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GEORGIA

Statement by H.E. Mrs. Tamar Beruchashvili Minister of Trade and Foreign Economic Relations

(Speaking as an Observer)

It is indeed an honour to be able to represent Georgia as a newly acceding Member of the World Trade Organization. We are especially pleased that our entry in to the WTO is taking place just as the WTO itself is undertaking a major new initiative to expand world trade and launch a new Round of negotiations.

First of all, I would like to express the appreciation of my country for all of the goodwill that was displayed towards Georgia, and the tangible help that we received from the Members and from the Secretariat staff during the accession process.

Our accession is a major step in our transition from Soviet Republic to independent, fully democratic State with a free-market economy oriented towards Europe and the west.

Georgia began the accession process having already made a firm decision to embrace the principles of a modern open economy. Our tariff rates were already quite low. Our economy was already substantially open to foreign investment and to the foreign provision of services. These facts facilitated our negotiations, which were completed in less than eighteen months from the date of our first working party meeting. As the WTO considers how to encourage and help the countries now in the accession process, I think Georgia's example shows us that with firm political will and with adequate technical assistance – both of which are necessary – accession can be achieved in a reasonable time and without compromise of WTO's standards.

Georgia looks forward to full participation in the efforts of the WTO to further expand international trade. We have accepted virtually all of the sectoral initiatives and plurilateral agreements. We support reasonable environmental and labour agreements.

In spite of the fact that Georgian GDP per capita is less than it is in many developing countries, we are ready to support the acceleration of the globalization and liberalization and also to discuss the new subjects at the "Millennium Round".

We hope to see the WTO disciplines deepened and strengthened in many areas in the coming negotiations, and we will work to that end. We especially support the dispute resolution mechanism as an effective means of protecting the interests of small countries such as ourselves.

The WTO provides an opportunity for small economies to be part of the world trading community. But increased exposure to the trends of globalization also carries with it certain dangers. Georgia believes that technical assistance provided through the WTO or bilaterally by the developed

WTO Member countries is an important mechanism for protecting small economies from these dangers. We urge the leading WTO Members to strengthen and expand such technical assistance programmes to the maximum extent possible.

President Shevardnadze recently stated that it would be impossible for any State, no matter how strong, to address the challenges facing us today alone. Only through the collective effort of all nations can success be achieved. The peaceful and predictable development of global trade will become one of the prime mechanisms for improving the standards of living for all people, and therefore, a major guarantor of peace in the world.
