

THE GENEVA BRIDGE

*AI Governance Interoperability —
A Technical Mechanism for Inclusive and sovereign Digital Trade*

Brief for MC14 Yaoundé | 26–29 March 2026

Prepared by: **Geneva AI Governance Institute (GAIGI)** -February 2026

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Executive Summary

Global digitally delivered services reached USD 4.64 trillion in 2024, yet regulatory fragmentation not technology is the primary barrier to inclusive participation. With six major economies advancing divergent AI governance frameworks, compliance costs for high-risk systems can reach €193,000–€400,000+ per jurisdiction, effectively locking out SMEs and developing-country enterprises.

The Geneva Bridge is a voluntary, neutral mechanism that maps functional equivalences between AI governance requirements enabling compliance documentation prepared in one jurisdiction to be read and assessed in others. It translates; it does not harmonise. National authorities retain full sovereignty over all acceptance decisions.

How it works

- Three certification levels calibrated to SME budgets: €1K–€5K (basic entry), €20K–€50K (multi-market mapping), €50K–€100K (sectoral assessment). Level 1 costs are fully subsidised for LDC-based enterprises.
- Sovereign exclusion list: each economy defines what is excluded everything else is eligible. Withdrawal is immediate and unconditional. Export controls, sanctions, and national security measures always prevail.
- WTO-anchored: aligned with Article 6 of the TBT Agreement (voluntary recognition of conformity assessment procedures) no treaty renegotiation required.

What we ask of WTO Members at MC14

1. Ministerial recognition that technical mechanisms facilitating the understanding of AI conformity assessment procedures, consistent with TBT Article 6, may serve as useful trade facilitation tools.
2. Support for pilot programmes (2026–2028): 3–5 volunteer countries, 8–10 AI systems each, targeting 30–40% reduction in deployment delays. 100% GAIGI technical support no WTO funding required.
3. Preliminary deliverables: equivalence matrix for EU–Singapore and US–Japan pairs (Q2 2026); Matrix v1.0 with sectoral guidance (Q4 2026).

About Geneva AI Governance Institute (GAIGI)

The Geneva AI Governance Institute is a Swiss-based applied research institute and ITU Sector Member, operating at the intersection of normative strategy, technical engineering, and international governance under the exclusive supervision of Geneva cantonal authorities.

Without action, OECD/WTO modelling projects up to –4.5% global GDP loss from regulatory fragmentation. With interoperability bridges, WTO simulations project +12–13% GDP by 2040.

I. THE OPPORTUNITY — AND THE RISK

The Alan Turing Institute estimates that the AI could automate 84% of repetitive public service transactions in the United Kingdom, saving the equivalent of 1 200 person-years of work annually.¹ Also, from 2015 to 2024, global digital services trade grew at an average annual rate of 8.9%, reaching 53.4% of total services trade. By September 2025, 138 free trade agreements—covering over 110 countries and roughly 37% of existing FTAs.² In 2024 alone, exports of digitally delivered services rose 8.3%, hitting US\$ 4.64 trillion, with computer services surging 12% to cross the US\$ 1 trillion mark.³

The challenge is not technology. it is regulatory fragmentation. Multiple economies are advancing legitimate AI governance frameworks, each reflecting national priority:

Economy	Approach	Key Instrument
European Union	Rights-based, risk-tiered	AI Act (August 2024), 4 risk categories + GPAI rules
China	Development-oriented governance	Multi-dimensional framework: Cybersecurity Law, DSL, PIPL, Generative AI Measures
United States	Innovation-driven, state-led + federal guidance	47 states with AI bills; NIST voluntary frameworks
Republic of Korea	Risk-based, sector-specific	AI Basic Act (watermarking, high-impact risk assessments) ⁴
Japan	Agile, principles-based	AI Strategy 2025, voluntary guidelines
Brazil	Risk-tiered with development objectives	PL 2338/2023 (approved December 2024) ⁵

