



Republic of Macedonia

**ELEVENTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
OF
THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION**

Statement by

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On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, I would like to congratulate the Government of Argentina for the excellent organization of the MC11 and for their warm hospitality. We welcome the accession of Liberia and Afghanistan to the Organization and remain committed to supporting the accession of other acceding countries. The Republic of Macedonia encourages and welcomes the early accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina and of the Republic of Serbia, which would additionally boost trade and economic growth in our closer Region. In addition to the existing cooperation within CEFTA, the regional countries have decided to further develop their cooperation by creating a Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans, which would enable unobstructed flow of goods, services, capital and highly skilled labour, making the Region more attractive for investments and commerce.

The Republic of Macedonia is a strong supporter of the multilateral system. As a small landlocked country, we believe that rules-based international system, including predictable and transparent multilateral trading system, gives greater certainty in trade relations, especially for smaller countries that make up the majority of WTO members. During the 22 years of its existence, the WTO has confirmed its role in strengthening the multilateral trading system and in promoting open global trade. By pursuing these activities, the WTO contributes to opening new jobs, global economic growth and development. Our job at the MC11 is to reaffirm the WTO as a valuable platform for trade negotiations, regulation and liberalization that stimulate growth.

We welcome the entry into force of the Trade Facilitation Agreement. This, together with the entry into force of the Protocol Amending the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights and the Decision Amending the Trade Policy Review Mechanism, have been among WTO's achievements attained since the MC10. We are glad that the WTO recorded 97.5 % on Macedonia's rate of implemented commitments regarding Trade Facilitation Agreement. Furthermore, this is an opportunity to call upon Members to fully implement the TFA.

While praising the achievements of our Organization, it has to be noted that our work has not progressed to the satisfaction and benefit of the entire membership. Developing countries and LDCs are still lagging behind and more needs to be done to assist their development. Negotiations under the Doha Development Agenda are difficult because of diverging positions, but everyone will have to do their fair share of work to ensure that everybody benefits from trade.

In keeping pace with the ever changing reality, it has to be acknowledged that digital technology is becoming an integral part of our lives and it has transformed how people communicate, learn and work. It is without surprise that the 2017 World Trade Report focuses on the inter-linkages between trade and technology, as powerful drivers of development and their impact on labour markets. The digitalization of the global economy has advanced, although not equally throughout the world. Even in the most remote areas, without a banking infrastructure, people are able to connect and conduct commercial activities via mobile phones. Both fixed and mobile broadband use in Macedonia has expanded in recent years, covering 94% of companies in 2015, compared to 87% five years earlier. The advantages of e-commerce have become most beneficial for SMEs, which account for over 99% of all companies in my country. This is equally true for the sector of services in Macedonia, bearing in mind the fact that half of the economy's jobs are in the service

sector. Therefore, Macedonia has carefully studied the proposals on e-commerce, domestic regulations on services, MSMEs. We support these initiatives and hope that we will be able to reach decisions at the MC11. Macedonia is interested in participating actively and in contributing to the Working Group on e-commerce that should prepare for and pursue negotiations on trade-related aspects of electronic commerce, on the basis of proposals by Members.

We are particularly glad that the proposal submitted by the Union of Chambers of Commerce of the Republic of Macedonia was the second selected under the Small Business Champions initiative, launched by the WTO and the ITC. As WTO Director-General Azevêdo stated “the project, named “WORLD NET for Small Businesses” provides a digital shop-window for SMEs to promote their products, services and training opportunities and supports and encourages small firms to seek opportunities in international markets”.

Empowerment of women is another issue Macedonia feels strong about. We are thankful to the countries that brought this proposal forward. Women empowerment provides for potential for growth that needs to be considered when elaborating economic and trade policies. Macedonia stands behind the Joint Declaration on Trade and Women’s Economic Empowerment and is among the countries championing gender issues.

In line with the Decision on beginning negotiations for accession to the WTO plurilateral Agreement on Government Procurement, Macedonia prepares the Initial Offer composed of 7 Annexes. Our intention is to submit the Initial Offer for discussion at the next session of the WTO Committee on Government Procurement, in 2018. Accession to the GPA can open new perspectives for our economy and will ensure greater transparency and accountability in this domain that will send a positive signal to all potential investors.

In closing, let me wish all delegates a productive and successful conference. Let us strive for what is achievable and commit to narrowing our differences in the negotiations, here in Buenos Aires and in the follow-up to the MC11.

Thank you for your attention.