Developing countries and LDCs are participating in the dispute settlement system considerably. Therefore, they do not have enough experience about the process (Beyerlin, Stoll, & Wolfrum, 2006). While, the United States and the EU are participating in the most cases and they are specialized in this

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area. By assisting developing countries in 49 different cases and participating almost frequently in the disputes, the ACWL collected enough experience and knowledge to share with developing countries and LDCs. Thus, they can advocate of their interests by using these experience and knowledge (ACWL, 2015). Despite that, there is specialize staff in the centre for providing legal support for the developing countries and LDCs, the ACWL is also providing legal services from external legal counsel. It is ordinary issue that two countries have dispute of a particular issue and both of them have a right to request for supporting in the same dispute and both parties have inconsistence goal. However, the centre cannot provide support through the ACWL staff for both parties because there is a conflict of the interests in the dispute. In this situation, the centre offers support for this country which requests firstly, but the support available for other county through list of the external consul (ACWL, 2012).

The roster of external counsel has been instated and organized by the advisory century on WTO law. It contains from different specialized law firms and individual lawyers which they accepted to offer support for developing and LDCs. Furthermore, a party in the dispute has opportunity to choose any legal firm or lawyer from the roster for supporting in the dispute. The legal services which provide by these legal firms and individual lawyers are in the same quality as legal services available in the ACWL. On the other hand, the fees between the Advisory centres are might be different with fees in the external counsel for services that is offered for disputes (ACWL, 2012). The centre pays the extra fee for the country that is supported by external counsel to the same fee with other county which is supported by the advisory centre (Schunken, 2008).

However, the ACWL has been criticized because it is thought that the centre not provides a full legal advice for the developing countries. In addition, it also argued that the centre was not bias in many disputes or the support was not satisfied the country that request for advise because the centre does not have independent finance resources (Lekgowe, 2012). With all critics, developing countries are responsible because they would not to join the ACWL in particular LDCs. If they will be a member of the ACWL, they have to pay half or less than half of legal service fee comparing to private legal firms in the DSM. In addition, these countries do not participate actively in the DSM. Thus, they cannot gather enough skills and experiences in this area comparing to developed countries (Gosset, 2015).

5. Conclusion

To conclude, establishment of The Advisory Centre on World Trade Organization Law (ACWL) was significant of the WTO member to help developing countries in involvement of the dispute settlement mechanism. During these fifteen years, the centre has provided useful services and training for developing countries LDCs to participate in the system more actively. Helping these countries in 41 different disputes is a great proof for that. While, the centre has been criticized because of the limitation of services and the financial sources, but all these critics cannot cover all achievements that the centre has obtained for developing countries in involvement with dispute settlement process in the short period of a time. Finally, results show that with getting more experience in the future, the centre will be a great source for the international trade law and real partnership for developing countries LDCs in dispute settlement mechanism.

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