The necessity of meeting multiple, distinct regulatory requirements can result in compliance costs that are potentially prohibitive for many enterprises. Independent estimates (CEPA 2024) place EU AI Act compliance for high-risk systems at €193,000–€330,000 per system.⁴ Real-world data from mPedigree, a Ghanaian healthtech platform operating across ~24 countries, indicates €230,000–€400,000+ in first-year EU compliance costs — while its US expansion proved viable, demonstrating that regulatory divergence, rather than technical capacity, is the determining barrier.⁵

¹ <https://www.turing.ac.uk/news/publications/ai-bureaucratic-productivity-measuring-potential-ai-help-automate-143-million-uk>

² CAICT, Annual Report on Global Digital Trade and Economic Rules (2025)

³ WTO annual report 2025 : https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/anrep_e/ar25_e.pdf

⁴ CEPA (2024), Costs of EU AI Act Compliance for High-Risk Systems. Centre for European Policy Analysis. Average costs €193,000–€330,000 per system; annual maintenance €30,000–€71,400. : <https://www.ceps.eu/clarifying-the-costs-for-the-eus-ai-act/>

⁵ mPedigree (2026), GAIGI Compliance Survey: MSME Cost Analysis for Multi-Jurisdictional AI Deployment. Verified first-year EU compliance costs for high-risk digital concierge deployment: QMS €193K–€330K, EU Authorised Representative €50K–€75K annually, GDPR DPIAs €14K–€149K, technical documentation €4,390, robustness testing €10,733, human oversight €5K–€8K annually, training data quality €4,763.

International recognition is building:

- **UN Secretary-General's Global Dialogue on AI** (September 2025): calls for interoperability between governance regimes.⁶
- **United Nations University** (February 2026): Written statement from the Rector and UN Under-Secretary-General emphasising the need to bridge the AI governance divide through co-creation and strengthened regional capacity.⁷
- **G20 South African Presidency** (2025): recognises that divergence requires greater coordination.⁸
- **Geneva AI Trade Forum** (11–12 February 2026): live demonstration of regulatory crosswalk tools (NIST ↔ EU AI Act) with private-sector validation from Switzerland (CCIG) and Morocco (APEBI), and participation of experts from WTO, CAICT, OECD, and UNU.

Without action, OECD/WTO modelling shows that full data-flow fragmentation could reduce global GDP by up to 4.5%.⁹ **With the right enabling policies**, WTO simulations project that AI could raise global GDP by 12–13% by 2040.¹⁰

⁶ UN Secretary-General launch, September 2025; explicit goal of "promoting interoperability between governance regimes.": <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statements/2025-09-25/secretary-generals-remarks-high-level-multi-stakeholder-informal-meeting-launch-the-global-dialogue-artificial-intelligence-governance-delivered>

⁷ Written Statement of the Rector of the United Nations University and UN Under-Secretary-General for the Geneva High-Level Dialogue on AI Interoperability (Geneva AI Trade Forum), Tokyo, 11 February 2026. Emphasises the need for co-creation rather than unidirectional technology transfer and for strengthening Global South participation in AI governance processes.

⁸ G20 (2025), AI Governance Coordination: South African Presidency Outcomes. Recognition of fragmentation challenges requiring greater coordination.

⁹ OECD/WTO (2024), Economic Implications of Data Regulation: Balancing Openness and Trust, Scenario 4 ("data autarky"): https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/economic-implications-of-data-regulation_aa285504-en.html

¹⁰ WTO (2025), World Trade Report 2025: Making Trade and AI Work Together to the Benefit of All: https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/wtr25_e.pdf

II. THE PROPOSAL: TRANSLATION NOT HARMONISATION

The Geneva Bridge is a **voluntary, neutral mechanism** that maps functional equivalencies between AI governance requirements — enabling compliance documentation prepared in one jurisdiction to be read and assessed in others. **National authorities retain full sovereignty** over all acceptance decisions.

