

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE Ninth Session Bali, 3 – 6 December 2013

AUSTRIA

Statement by HE Dr Reinhold Mitterlehner

Federal Minister of Economy, Family and Youth

First and foremost, I would like to convey my deep gratitude to Indonesia and to the People of Bali for hosting this Ninth Ministerial Conference in their traditional warm hospitality. I may also express my deep appreciation to the Chair of this Ministerial Conference, the Indonesian Trade Minister, H.E. Gita Irawan Wirjawan, whose able leadership will guide us in our work.

I welcome our new Director-General Roberto Azevedo, whom I wish all the best in his demanding post and who has already proven to keep WTO on track in difficult times. The documents on the table today witness the extraordinary achievements of the last ten weeks. I also owe my thanks to the WTO Secretariat and its skilled staff for its most valuable assistance in preparing this Ministerial Conference.

Austria is very pleased to welcome Yemen as a new Member to the WTO after more than a decade of negotiations. Austria wishes Yemen all success for deeper integration in the global markets while fostering sustainable development. Together with Laos and Tajikistan, these accessions are a further contribution to making the multilateral trading system truly universal.

Two years have passed since the Eighth Ministerial Conference where Ministers explicitly underscored the need to firmly resist protectionism in all its forms and keep markets open by strengthening WTO and its bodies as the entrusted guardian of WTO rules. Today, Ministers can be assured that existing reviewing and monitoring procedures have helped to keep protectionism at bay. WTO bodies continue to remain alerted and, by the same token, are ready to take on new issues of concern. The value of a functioning rules-based multilateral trading system cannot be over-emphasized, especially in times of a challenging global economic environment.

The Doha Development Agenda still is the road map for negotiations with development playing a prominent role. However, at this point of time, the political reality only permits harvesting some ripe fruits. The deliverables in our MC9 package have been carefully selected and represent a delicate balance. We must not let this chance disappear and show the world that WTO is still in business.

For Austria, a deal in trade facilitation would be extremely valuable. Estimates show that gains from a new agreement equal those achieved from liberalizations both in the goods and services sector under the Doha Round. Every day, conducting global business becomes more sophisticated and is done at higher speed. For this reason, cross-border exchange of goods and services requires proper facilitation, both legal and technical, at various levels of conduct. This is particularly relevant for SMEs which represent the dominant form of business in Austria. Unquestionably, a multilateral agreement on Trade Facilitation can generate relevant technical capacities and offer individual legal flexibility, in particular for developing countries most in need. It augments the chances for developing and least-developed countries to build up necessary technical structures, to benefit from comparative advantages, and to secure their participation in global value chains. Accelerated trade at lower costs increases income and wealth among all countries, with the biggest benefits being accrued by developing landlocked countries. These opportunities must not be foregone.

Austria recognizes the importance of agriculture to a large number of WTO Member States. Access to food at affordable prices can be guaranteed best by functioning markets, combined with targeted aid, where necessary. Certainly, any new measure impacting the level of domestic support will need to be carefully considered, temporary in nature and completely in line with WTO law. Regarding export competition, the high value some Members place on this aspect of agricultural negotiations is reflected by the work done so far in this area.

Austria also supports the third part of the package, dedicated to development needs with a strong focus on least-developed countries, consisting of the decisions on Rules of Origin, the Services Waiver, Cotton, Duty and Quota Free Market Access and on the application of the TRIPS agreement. In addition, the Monitoring Mechanism on special and differential treatment provisions contained in multilateral WTO Agreements will add a valuable tool to further integrate developing and least-developed countries into the multilateral trading system.

The unfinished parts of the Doha Development Agenda must not be hidden or forgotten and should remain on the negotiating table until ultimately resolved. A meaningful outcome of this Ministerial Conference and the implementation of its results will, no doubt, revitalize work on the remaining open elements of the Doha Round. When addressing these issues, we also have to accelerate and intensify our work in the area of trade and environment, which is an important Austrian interest. There is also the challenge of keeping abreast of other, new trade-related developments which WTO should embrace, e.g. in the field of energy, investment and competition.

Austria wishes to see a strong and solid multilateral track for negotiations. However, we cannot negate that an increasing number of regional and plurilateral alternatives has become a political reality today, among other factors due to the slow multilateral negotiating progress. However, this must not jeopardize ongoing efforts in the multilateral field; such initiatives should be complementary and supportive to the multilateral trading system.

Mr. Chairman, with regard to the Bali package we look back on a period of long and intensive preparation and an agreement seems to be within reach. We must now seize the opportunity for concrete results which will give an urgently-needed stimulus to the global economy and address important needs of our peoples. The benefits will accrue to all, in particular to developing countries. A successful MC9 will also enhance WTO's standing and reputation and will strengthen the multilateral trading system. Let us not miss this chance.