

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

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SLOVENIA

Statement by Dr. Janez Drnovšek,
Prime Minister

Please allow me to express my sincerest appreciation to the organizers of this historic and extraordinary celebration, particularly to the Director-General of the World Trade Organization and his staff, for the unique opportunity to pay tribute of my country to the GATT and the multilateral trading system that was born with it 50 years ago.

As a relative newcomer to the system, as a country that acceded to the GATT in 1994, and as the last contracting party to sign on to the Agreement, my Government and myself fully understand the contribution of the GATT and now of the WTO to the remarkable worldwide growth in trade, employment and social progress. Therefore, here, at this singularly important commemoration, I wish to pay tribute to the GATT's founders and the enormous potential that they have unleashed.

The wealth of experience with the implementation of the GATT in the past five decades and its development and the collective wisdom of governments and traders is teaching us that trade and international economic ties promote and reinforce stability and peace, and that the only conflict worth pursuing is competition in an open market. The greatest achievement, to my mind, of the GATT, apart from its success as an economic experiment, is the binding of nations and peoples together on a non-political basis. Through the GATT and the World Trade Organization, Slovenia, a country that heavily depends on trade, has learned the benefits of such binding through regional integration and economic cooperation, in particular, within the Central European Free Trade Agreement, through the European Free Trade Association and most recently, through the processes of integration with the European Communities. My country sees regional trade agreements as a stage in the gradual reduction and elimination of trade barriers and therefore as the road to the ultimate goal of the GATT, as it was envisioned by its founders and is still championed today, that is, the disappearance of tariffs and quotas and other limitations to economic growth, greater employment and sustainable development.

Accession to the GATT was a major stepping-stone in Slovenia's economic history. It allowed my country to assert its economic independence and gain full citizenship among trading nations. It proved its viability as a young, vibrant and forward-looking economy. Slovenia is firm in its belief that all nations, large and small, and particularly developing nations and countries in transition, should be able to fully benefit from the multilateral trading system. No country should be barred from accession to the WTO. Even more, all of us should help those that are pursuing Membership. However, there should be no reason to compromise the established trade rules. The practice of contribution by new countries of meaningful market access concessions should be maintained, and nothing in future negotiations should be used as an excuse to rollback or revise the commitments and agreements already achieved.

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As we celebrate this remarkable milestone today, it is necessary to take account of the recent developments in international trade and to call on our Ministers to adopt objectives and guidelines for the future work in the World Trade Organization in clear and operational language, and to consider issues and future directions and through their recommendations to reaffirm the belief in the central role of the multilateral rule-based system, reaffirm the World Trade Organization as the primary forum for broad-based trade liberalization.

Furthermore, it is imperative to communicate to the wider public the achievements that we are celebrating today and what is the vision for the future in terms of enhancement of prosperity for all nations. It is of crucial importance for the World Trade Organization to be responsive to civil society and its concerns. It must also be able to listen seriously to the concerns of the developing world and address them in an appropriate way.

Slovenia is looking forward to the new challenges that the World Trade Organization must meet. It is looking forward to being involved in the new issues that will be discussed in the WTO in the next decade. The influence of these issues will go beyond trade. The major challenges now are trade and environment, labour standards, protected farm trade, new directions on investment, competition policy, and so on. The World Trade Organization must bring us into the new century on the wings of new ideas in a similar way as the founders of the GATT have brought forward a new era in economic history in the middle of this century.

The compelling ideas of the GATT, brought into the World Trade Organization, based on equal opportunity and open markets, clear rules and coherent domestic and international economic policy-making, and others, are worth pursuing and developing against the same odds that GATT had faced. We believe that we will succeed.
