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GREECE

Statement by H.E. Mrs. Rodoula Zissis, Deputy Minister of National Economy

First, I would like to thank the United States Government for hosting the third WTO Ministerial Conference, here in the very beautiful city of Seattle.

At the very outset, on behalf of the Greek delegation and on my own behalf, I would like to convey our deep appreciation to the people of the United States, the authorities of the State of Washington and the Seattle Host Organization for the generous hospitality extended to us and the excellent arrangements made for this important meeting. (Moreover, personally, I feel delighted to be in this beautiful state, having a capital, with the Greek name).

We have gathered here, to launch the Millennium Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations, by further trade liberalization and strengthening the world trading system, to the maximum degree to the sustainable development, to the welfare of our citizens, to the achievement of full employment, to the protection of the environment, to all other objectives that are enumerated in the preamble of the agreement establishing the WTO, as well as to any other emerging new issues.

From the outset, I have to underline, that if we are going to have fruitful negotiations, the Millennium Round must be comprehensive subject to a single undertaking. Only in this regard, we can secure that the interest of all participants, will be taken into account and that the intended results will be balanced and equitable, taking into consideration the recent economic and technological developments and the actual economic environment.

In my view, it is amazing how many lobbying groups and trade unions and NGOs have come to Seattle, looking to the WTO Ministerial Conference to agree to launch a new comprehensive round of negotiations, including the priorities of the investments, the services, the environment, the competition and the labour standards, as the human and social face of the WTO.

Since the world's contemporary problems – war and conflict, mass migration, environmental degradation – are rooted in poverty and inequality, we have to discuss the biggest moral issue facing the world and the greatest threat to the future security and stability of the planet.

Due consideration should be given to the needs of developing countries and especially LDCs. We shall make any possible effort to ensure that these countries get a due share in the growth of international trade commensurate with the needs of their economic development. Emphasis should be given to the provision of the appropriate technical assistance and to the enhancement of their capacity building. Equally it is important for the well functioning of the world trading system the accession to the WTO of all candidate countries, as long as they fulfil the necessary conditions.

Allow me, Mr. Chairman, to make a couple of brief comments on some particular issues.

In relation to agriculture, there are several points that I would like to stress. The continuation of agricultural policies reform, is a fundamental objective. However, as we all have accepted, this is a long-term objective. Therefore, it has to proceed at the appropriate pace and gradually so as to be sustainable, valuable and acceptable by civil society in general and by agricultural producers in particular. In this regard, it is important, on the one hand to retain a certain level of flexibility in conducting agricultural policies, and on the other to secure that farmers will be able to develop their activities within a stable environment with regard to the evolution of agricultural policies. It is for that reason, that we consider the issue of legal security, as being of high significance. Another equally important issue that should be taken fully into account, is the specific characteristic of agriculture and especially its multifunctional role, in particular with regard to rural development, food quality and safety, food security and the protection of the environment. Food safety and food quality are two important objectives in the area of agricultural policies. Radical technological innovations and income growth raise the concerns of civil society, about the safety of food and the ways food is produced. Governments must react as appropriate to these legitimate consumers concerns and this is an important issue, that has to be addressed during the negotiations.

Agriculture contributes to rural development by various ways. A powerful instrument to enhance this contribution and indeed the food quality, is the establishment of an effective system to protect geographical indications, including the protection of traditional agricultural products. By this, we may offer considerable opportunities to rural people to remain in rural areas, to diversify their agricultural production, to develop new activities, based on the local processing of high quality products and therefore to set rural areas on a sustainable development path.

With regard to the services sector, its further liberalization constitutes a key issue. The sectoral coverage of many schedules is small and many of the commitments which do exist, are subject to important limitations. To obtain the full benefit of the Agreement on Trade in Services, we must work towards great expansion concerning the number and the coverage of commitments, including the possible removal of existing limitations.

Greece maintains a general trade liberalizing policy in the services sector. We consider that the removal of trade barriers, promotes the competition and thus the efficiency in the production and supply of services, as well as the overall improvement of economic efficiency. Therefore, we hope that this round will focus overwhelmingly to higher levels of commitments both on market access and national treatment. The negotiations should also aim at strengthening of GATS disciplines with the objective of ensuring transparent and predictable regulatory environment.

Further liberalization and globalization must be manageable. The improvement of market access, only, is not enough to achieve social and economic development. Therefore, for the new issues that are emerged, new rules and disciplines are needed. Certainly, before agreeing on new rules and disciplines a deep examination of all aspects involved has to take place. We understand the concerns expressed by several partners and we believe that exploratory work is necessary before starting negotiations for the establishment of new rules. Indeed, new rules must not be a pretext for protectionism.

Concerning trade and core labour standards, we believe that it is necessary at this stage to create a joint ILO/WTO forum of dialogue to better understand each others concerns. However, in relation to the environment, we believe that after many years of intensive exploratory work, we are in a position to start now negotiations.

In this respect we would tend a particularly receptive ear to the views of NGOs. Their massive presence here, on the occasion of this conference, underlines the increasing attention that civil society and our citizens are paying to the issue relating to the protection of the environment and to the sustainable development. Investment and competition issues are, also, two other areas, on which we are ready to undertake negotiations, with a view to ensure transparency and consistency in the application of domestic regulations.

As final "users" of the multilateral trading system, we are all determined to see WTO succeed in its mission, which is to prove that the framework of rules is indeed to create fair competition and to allow all the partners to carry on their activities and develop new ones and to ensure that liberalization of trade and investment maximizes realization of the aspirations shared by all, as citizens and consumer, in terms of a free and fair international trade, can improve living and working conditions, health and safety and sustainable development.
