

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON

SR.43/ST/27

4 January 1988

TARIFFS AND TRADE

Limited Distribution

CONTRACTING PARTIES
Forty-Third Session

Original: English

BULGARIA

Statement by H.E. Mr. Atanas Guinev
Vice-Minister of Trade
(speaking as an observer)

The 40th anniversary of the GATT has inspired an in-depth and thought-provoking discussion on the rôle of the GATT and its future. As a representative of a country which is now in the process of accession; I would like also to address this issue and to inform you of our preparations for the accession negotiations.

We share the view that the forty years of GATT history are a proof of its viability and effectiveness. Our own experience as an observer in GATT has convinced us of the positive rôle of the GATT in international trade and the importance of its multilateral rules and disciplines, particularly for smaller countries that are largely dependent on foreign trade. In particular, Bulgaria highly values the unconditional MFN and non-discrimination provisions embodied in the GATT and regards them as the basic principles for the conduct of trade. GATT has been able to provide the forum for successful multilateral trade negotiations and for the development of the legal framework of international trade. GATT has also equipped the trading nations with a valuable and pragmatic multilateral mechanism for conciliation and dispute settlement of trade problems. However, today GATT is facing new challenges. It is broadly recognized that there are growing problems in international trade. All they require are further opening of world markets and reinforcement of the legal and institutional rôle of the GATT.

The Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations provides a unique and timely opportunity for this purpose. We believe that this round will result in strengthened GATT disciplines and observance of its basic principles, in better functioning of the GATT system and in further liberalization of international trade, including in agricultural products. Bulgaria reiterates its interest to become a participant in the Uruguay Round in due course.

Such an assessment of the rôle of the GATT was an important aspect of our decision to seek accession. Of course, this decision primarily reflected the evolution of Bulgaria's economic policies, instruments and measures, requiring direct involvement in the multilateral trading system and providing the normative basis for accession. Since 1985, Bulgaria's economic reform aimed at increasing the efficiency of its economy by strengthening the autonomy of the economic enterprises and promoting

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their market-orientedness has gained momentum and has become a favourable factor to conclude positively the negotiations for accession. This reform adds new dimensions to the openness of the Bulgarian economy for which exports exceed 50 per cent of the national income.

By the end of this year; a precise version of the regulations on economic activities will be finalized on the basis of the experience gained. The first stage of the price reform will also become effective. A set of rules on foreign economic activities, reflecting the new rights and obligations of the economic operators, is also being prepared.

Therefore, we intend to present the memorandum on Bulgaria's foreign trade régime after the said legislative acts come into effect. We would like to reiterate our readiness to consult interested parties in the process of finalizing the memorandum.

In the meantime, we have held informal consultations and discussions on Bulgaria's economic reforms, instruments and measures affecting foreign trade as well as on Bulgaria's rationale for accession and approach to membership in GATT. For instance, together with academic institutions, the Bulgarian side has organized, in Graz and in Washington, seminars which were useful both for us and for all interested parties.

Our optimism as to the future rôle of the GATT is based on our strong belief in the new possibilities for enlarged international trade and economic co-operation in this rapidly changing and increasingly interdependent world.