

**MULTILATERAL TRADE
NEGOTIATIONS
THE URUGUAY ROUND**

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Trade Negotiations Committee
Meeting at Ministerial Level
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ADDRESS BY THE RIGHT HONOURABLE MR. WILFRIED MARTENS,
PRIME MINISTER OF BELGIUM

Your Majesty,

I should like to express my sincere thanks to you for accepting to enhance with your presence the official opening of the Ministerial meeting which is to close the Uruguay Round. Your presence is the all more gratifying as you are well known for your keen interest in world economic developments and your desire to see the emergence of the third world, too often overlooked in a frequently hostile world.

Your Majesty,
Mr. Chairman,
Ministers and Heads of delegation,
Director-General of GATT,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Four years ago, Punta del Este was placed on the international trade map by the launching of the most ambitious round of multilateral trade negotiations that the world has ever witnessed. In 1988, Montreal played host to the Ministerial meeting known as the Mid-Term Review and today the eyes of the world are turned to Brussels which has the exceptional honour of hosting the closing meeting.

It is a great honour for Belgium to welcome all those who, in recent months, have been endeavouring to give written expression to our aspirations for an open world and for fairer and more balanced trade.

Situated at the heart of the European Economic Community, the hub of major communication networks and a cultural crossroads, Belgium, like Europe, aspires to plurality - to be the home of many cultures and the melting-pot of many forms of co-operation.

The Europe of the Twelve is engaged in a vast structural adjustment process that will culminate on 1 January 1993 with the completion of the single market which will be one of its most striking manifestations. Yet the European Economic Community remains open to the world; aware of its size and its responsibilities, it intends to be open to all and for all.

It has made its choice between protectionism and free trade: all of us here know that no man is an island - and recent events have confirmed this - and we must pursue the vast and gradual movement towards the opening of markets as frontiers gradually disappear and international solidarity grows.

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It may be worth recalling today that GATT's basic objective is to liberalize international trade and to set it on firm foundations as a contribution to economic growth, development and the well-being of peoples.

Thanks to seven rounds of trade negotiations and the patience and hard work of the secretariat, there has been a surge in international trade, in which developing countries are playing an increasingly active part.

But more should have been done: the 1970s were marked by four major events: the unpegging of the United States dollar from the gold standard along with the abandonment of fixed exchange rates, the two oil shocks of 1973 and 1979 and a new industrial revolution with the advent of the era of the computer and its use to so many spheres of activity.

The world had suffered, as had free trade; it soon became clear in 1982 as the economy recovered to some extent, that there were many errors to be rectified and many challenges to be met, and that therefore particularly ambitious objectives had to be set. The promoters of the Uruguay Round tried to do exactly that. They had no qualms about tackling issues that were difficult - or even taboo - and arranging multilateral negotiations covering not only agriculture, textiles, safeguards and dispute settlement, but also new areas such as services, investments or intellectual property. In other words, they identified 15 subjects for negotiation, which inspire hope and will shape the dimensions of the GATT of the future.

The negotiations have been arduous and are likely to remain so until the end, but it would be unthinkable not to succeed. Europe has recently experienced hard but exalting times, the evolution that was expected has been replaced by a veritable revolution, a peaceful one, fortunately, and a new wind of hope is blowing through all continents.

Admittedly, there is still the threat of armed conflict - a new challenge that we will have to meet - but GATT can surely not fail in the world of trade where the Security Council has succeeded in the world of politics.

Much remains to be done and this week will be long and arduous: we must forget our differences, put our personal interests aside, and look for points of convergence rather than divergence in order to establish rapidly an open, stable and lasting multilateral trading system.

We are mindful of the present plight of many developing countries, crushed by a debt which they can no longer handle and which is growing as a result of current political tension. I realize that this situation has already been duly taken into account in the various areas of negotiation, and I hope that the industrialized world will continue to seek ways of further opening its markets to the services, products and production of the South. If it succeeds, developing countries will be able to participate more fully in trade and, consequently, in the world economy.

Excessive, irrational and unconsidered use of natural resources is clearly a fundamental factor in upsetting the balance that must exist if we are to safeguard the overall balance of life. International trade can on no account ignore that fact.

While it can no longer ignore the environment, trade must also concern itself with man, who must be and must remain the target of all our actions: we must be guided by the human dimension, for to ignore it would be to exacerbate the disparities and to deny the world of tomorrow even the basics of a decent life.

Mr. Chairman,
Heads of delegation,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The task you face is immense, and you have only a short time in which to succeed. Much is expected of you and you will have to show great initiative and be prepared for many contingencies, and you may well upset others, but that is the price of success.

Although I feel it cannot be said that failure would be synonymous with chaos, failure would nevertheless strike a serious blow at the stability of international trade and would do serious harm to the world economy. It would also mean a return to protectionism, bilateralism or even unilateralism and would nullify the efforts of the past 40 years to go beyond the cramped frontiers of bilateralism in trade.

The results of the Round must be positive and well-balanced and the rules and disciplines must come out of the negotiations strengthened. It must be remembered that the multilateral trading system is vital to the international community.

The positive results that we all desire must be put to good use to go beyond the General Agreement as it is and do something more, something greater. Perhaps, here in Brussels, you could lay the foundations of a world or multilateral trade organisation which would be the pillar that the economic and financial world still lacks. Such an organisation would be a forum for permanent negotiations and the acknowledgement of the success of so many years of endeavours, understanding and even abnegation and of the advent of an open world free from the self-interest which is still all too frequent.

Your Majesty,

I have tried briefly to indicate what is at stake in our work beginning this morning in your presence. No international trade negotiations have ever had the dimensions and intensity of the present Round. Well-being and a better life for millions depend on the decisions taken in Brussels this week.

Your Majesty,
Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In conclusion I should like to recall that an increasingly interdependent world can be managed only by multilateralism. Multilateralism alone is capable of redressing imbalances and ironing out differences or variations.

Let us not lose the present opportunity. I would remind the negotiators, who so obviously want to succeed, that:

"Where there's a will, there's a way"

and I will simply add:

"Take heart and good luck".