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## LATVIA

### Statement by Mr. Maris Riekstiņš Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

Allow me, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Latvia, to express my pleasure for having this opportunity to address the Third Ministerial Conference of the WTO held in Seattle.

Since regaining independence in 1991, the Government of the Republic of Latvia has undertaken a profound and comprehensive reform programme in order to establish a functioning market economy, including a liberal and rules-based trade policy.

As a result of intensive work internally and with our trading partners, on 10 February this year Latvia became the first Baltic State to obtain full membership in the WTO.

We would like to thank the WTO Members for their cooperation and assistance during the accession process. We would also like to congratulate our friend and neighbour Estonia for recently joining the WTO.

As a new Member of the WTO, Latvia has committed itself to the implementation of all the WTO rules without any transitional periods. Concerning market access, Latvia has bound all tariff lines for goods and has extensive sector coverage for services. As a result of the accession negotiations, Latvia has established a rules-based trading regime with considerably higher market openness than other Members of the WTO with a similar, or even higher level, of economic development.

Therefore, we strongly support focusing on market access issues for services and agricultural products. The existing differences in the levels of market access commitments in the two sectors and the wide use of certain distortive trade measures in the field of agriculture forms a basis for discrimination against new WTO Members.

In our view it undermines the effectiveness of the multilateral trading system and to a certain extent is proven by rapid development of regional trade agreements.

Globalization and increasing interlinkage among the economies of separate countries is an inescapable process. It is important that the WTO responds to this process and plays a constructive role in shaping the global trading system.

The Government of Latvia believes that future work in the WTO is crucial for achieving more open markets. To strengthen results on market access with an effective rules system and to achieve balanced results of negotiations, Latvia joins the EU and other countries in supporting the opening of a new, comprehensive multilateral trade round that would include not only a built-in agenda, but also new topics such as trade and investment, trade and competition, trade liberalization and others.

Regarding the accession of new Members to the WTO, Latvia fully supports the facilitation and speeding up of this process. At the same time we would like to point out that **all future** Members must show their commitment to respect and implement the WTO rules and principles. They must offer market access commitments that would be commercially meaningful.

In conclusion, let me confirm that the Government of Latvia strongly believes that the next trade negotiations in the WTO framework offer the best forum for further development of the global trading system. We look forward to active participation in the New Round and hope that it will result in significant achievements in all fields of negotiations.

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