

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

WT/MIN(99)/ST/129
2 December 1999

(99-5364)

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
Third Session
Seattle, 30 November - 3 December 1999

Original: French

LUXEMBOURG

Statement by Mr. Eugène Berger Secretary of State for the Environment

This Seattle meeting brings the WTO face to face with its internal changes as well as with the demands of a civil society that is reacting to the effects of globalization. The concerns we have heard voiced in recent days in the streets of Seattle largely mirror those of public opinion in our countries. The WTO must reach out to the public: we must fill the information gap that is the source of too many misunderstandings.

Since its creation, our Organization has been undergoing a constant process of enlargement; its membership is becoming more diversified, and at the same time the organization's centres of interest are becoming diversified.

The promotion of international trade certainly remains the Organization's primary goal. Nevertheless, whereas sharing in the expected benefits of trade liberalization remains an unsatisfied aspiration for some Members, for others the lack of progress in the opening up of certain sectors seems an unjustified barrier, while yet others fear the possible excesses of a purely commercial approach.

We all see the WTO as a decisive instrument in generating progress, and it is this assumption that underlies the Organization's power and genuine autonomy. In fact, the WTO's decisions only shape progress to the extent that consensus among its Members allows. The difficulties surrounding the preparations for Seattle highlighted the responsibilities incumbent upon each of the Members, as well as the lack of trust characterizing our relations with regard to the issues at stake.

As a member of the European Union, my country comes to the WTO through a continuous process of internal consultation conducted by the European Commission. This internal process involves making major concessions, but is accompanied by the conviction that these concessions serve our common interest.

In fact, the EU is one of the major partners in the WTO. It was the EU that launched the idea of a new global round of negotiations in the belief that this was the only way of ensuring a balanced outcome that would benefit all Members.

Nevertheless, in the wider framework of the WTO the multilateral negotiating process alone is perhaps not enough to resolve the existing contradictions. The Organization does need to set its agenda and timetable, but at the same time it must ensure that all its Members are in a position to join in the decisions rather than submit to them.

Development must therefore be at the heart of our concerns. Within the WTO, technical assistance for developing countries must absolutely be strengthened. At the same time, market access for products from developing countries is one of our priorities. In particular, the European Union has proposed duty free access for essentially all products from least developed countries, and I am happy to see that the President of the United States also supports this initiative. Some flexibility is also required on all sides to take account of the specific problems faced by developing countries in the implementation of the existing agreements. Better targeting of special and differential treatment is essential.

The aim of these measures is to integrate developing countries better into the multilateral trading system, but they will only really be effective if the WTO as an Organization pursues its efforts of integration into the international system.

The experience of recent years has proved that the impact of international trade calls for enhanced coordination with other international bodies. The effort to ensure coherence already under way cannot stop with the IMF and World Bank. The WTO cannot disregard the side-effects related to trade. It must take into consideration the concerns aroused by the development of trade on major issues such as sustainable development, environmental conservation, animal welfare, food security and safety, consumer protection, public health, social standards and foreign debt. Nor should the WTO itself seek to settle the existing contradictions. The Organization must take into account the fact that it and its Members depend on the expertise available elsewhere. My country encourages a closer dialogue between the WTO and international organizations such as UNCTAD, the ILO, WHO, WIPO and UNEP. The WTO should engage in an effort of collective responsibility and I welcome the availability of leaders of the international community such as the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, Mr. Rubens Ricuperro of UNCTAD and Mr. Juan Somavia of the ILO, who have come to Seattle. I also wish to pay tribute to the consciousness-raising activities carried out by the WHO in tandem with this conference.

As a factor of economic growth, international trade induces fundamental structural change.

The WTO has to take a position on suitable accompanying measures that reasonably take into account the diversity of its Members. As far as agriculture is concerned, Luxembourg is certainly ready to contribute to pursuing the reform process. However, these reforms must take account of the specific features of agricultural activity, and in particular its multifunctional nature.

My country can understand the reluctance of those who fear being forced to make concessions in the area of social standards under the pressure of the negotiations.

My country nevertheless considers that the WTO has reached the necessary maturity to engage in a dialogue with the ILO on the interaction between trade and social standards.

Lastly, Seattle has made us aware of the degree to which international trade can mobilize civil society, whose power to react is in many respects the product of the information society.

For the WTO, Seattle will be the moment for forging ahead, not as an extension of the GATT, but as an organization that moves with the times: democratic and responsible.
