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ALBANIA

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Two years ago three thousand innocent people lost their life and showed to the world that we are still vulnerable to the evil's actions. Today we pay tribute to all the victims of the 11 September tragedy, their families, to the heroes who sacrificed their lives in the war against terrorism and we never forget that much has to be done to achieve our common goal: a safe and better world for the future generations.

Two years ago we made a promise to three billion people all around the world - the World Trade Organization would be a forum where everyone's voice would be heard and efforts to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development in the world will prevail. Today we see tangible results of this joint commitment and hope for the lives of those who are watching us in here. Today is the time we need to move from separations to synergy, from affirmations to actions, from promises to prosperity.

Albania is a clear example of how the World Trade Organization could contribute for the development. Although a recently acceding Member, Albania has opened its market towards international trade and foreign investments. The experience of Albania has proven that trade liberalization in all its aspects, by means of the facilitation of tariff and non-tariff barriers, the reduction of trade-distorting subsidies, the facilitation of licence procedures of trade activities and the fulfilment of WTO rules, together with a stable macroeconomic environment is a key for economic growth and sustainable development.

Membership in the WTO is a strong commitment for the law enforcement and an important factor for the stability of the macro and microeconomic environment. In this respect, Albania is making every necessary effort to comply with the commitments taken during the accession negotiations and is elaborating a contemporaneous legal framework in compliance with the WTO principles and Agreements.

The Albanian accession to the WTO marked the first and indispensable step for its integration into the international dimension. It constitutes at the same time a challenge for the implementation of deep reforms and integrating economic policies that are being successfully implemented. The advancement in trade reforms is successfully materialized in terms of regional cooperation and integration with eight Free Trade Agreements recently signed with South Eastern European Countries. These agreements aim at increasing export potentials towards our countries by complying with international standards and quality of goods as well as the attraction of foreign direct investment. Although in their initial implementation steps, these Agreements have provided positive effects in the growth rate of export volume for the negotiated goods.

Significant progress has been made by Albania towards the integration into European family and the intensification of relations with our main trade partner, the European Union. The launch of the negotiations for the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union is considered by the Albanian Government as an important milestone in this process and as the beginning of a long and complex road toward deeper economic and trade, as well as institutional and legal reforms.

Reforms recently undertaken by Albania go even further than the WTO boundaries. The very liberal commitments related to agricultural and non-agricultural products market access, are beyond the levels agreed upon during the negotiations of the Uruguay Round. Albania is a small country to affect the global trade but even the smallest changes in the global trade rules, could have profound effects in the Albanian economy.

On the agricultural products market access, as a recently acceding country, Albania is requiring flexibility on the modalities for reduction on these issues:

1. Exemption of low duties from further reduction commitments;
2. providing for lower tariff reduction and longer implementation period for new commitments;
3. providing a grace period - recent acceding Members should begin the implementation of new commitments several years after the beginning of implementation period for all Members; or, several years after the end of accession implementation period, whichever is later.

Since its accession, Albania was in favour of the liberalization and elimination of trade-distorting domestic subsidies in agriculture, and submitted a schedule that served also as a model for other countries. But as a country with an economy in transition where the agriculture sector still provides a very important share in the GDP, being at the same time a base for the development of agro-processing industry, we esteem that the subsidies that fall under the category Green Box measures are still very important for the increase of efficiency in this sector. Therefore, provisions on flexibility are useful for the beginning of the implementation period as well as the length of this period.

On trade in services, Albania has made very liberal commitment during the membership process; that is why we invite other Member countries to undertake further liberal step in their actual commitments.

Last but not least, I would like to take this opportunity to thank, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Albania, the Mexican authorities and the WTO Secretariat for the outstanding organization of the Fifth Session of the WTO Ministerial Conference. I also would like to extend my compliments to the WTO Director-General, the Chairman of the General Council and all the Members for the effort they have made to achieve progress on negotiations related to sensitive but important issues. This is a crucial step towards the fulfilment of the tasks jointly undertaken in the Doha mandate.