Five Foundational Principles

1. **Full sovereignty** — the Bridge provides technical analysis only; national authorities decide.
2. **Equivalence mapping** — identifies where divergent requirements achieve comparable regulatory outcomes, without imposing common standards.
3. **Graduated architecture** — three certification levels matched to enterprise maturity.
4. **Respect for regulatory diversity** — different pathways can achieve equivalent safety outcomes.
5. **WTO anchoring** — aligned with Article 6 of the TBT Agreement: voluntary recognition of conformity assessment procedures.¹¹

Certification Levels (costs calibrated to SME budgets)

Level	Scope	Indicative Cost	Timeline
1	Basic security & market entry documentation	€1,000–€5,000	Weeks
2	Multi-market documentation mapping	€20,000–€50,000	2–3 months
3	Sectoral assessment (health, finance, agriculture)	€50,000–€100,000	2–3 additional months

Ongoing compliance maintenance. AI systems evolve through continuous learning. Geneva Bridge addresses this through cyclical compliance checkpoints aligned with post-market monitoring obligations (e.g., EU AI Act requirements for high-risk systems: 6-month log retention, active human oversight). The Bridge facilitates cross-border sharing of monitoring evidence, enabling regulators to track compliance over the system's lifecycle — not only at the point of market entry.

¹¹ WTO anchoring — The Bridge operationalises Article 6 of the TBT Agreement, which provides that Members shall ensure, whenever possible, that results of conformity assessment procedures in other Members are accepted, provided they are satisfied that those procedures offer an assurance of conformity equivalent to their own procedures (Art. 6.1). The Bridge furnishes the technical evidence enabling that equivalence determination — without substituting for national decision-making authority. This approach builds on the TBT Committee's established framework of regulatory transparency and cooperation (over 60,000 TBT notifications since 1995).

Exclusions — Sovereign exclusion ("Negative") list approach

Each participating economy defines and submits its own Sovereign Exclusion ("Negative") List of AI systems and use-cases excluded from facilitated documentation recognition — an approach modelled on established trade practice. Unlike traditional negative listing, the Bridge inverts the logic to maximize regulatory space: everything is eligible for documentation translation, unless explicitly excluded by sovereign notification. Withdrawal is immediate and unconditional. All national export controls, sanctions, dual-use regulations, and national security measures always prevail. GAIGI has **no licensing or override power**.¹²

III. OPERATIONAL PROOF & TRADE FACILITATION VALUE

Demonstration track (February 2026)

The Geneva AI Trade Forum (11–12 February 2026) demonstrates that regulatory interoperability is technically feasible, economically necessary, and politically achievable. The programme includes a live demonstration of "regulatory crosswalks" (NIST ↔ EU AI Act mapping tools) and private-sector validation tracks:¹³

- **Swiss pilot (CCIG)** — proof-of-concept announcement
- **African pilot (APEBI Morocco)** — proof-of-concept announcement

These validation tracks are distinct from the government volunteer pilot programmes proposed for 2026–2028.

¹² Sovereign Exclusion List approach developed following technical consultations (January–February 2026). Each economy retains sovereign authority over its exclusion list and over acceptance decisions for all systems. Export controls, sanctions, and dual-use regulations always prevail under national and multilateral law

¹³ Geneva AI Trade Forum, 11–12 February 2026, Geneva, Switzerland. Technical demonstration: NIST ↔ EU AI Act mapping tools. Private-sector proof-of-concept announcements: CCIG (Switzerland), APEBI (Morocco). Participation of experts from WTO, CAICT, OECD, and UNU.

Beyond AI systems trade

AI-driven customs risk scoring, implemented under the risk management frameworks of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (Art. 7.4),¹⁴ can reduce physical inspections by 30–60%.¹⁵ Smart logistics platforms can cut port waiting times by 20–30%.¹⁶ The Bridge enables these tools, once certified in one market, to be recognized across borders through its equivalence determination mechanism. In health, the mechanism supports access to life-saving AI diagnostics — advancing the equity principles articulated in the WHO Pandemic Agreement (2025)¹⁷ while respecting national sovereignty over health data governance.¹⁸

IV. OUR RECOMMENDATION FOR WTO MEMBERS

1 — Ministerial acknowledgment

"Members recognise that technical mechanisms enabling the understanding and potential recognition of AI conformity assessment procedures, consistent with Article 6 of the TBT Agreement, may serve as useful trade facilitation tools. Members encourage further exploration of such mechanisms in cooperation with the WTO, ITU, and ISO, fully respecting national sovereignty and voluntary participation."

