The measures that my Government has recently been obliged to take as regards its economic policy have made it impossible, at the last moment, for the Minister of Trade, H.E. García Moncó, to attend this Meeting of Ministers of the CONTRACTING PARTIES.

However, my Government would not like you to interpret the absence of its Minister as a lack of interest in the work of GATT, especially in the agreements that might be reached on a future programme of action of the CONTRACTING PARTIES. For this reason, besides apologizing for the unavoidable absence of our Minister of Trade, I am instructed to give you a short account of the views of my Government on the subjects dealt with in this Meeting of Ministers.

My country is one of the most recent Members of GATT. It acceded to the General Agreement in 1963 during the Dillon Round; but this does not mean that it is ignorant of the work done by the CONTRACTING PARTIES towards the liberalization of international trade in the previous seventeen years. It fully appreciates the efforts to overcome the obstacles to the accomplishment of this aim and the attempt to establish international trade relations in a legal framework to allow the friendly solution, by negotiation, of the trading problems of countries which sometimes do not coincide.

The results obtained by GATT in this continuous process of liberalizing trade, especially since the Kennedy Round, and the series of trade conflicts that have been solved on a friendly basis in the last few years, thanks to GATT, constitute, in the opinion of my Government, positive elements of international economic co-operation that should be posted as assets in any balance sheet of the activities of the CONTRACTING PARTIES over these twenty years of life of the GATT.
However, we should be unjust if, at the time of reviewing the activities of the CONTRACTING PARTIES and listing these positive results of its activities, we did not acknowledge the immense value to us of the competence and efficiency of the staff of the GATT secretariat and, more especially, its Director-General, Mr. Wyndham White, whose praises I need not sing since everyone knows that his competence, his skill and his perseverance have managed to overcome crises and solve problems of great complexity. We should like to convey to him our great esteem and thanks.

In connexion with the future programme of action of GATT, you all know the position of my country which was expressed in previous Meetings of Ministers or of the CONTRACTING PARTIES.

It is generally agreed that, in the international trade of industrial products, a fairly satisfactory degree of liberalization has been reached, especially since the Kennedy Round; but it is nevertheless obvious that, in other sectors of trade, as for example agricultural products, fisheries or small manufactured articles produced especially by the less-developed countries, progress in the liberalization of their trade has been very small, if not non-existent.

For this reason, my Government believes that, although it is very important to consolidate the results so far achieved in industrial products, avoiding the possibility that new protectionist tendencies may practically invalidate the customs concessions of the last negotiations, this consolidation cannot constitute the sole, nor even the main aim of a programme of future action.

On the contrary, we feel that action towards finding a satisfactory solution to the problems which arise in the other sectors we have mentioned should be given priority on account of their urgency. The improvement of conditions of access of agricultural produce to the consumer markets, the abolition of non-tariff barriers which are opposed to the expansion of trade in such produce, special measures that may favour the expansion of the trade of the less-developed countries and, especially, measures to enable the diversification of their economic activity such as those taken to promote exports of their manufactured and semi-manufactured products are, I repeat, the basic points around which the future action of GATT should evolve.

Whether these aims that I have just mentioned can be attained within the present provisions of the General Agreement, especially taking into account the contents of the new Part IV, or whether it will be necessary to expand the present rules of GATT, adapting them whenever necessary, to the present problems of international trade, is a matter which deserves close consideration by the CONTRACTING PARTIES in the new period which is opening with this Meeting of Ministers.