

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

WT/MIN(99)/ST/54
1 December 1999

(99-5275)

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

Original: English

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Statement by H.E. Mr. Peter Brno Deputy Minister of Economy

At the outset, allow me to express on behalf of the Slovak Republic thanks to the Government of the United States for hosting the 3rd WTO Ministerial Conference and the possibility to visit the beautiful city of Seattle.

This Ministerial Conference of the WTO has particular importance for the future development of the multilateral trading system. We have to make some important decisions with extraordinary significance not only towards the multilateral trading system but also for economic growth in the new Millennium.

We are convinced that the **multilateral trading system**, based on WTO rules and principles could bring benefits to the world's citizens of all countries and could play a fundamental role in their economic success and development. We recognize the reality that the multilateral trading system should be better organized and improved in many aspects, and shall be more liberal as well. Our attention and efforts in this respect should be particularly directed towards enhancing interaction between the multilateral trading system and national economies.

We believe that the **new round of negotiations** should be based on mutually agreed principles, building up on our previous commitments and taking into consideration needs arising from current world economic development, leading towards our common goal of sustainable economic growth. Postponing or failing to launch the new round of negotiations could bring disadvantages for all of us. It would encourage protectionism tendencies as well as stagnation in strengthening of the multilateral trading system.

The Slovak Republic attaches high importance to the **comprehensive** process of new negotiations which in its wide scope offers a better balance of benefits to all WTO Members. Particular consideration should be devoted to developing countries and countries in economic transitions, paying special attention to the least-developed countries. We believe that the balanced outcome of a new round of negotiations will help to narrow differences which still exist in the level of tariff as well as non-tariff protection among the trade policy regimes of WTO Members.

We believe that to have a successful new round of negotiations leading to results mutually accepted by all WTO Members, the key element of our future work must be **transparency**. Transparency should mean that every single member of the WTO shall be involved in the process and shall have the possibility to express its views and concerns. Having gone through a long and complicated process of preparation for this Conference we have to express our feeling that transparency was not always part of the preparatory process. In this respect, I would like to highlight the need to preserve the original spirit of this Organization based on transparency and consensus.

For the Slovak Republic, as a small country extensively dependent on foreign trade, it is very important to firmly anchor a multilateral trading system based on fundamental rules and principles of liberal trade regime and high levels of market access commitments.

For the Government of the Slovak Republic there are five main premises:

1. Strengthening of the WTO multilateral system of rules;
2. promoting the further liberalization of trade;
3. improving the integration of the developing countries into the multilateral trading system;
4. addressing the deepening of interfaces between trade and related issues and policies;
5. achievement of balanced and satisfactory results for all parties.

Allow me now to highlight some issues.

We consider that the evaluation of the **implementation** of existing WTO agreements and realization of their objectives is an important issue. The problems encountered in implementation and the consequent impact on trade and development prospects of Members has to be addressed in our declaration. In this respect, it is necessary to take into account the capacities and constraints of developing countries. The integration of developing countries into the multilateral trading system has to be an integral element of our work.

The Slovak Republic provides through the General System of Preferences a **duty-free access** to all imports coming from LDCs for many years. In this respect we would also like to encourage other WTO Members, especially industrialized countries, to make a similar contribution to the LDCs.

Agriculture belongs to key issues where we have to find consensus acceptable to each Member. Therefore, I would like to reiterate that my country is committed by an obligation clearly laid down in Article 20 and the Preamble to the Agreement on Agriculture. In this context I would like to stress that it is very important to take into account the experiences and effects of implementing reduction commitments, as well as non-trade concerns (e.g. food safety and rural development) given by the specificity of the agriculture sector.

Notable consideration should be also given to the **countries in transition**, having their own specific problems. The number of the WTO Members in a transformation process is increasing. Next, negotiations should take into account the particular problems of these countries, especially in the area of agriculture. Improved market access, as well as a substantial reduction in support, is of vital interest to us.

The forthcoming negotiations should also cover all **non-agricultural products**, without a priori exemptions and aimed at a substantial reduction of tariffs, to achieve further improvement in market access. The Slovak Republic is convinced that improved market access can be reached through tariff harmonization and the simplification of the tariff structure, elimination of peaks and reduced tariff escalation. It is also necessary to reduce the scope of non-tariff barriers having a restrictive or distorting impact on trade.

Trade and environment policies should play a mutually supportive role in favour of sustainable development. Environmental considerations should be taken into account through the whole process of the future negotiations.

The comprehensive round of negotiations should also involve negotiations related to **trade and investment, competition and trade facilitation**.

At the end of my statement I would like to stress, that from the new Millennium prospective we need to ensure economic growth with positive synergies between trade liberalization, environmental protection and economic development. We believe that our decisions will lead to increased trade, investment, employment and prosperity from which all the WTO countries can benefit.