2 — Support GAIGI pilot programs (2026–2028)

- 3–5 volunteer countries required for the pilot program
- 8–10 AI systems per country (healthcare, logistics, agriculture) can be certify
- Target KPIs: 30–40% reduction in deployment delays
- Impact report before MC15 (November 2027)
- 100% GAIGI technical support no WTO funding required

¹⁴ WTO, *Trade Facilitation Agreement*, Art. 7.4 ("Each Member shall, to the extent possible, adopt or maintain a risk management system for customs control"). Art. 7.4.3 requires Members to "concentrate customs control [...] on high-risk consignments and expedite the release of low-risk consignments." See: tfadatabase.org/tfa-text/measure/18

¹⁵ WCO, *Report on the Adoption of AI/ML in Customs* (March 2025) — AI-based risk assessment systems reduced inspection times by up to 60% in several pilot countries. See also: Geourjon & Laporte, "Inspecting Less to Inspect Better: The Use of Data Mining for Risk Management by Customs Administrations," *Ferdi Working Paper* No. 46 (2012), finding a 60% reduction in inspections through the SAGAR data-mining system in Senegal. WCO/World Bank case studies further report automated risk engines cutting physical inspections by 30–50%.

¹⁶ Port of Rotterdam Authority & PortXchange, *Pronto/Synchronizer Platform* (2018–present) — AI-powered data-sharing platform reduced vessel idle time on departure by 20%. Confirmed by Shell GM Shipping & Maritime: "We have reduced the waiting time up to 20% for departing ships." See also: UNCTAD, *Review of Maritime Transport 2024–2025* — ports adopting digital technologies (AI, blockchain, automation) report reduced waiting times, better cargo tracking and more efficient transshipment.

¹⁷ WHO, *Pandemic Agreement*, WHA78.1 (adopted 20 May 2025), Art. 3.4: "equity as a goal, principle and outcome of pandemic prevention, preparedness and response." Art. 12 (PABS System) mandates equitable access to "vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics."

¹⁸ *ibid.*, Art. 3.1: "the sovereign right of States [...] to legislate and to implement legislation, within their jurisdiction." Art. 22.2 states that nothing in the Agreement "shall be interpreted as providing [...] any authority to direct, order, alter or otherwise prescribe [...] national and/or domestic law."

3 — Preliminary deliverables

- **Q2 2026:** Preliminary equivalence matrix (EU–Singapore, US–Japan pairs)
- **Q4 2026:** Matrix v1.0 + sectoral guidance (health, finance, agriculture)

V. WHY THIS IS IN YOUR ECONOMY'S INTEREST?

If you are...	The Geneva Bridge offers...
A regulator	A tool to improve readability of foreign compliance dossiers without delegating authority or reducing domestic safeguards
An exporting economy	Reduced uncertainty from duplicative processes across 6+ diverging governance frameworks
A developing Member	A lower-friction path to a USD 4.64 trillion digital services economy where participation is currently concentrated
A multilateral advocate	A concrete, TBT-consistent pathway that complements existing WTO work no treaty renegotiation needed

VI. ENGAGE

We invite all countries interested to help shape this mechanism. How? Contact us and join the technical advisory group to co-design your sovereign tools to ensure the Bridge reflects your national priorities.

A **bilateral briefing** can be arranged at your convenience during the pre-MC14 period. Upon request, we can also provide:

- A detailed TBT Article 6 legal compatibility analysis (with WTO case law references)
- Customized talking points for your delegation or companies on specific objections (sovereignty, AI complexity, LDC costs)
- A draft intervention text for the TBT Committee or General Council, if your country wishes to raise the topic

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