

**MULTILATERAL TRADE  
NEGOTIATIONS  
THE URUGUAY ROUND**

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Trade Negotiations Committee  
Meeting at Ministerial Level  
Marrakesh (Morocco), 12-15 April 1994

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**BELGIUM**

**Statement by Mr. Robert Urbain**  
**Minister of Foreign Trade and European Affairs**

I would like first of all to thank His Majesty the King of Morocco for the exceptional welcome which has been extended to us. I also wish to add my warmest congratulations on the remarkable organization of this Meeting, which crowns negotiations that lasted over seven years, culminating the Agreement of 15 December last. Belgium, which had the good fortune and privilege to host the 1990 Conference in Brussels, has constantly emphasized, in accord with its partners in the European Union, the need for a comprehensive and balanced agreement. I would like to start by welcoming the achievement of this result, which goes beyond our initial ambitions.

The Declaration made at Punta del Este in 1986 showed a very high level of ambition. By adopting the list of 15 subjects, we set the extraordinary challenge of taking up again the objectives not achieved in the previous rounds of negotiations. The Declaration clearly, and I would say traditionally, aimed at greater liberalization and expansion of world trade. At the same time, however, we wished to strengthen the universal role of GATT, both through better integration of the developing countries and through considerable extension of the scope of the agreements, and particularly the inclusion of agriculture, services, intellectual property and trade-related investments.

To all this, which is in itself a great deal, was added, during the negotiations, the Agreement on the World Trade Organization, which perpetuates and finally provides a structure for the GATT system and which my country had been urging since the abortive attempt of 1948 in order to put an end to the practice of unilateralism too often engendered by that hiatus.

Thus the Uruguay Round has given rise to the most important trade agreement ever concluded in the history of the world. This agreement will undoubtedly constitute a strong incentive, and one highly necessary in the current world economic situation, to revive economic growth for all of us.

That does not mean, however, that work has been completed. In particular it remains to be hoped that an agreement can be reached at this Meeting on access to markets for textiles products. In the months to come, negotiations will have to be continued in the steel, aircraft manufacturing, telecommunications and financial services sectors.

At this Ministerial Meeting we should strongly reaffirm the principles of the primacy of the multilateral rules governing security and legal safeguards in trade.

The institutional framework provided by the WTO was accordingly essential in order to ensure that the elimination of obstacles to trade could be put effectively into practice through a lasting

improvement in market access by strengthening the multilateral system and making it more efficient and coherent. The obligation to bring systems of municipal law into conformity with the multilateral rules is clearly the backbone of the new system.

Lastly, although there are ample grounds for celebrating the achievements thus reviewed, the Belgian delegation also wishes to take the opportunity offered by this Meeting to draw attention to a number of new subjects which it would like to see covered in future multilateral negotiations held in the WTO.

My country - as it has already had occasion to emphasize at the Rio Conference - attaches great importance to the link between world trade and the environment, as well as to the link between trade and social rights.

With regard to the environment, we fully support the proposal to create within the WTO a Committee on Trade and Environment, which would be responsible for examining the connection to be established between international agreements in the environmental field and the multilateral rules of trade, improving the transparency of environmental rules as they affect flows of trade, and making proposals for the harmonization of regulations governing the environmental conditions of production, while at the same time preserving the comparative advantages of the developing countries. The Committee should submit a report to the first biennial Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization.

With regard to social rights, my country wishes to urge that the idea of introducing a number of minimum social standards to be observed by all the contracting parties should be studied objectively and impartially, while at the same time care is taken to ensure that those standards cannot be used for purposes of protectionism. The idea of a certain common and universal "social platform" is not new. There are a number of fundamental principles, to which all of us present here have subscribed either explicitly or implicitly by joining the United Nations and the International Labour Organisation. I am thinking in particular of freedom of association and bargaining (ILO Conventions Nos. 87 and 98), the prohibition of child labour (Convention No. 138) and that of forced labour and slavery (Conventions Nos. 29 and 105), which would appear to be a good starting point.

In order to encourage the observance of these standards without promoting a system based essentially on the idea of sanctions, Belgium will continue to support within the European Union the proposal to afford additional trading advantages, particularly under the generalized system of preferences, to countries which conform to it.

Without anticipating the outcome of this reflection, we hope that the Preparatory Committee of the WTO will be able to undertake an objective study of this matter - the desirability of which no one can deny without claiming that the problem does not exist - and that it will be able to draw up a programme of action.

At this stage - for we do not wish to jump the gun by including in the Uruguay Round matters that have never even been discussed there - all we want is a commitment to establish an agenda for the future covering the points I have just mentioned.

We accordingly welcome the compromise reached last Thursday in the Trade Negotiations Committee, which gives us the assurance that new subjects can be included in the programme of work of the World Trade Organization. For our part, we explicitly request the Preparatory Committee to suggest the inclusion in that programme of an examination of the relations between the trade system and social and environmental standards, in addition to the link existing between currency fluctuations and trade, which also seems to us to merit our future attention.

Belgium is committed, with all its energy and political will, to building the European Union, which we certainly wish to see strong but, in equal measure, open to the rest of the world; as a country totally dependent on foreign trade, it cannot be suspected of protectionist leanings. Our thoughts on the aftermath of Marrakesh reflect the hope that this remarkable meeting of so many partners, represented at such a high level, can be turned to advantage as a new departure and not merely as the culmination of a process, a treatment which would greatly limit its scope. But believe me when I say that we unreservedly and very sincerely welcome the signature next Friday of this long-awaited Agreement which, thanks to the warm hospitality of His Majesty the King of Morocco and his people, has become the world event that it deserved to be.