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**OPENING STATEMENT
BY H.E. MR. ALEXANDER TURCHIN,
FIRST DEPUTY PRIME-MINISTER
OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS**

**12TH MEETING OF THE WORKING PARTY ON THE
ACCESSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS TO THE WTO
(GENEVA, 11 JULY 2019)**

Distinguished Mr. Chairman, Mr. Deputy Director-General,
Excellencies,
Dear representatives of WTO Members and Observers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of Belarus I would like to extend our sincere appreciation to all participants of today's Meeting.

I would like to thank H.E. Ambassador Mr. Kemal Madenoğlu, Chairman of the Working Party, and Mr. Alan Wolff, WTO Deputy Director-General, for their efficient personal involvement to advance our WTO accession negotiations.

We highly appreciate the WTO Members' constructive engagement in our negotiations, both on multilateral and bilateral tracks.

This is my first visit to Geneva in the capacity of the First Deputy Prime-Minister to attend the Working Party Meeting. Today's event will allow me, as the responsible for WTO accession negotiations in the Government of Belarus, to personally assess the progress achieved and outline the steps which Belarus should undertake in order to become the WTO Member. I would appreciate your objective assessment of and comments to the package of documents, which was circulated for today's meeting.

For Belarus, the WTO accession is more than just a negotiating process as such. We use it as an opportunity to evaluate the economic policy of Belarus in the context of WTO rules, to employ the best international practices and to implement them for the benefit of further economic recovery and sustainable development of Belarus.

On behalf of the Belarusian Government, I would like to reassure you that the early completion of the negotiating process is one of the top priorities for Belarus. And we approach it seriously. With the aim to address a number of systemic issues raised by WTO Members, we have developed draft legislative and regulatory acts, which are currently under consideration by the relevant stakeholders. This work is reflected in the revised package of negotiation documents.

By my side today you can see the most high-level delegation of Belarus since the resumption of negotiations in 2016. It includes Ministers of Economy, Finance, Antimonopoly Regulation and Trade, as well as heads of other government bodies. Together with our key experts, we stand ready to answer your questions today, or to present our responses in writing after the meeting.

On behalf of the Government, I would like to reconfirm our strong intention to complete the accession negotiations by the 12th WTO Ministerial

Conference in June 2020 in Nur-Sultan. We have completely redrafted our Legislative Action Plan, which clearly reflects our future and current steps to resolve the Members' concerns.

Currently, we are working on improving the investment regime, pricing policies, procedures of importation and exportation of certain products, protection of clinical research data, antimonopoly regulation. We expect substantive changes in the area of currency regulation. We continue our work in order to establish legal framework for operation of branches of foreign service suppliers in Belarus. By the end of this year, we are planning to complete our work on customs legislation in order to fully implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement.

Belarus plays an active role in the ongoing work on harmonization of legislation within the Eurasian Economic Union and its further improvement in conformity with the WTO rules. As an example of such work I would mention the proposal to revise certain veterinary requirements.

We also closely cooperate with leading international organizations on many issues related to our accession to the WTO. Together with the World Bank we are preparing the Roadmap for Structural Reforms in Belarus. With the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development we are working to improve our legislation in the area of investments, privatization and public procurement. In cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, we carry out a research on how to implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. We also cooperate with UNCTAD on improving our competition policy and antimonopoly regulation.

Today, we are looking forward to an open and constructive dialogue with Members. We would like to hear your opinions whether we are on the right track, and we are ready to provide detailed answers.

Over the last 4 months, we have made a lot of efforts to prepare the revised draft Working Party Report.

Upon the request of the WTO Members, Belarus has indicated its readiness to agree on more than 70 percent of its commitments containing in the draft Report. I believe that such step forward will be considered as confirmation of seriousness of our intention to become a WTO member. I expect that during today's discussion on the draft Report we will agree with you on the majority of draft commitments in order to concentrate on the remaining ones by the next Working Party meeting.

Upon the Members' request we have streamlined the Import Licensing, TBT and TRIPS sections of the draft Working Party Report. I am thankful to the WTO Secretariat and Members for their help and constructive engagement in this issue.

We presented our revised offer on domestic support for agriculture during the plurilateral meeting on agriculture which was held yesterday. We also agreed on the next steps with the interested Members. After we receive the written questions from Members we will prepare our revised offer for your consideration.

We are monitoring closely the WTO reform negotiations and we support the necessity to update the rules of the multilateral trading system which we consider as a guarantee of protection of our interests against unilateral protectionist measures. Being an advocate for a predictable world order based on the norms of the international law at all international platforms, Belarus also hopes to contribute to the WTO reform in the near future. Close trade relations and growing interdependence of economies is the true base needed in order to strengthen international relations and ensure sustainable development.

In April 2019 we officially notified the WTO about our interest in joining as an observer to the initiatives on development of new rules in the field of investment facilitation for development, e-commerce, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and women's empowerment in trade. These topics clearly reflect the priorities of our Government's work.

Dear colleagues,

In 2020 Belarus will preside in the EAEU. Accession to the WTO at the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference in Nur-Sultan has a symbolic meaning for us. It was in Kazakhstan where the Treaty on Eurasian Economic Union was signed. In this regard, without exaggeration, 2019 is a crucial year for Belarus.

We hope that the WTO Members also keep Belarus in their strategic focus, since our full-fledged WTO membership will complete the work on accession of all the EAEU Member States to the WTO.

We count on help and support of the WTO Secretariat and WTO Members in order to finalize this ambitious task successfully. In December 2019 we would like to hold the next meeting of the Working Party. In order to achieve this goal, we are ready to work with you in different formats and we look forward to your active involvement.

I would like to underscore that the Draft Report already contains more than 100 commitments in all sections. In our opinion, it is in proportion with the size of the Belarusian economy. We believe that the degree of readiness of the draft Report is quite high. Thus we are ready for even closer interaction with Members in order to agree on absolute majority of Report's sections during the next meeting of the Working Group.

Belarus is ready to promptly reply to all questions of the WTO Members and we are looking forward to the same promptness from your side. I will

personally monitor the preparation of the replies and I assure you that Belarus will meet Members' requests in those areas where it is possible.

However, I ask you to abstain from unrealistic demands to Belarus and to be flexible while approaching the issues which are most sensitive for us. For my side, I can assure you that we will only promise what we can fulfill. Our delegation is open to discuss any compromise solutions. In our face, WTO Members will find an honest and reliable partner.

Finally, I would also like to urge the Membership to be consistent and to refrain from introducing unresolved trade concerns related to the EAEU or its individual members into the Belarus' accession. The WTO regular bodies provide to the Members all the necessary tools to resolve issues of such kind.

Dear colleagues, I am looking forward to our constructive discussions today and I count on your support of Belarus' soonest accession to the WTO.

Thank you for attention.