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BULGARIA

Statement by H.E. Mr. Valentin Vassilev Minister of Trade and Tourism

We have all come here because of our conviction that we have to pursue the liberalization of the world trade.

However, we are aware of the increasing difficulties and mounting resistance that the further liberalization will encounter. The protests we are witnessing here in Seattle come to prove this observation.

Our countries are faced with different problems, as the expectations about the future of the WTO are different. This has become clear in the statements of the Ministers from the least-developed countries, from the developing countries, from the economies in transition, as well as the developed countries.

Therefore, it is our task to come to an agreement on the major principles that will make the subsequent negotiations successful; negotiations in which each group of countries will find its place and protect at least part of its interests.

1. We must admit that at the dialogue of the WTO with the public and the cooperation with the trade unions and the media have been extremely inefficient so far. What we need is a fundamental change, as the support of the public is indispensable to the attainment of our goals both within the WTO framework and within our countries.
2. We need similar cooperation with the IMF, the World Bank and other international organizations, whose rules sometimes differ from the WTO principles.
3. We have to agree to expand the scope of the forthcoming negotiations as much as possible and to make the schedule of work as short as possible, i.e. to conduct the negotiations within three to four years.
4. Our future decisions should be consistent with the principles of sustainable development, protection of the environment, human health and labour conditions.
5. The trade liberalization should promote development and alleviate poverty. This means that the least-developed countries, developing countries and economies in transition need special attention in the course of the forthcoming negotiations.
6. We need to take in to account the temporary difficulties that a given country, region or community may experience.

7. We have to encourage the regional free trade agreements, in which greater liberalization is achieved than in the WTO.

8. Regrettably, the WTO has not yet expressed a firm position with regard to the military conflicts that greatly impede free trade, e.g. the imposed embargo, the closed roads and railways, the inhibited navigation along the river Danube as a result of the wars waged by Milosevic have inflicted the greatest losses to Bulgaria's foreign trade.

Bulgaria will take an active part in the forthcoming round of multilateral trade negotiations. We shall make efforts to expand the access of our goods and services to other markets and to reduce or eliminate the existing tariff and non-tariff barriers to our exports.

These negotiations should be based on the principles of the single undertaking, and balance and equity in order to ensure benefits to all participants and to make them transparent to the public.

We believe that the negotiations should encompass agriculture, services, non-agricultural products, the additional protection of geographical indications, investments, competition, trade facilitation and transparency in government procurement. We should not neglect the issues of e-commerce, the relationship between trade and labour standards and the impact of trade on the environment.

As to agricultural products, our main objective should be to improve the market access, which has to be accompanied by reduction of export subsidies and domestic support, and to take account of food safety and environmental protection. We should address also the social problems of rural areas.

Bulgaria strictly fulfils her commitments within the WTO framework. Furthermore, the liberalization we have undertaken goes far beyond these commitments, as we do not subsidize the production and export of agricultural and industrial products, we do not apply quantitative restrictions and taxes on imports and exports, we provide duty-free access for imports from least-developed countries and preferential access for developing countries.

Bulgaria will continue to be an active participant in the processes of further liberalization. Notwithstanding the different positions expressed here, I am confident that we shall all come to a compromise and that the declaration to be adopted at the end of the Conference will open up the way to a round of further broad-based negotiations.
