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ANDORRA

Statement by H.E. Mr. Albert Pintat Minister of Foreign Affairs

(Speaking as an Observer)

The first meeting of the Working Party on the Accession of the Principality of Andorra took place on 13 October this year. That meeting constitutes an important point of reference for a process that started in October 1997 with the submission of our membership application to the Organization's General Council. When my Government decided to bow to the inescapable reality of globalization, the decision was taken in full awareness that even a small country such as ours had to find its place in the new, open and competitive economy that will emerge in the 21st century.

In requesting WTO membership, Andorra was putting into practice the unanimous decision taken by its Parliament in 1996. In 1998, the Chairman of the Working Party on Andorra, accompanied by a member of the Secretariat, paid an official visit to my country. Early this year, Andorra submitted the memorandum on its foreign trade regime. Members then asked questions, to which we responded within the appropriate time-frames. In short, we mobilized our own diplomatic and technical resources in a sustained effort. Now, following the first meeting of the Working Party, bilateral talks must begin with those delegations requesting them so as to work out the conditions for Andorra's entry into the WTO.

Andorra is a small European State and its economy, which is dependent and not very diversified, is vulnerable over the medium term. Thanks to tourism and the associated domestic commerce, we have been able to make some progress in recent decades as a spin-off from the boom in the economies of some of our Western European neighbours. Nevertheless, we must be in a position to prepare our economy for diversification in innovative sectors as a means of guaranteeing improved standards of living for all our inhabitants. With this in mind, Andorra wishes to place itself within the scope of the package of world trade rules. For it is indeed a multilateral trading system regulated by law. Simple though it may be, this principle is decisive for a small sovereign community, as it will entail a tremendous effort to achieve openness, transparency and accountability. Today, we proclaim our commitment to the universal values embodied in the principles of free trade.

The negotiations that lie ahead must strike the right balance between the systemic needs of the WTO and the special vulnerability of small States. We call upon the Members of the WTO to put in proper perspective the real impact of our economy and that of other small candidate countries on world trade.

Free trade is universal in orientation. In the long run, it will make for a more prosperous, integrated, perhaps more democratic and peaceful world, as all nations will be entirely interdependent. At present, trade barriers, exceptions, peculiarities and specificities are disappearing in rapid succession. Borders are disappearing under regional agreements and globalization is a fact of life.

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Free trade is not the only antidote to underdevelopment and poverty, but it is still the sole vehicle for real solidarity among peoples provided it does not remain a mere expression of intent. It is not enough to open markets: world trade must extend beyond the industrialized countries and developing countries must also have their share in it, in keeping with the principles of equity and fair trade.

Thus, the incorporation of new countries into the WTO must be done in a genuine spirit of shared progress, without leaving a trail of hapless victims along the edge of this new highway. All States are equal in terms of sovereignty. But the economies of nations are not identical. The WTO must guard against becoming an exclusive club for the rich and the great or even resembling such a club. Ensuring that all nations are brought within it on an equitable and progressive basis is perhaps a challenge as important as the pursuit of market opening that will be attempted during the Millennium Round.

The city of Seattle, birthplace and major centre of the information society and new technologies, is a good reflection of the contradiction between the great principles of free trade as we espouse them in this room and the fears of countries and peoples who feel neglected in the worldwide process of wealth creation, in which the obligations do not encompass the environmental or labour aspect. Indeed, the demonstrations that have greeted us here in Seattle should be taken as a warning that the principles of free trade as professed in the Millennium Round should be a genuine expression of solidarity and collective progress for all, without exception.
