

“There are effectively three distinct issues raised by the survey. The first is raised by the fact that it is based on a large sampling cutting across a broad range of stakeholder communities and geographies. And although the WTO has improved in recent years, its system for engagement and feedback loops is not well-developed. I will use a few extra minutes at the outset to offer some thoughts about this, as I do not expect it to be a focus of Chuin Wei’s remarks.

The second issue is the substance of what needs reform. The survey’s nine questions are themselves a choice, and not at all exhaustive of the list of underlying issues – e.g., agriculture, industrial subsidies, SOEs vs. market principles, the scope of the national security exception, etc. I would expect him to speak about this, on which you may wish to comment as well, and no doubt a good number of FMG members will have views on which among the candidates deserves what priority in what sequence.

The third issue, on which the report is weakest, is whatever the potential substantive agenda, what are credible steps to move a reform agenda forward? What about the WTO-minus-one angle? Is it just a WTO question, or given the current account and financial angle, must there be a broader set of Bretton Woods considerations? In what non-negotiating setting, involving what stakeholder communities (to come full circle), can thought leadership come to the fore? Recall for example that it took the Council on Foreign Relations in the US, and the MacDonald Commission in Canada, to articulate and socialize the idea of free trade before the two countries earned sufficient social license to engage on the original bilateral FTA negotiations...”