

BELGIUM

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Fifty years of a multilateral trading system

1. Belgium is proud to be one of the 23 founding members of the Havana Charter, whose 50th Anniversary we commemorated on 19 May.

We have thus contributed to the prodigious growth in trade, the bedrock of our economic development since the Second World War, with the objectives of employment, stability and well-being. From the very outset, we have included developing countries in this enterprise, thereby underlining its universal character.

2. Belgium expects a great deal of the multilateral trading system, which must produce wealth that is shared through universal participation. If the WTO is to lay claim to its universal mission, it must include the poorest countries in world trade. Special measures must be taken to meet their needs. The protection of the fundamental human right to work must be taken into account, together with the concerns of governments and society with regard to the environment and health protection. Through constructive dialogue, public opinion must be shown that responsible liberalization is beneficial even if it must go hand in hand with certain adjustment costs. This is the price for acceptance of the globalization of the economy.

3. Belgium welcomes the results recently achieved by the multilateral trading system. The year 1997 was a fruitful one and saw the successive conclusion of agreements on information technology, telecommunications and financial services.

4. Belgium was an active participant in the Uruguay Round and welcomed the creation of the World Trade Organization in 1994, in particular for the following reasons:

- It introduced a single act of accession with the obligation for all its members to comply with all the agreements;
- it has a legal and binding dispute settlement mechanism. Since its inception, this mechanism has shown its effectiveness and we have accepted the consequences. It is used as much by developing countries as by industrialized countries. It will give birth to international case law in the area of trade and constitutes the remedy to unilateralism;
- it has become a permanent forum for trade negotiation.

5. In this regard, the WTO and its body of rules are a logical conclusion to the work of the GATT and the successive negotiation rounds held since 1948. The priorities have now moved from the tariff to the non-tariff sector, from goods to services and intellectual property, towards the new form of trade represented by electronic trade, towards the need for new regulatory frameworks that are a response to a global society. Fair rules on investment, government procurement, the organization of competition, relations between the environment and trade ..., respect for basic labour standards.

This is why we would like the WTO to have a balanced programme capable of facing up to these new challenges.

6. Belgium is determined to contribute to liberalization whose main goal is not material gain or unfettered growth but whose priority is to improve mankind's lot.
