

WORLD TRADE

ORGANIZATION

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

Eleventh Session

Buenos Aires, 10 – 13 December 2017

AUSTRIA

Statement by H.E. Ms. Bernadette Gierlinger

Vice Minister / Federal Ministry for Science, Research and Economy

Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First and foremost, let me thank the government of Argentina and Minister Susana Malcorra for hosting the eleventh WTO Ministerial Conference and for welcoming us to the beautiful city of Buenos Aires. I would also like to congratulate WTO Director General Roberto Azevedo and his able team for their tireless efforts in preparing this meeting.

The circumstances surrounding this Ministerial Conference have certainly been challenging as the political landscape is changing. What we thought to be self-evident for years might not in fact be guaranteed anymore in future. Let me just point out three important aspects for our work ahead, here in Buenos Aires and beyond:

Firstly, the centrality of a rules-based, multilateral trading system, including the enforceability of trade rules through a strong dispute settlement, served us well in the past 20 years and has to be preserved in future. International organizations are member-driven organisms; their accomplishments, their efficiency and also their relevance depend on their member's willingness to achieve results, to compromise and to cooperate. In this light it is unfair and wrong to accuse the organization for some perceived shortcomings; on the contrary, it is the members who should be blamed. Our WTO is far from being perfect, but good enough to fight for. If WTO did not exist already, we might have to invent it.

Secondly, a consensual Ministerial Declaration, negotiated results and a game plan for the future are the ingredients for a successful Ministerial Conference we got used to by the successes in Bali and Nairobi.

This time however, as of today, it seems to be widely unclear if any of these components will materialize. They might or they might not! To leave Buenos Aires empty handed would clearly imply from the Austrian (and also European) perspective a missed opportunity. Instead, we still have the chance to make the best out of this difficult situation, to agree inter alia

- on a first installment on bans of fisheries subsidies and
- on a permanent solution for public stockholding.
- Furthermore, we should open our minds to deal with 21st centuries issues like eCommerce, investment facilitation and measures in favor of small and medium sized enterprises.

Thirdly, let me turn to an issue which has been dominating and overshadowing the preparatory negotiations in Geneva, namely the debate on special and differential treatment and, in a broader context, on the relation between trade and development. Austria welcomes and acknowledges the role many developing countries attach to trade in their development strategies. Indeed, their better and deeper integration in world trade and continuous efforts to develop a stronger participation in the global value chains can contribute to economic growth, sustainable jobs and stable incomes. To prove this economic theory, we have witnessed a perfect example in the last year, the entering into force of the Trade Facilitation Agreement which will benefit every member of this organization and in particular the developing world. This agreement, by the way, also contained a new, active and favorable approach to Special and Differential Treatment. Going into the completely opposite direction and to seek broad and far reaching exemptions from existing WTO agreements could only be an option when dealing with very specific problems on a temporary basis.

Already since 2002, Austria has been a regular contributor to the Doha Global Trust Fund and is ready to continue this support as a commitment to helping developing countries expand their trade capacities and integrate into regional and global value chains. In this context, I am happy to announce that a further contribution will be transferred to the WTO in the coming days.

Ladies and Gentlemen, to sum up, in two days we will have to show a result of our deliberations to the world. Trade is not the most popular issue for the media and many "opinion leaders"; they have been looking at us in a very skeptical and critical way. Therefore, we have to demonstrate that we are united and willing to support the multilateral trading system, to defend the work in all areas of the WTO and to expand our trade rules in future. And we should also use the remaining time to rebuild trust, confidence and cooperation among ourselves to facilitate the task for our negotiators when they restart their work in Geneva in the New Year. Our main task at hand in the next hours of course is to work towards a good result in Buenos Aires. Thank you very much.