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BELARUS

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(As an Observer)

The Republic of Belarus has been following the Conference debate with great attention. It is here at Doha that the fundamental principles of the new trade and economic policy are being framed, and they will determine global development in this decade.

Full-fledged integration in the world economy and the multilateral trading system, including through accession to the World Trade Organization, is part of the sustainable development strategy of Belarus and a priority of its foreign policy.

Less than two years away from Seattle we seem to find ourselves in a new world and we have learnt very serious lessons. The most important of them, probably, is that we are all responsible for all of us. There is no way for the international community but to endeavour to build together the economic environment to enable each and every country to deliver on this responsibility. The basis for that should be our common assessment of the global challenges that surround recent tragic events, and timely joint action to address them.

Speaking of the major challenge facing the world, marginalization, it should be recognized that its primary cause stems from a wrong choice of globalization strategy, namely, through fast and sweeping market reform and economic liberalization regardless of the country-specific national and historic situation. This led to a steep economic decline in many countries but particularly in the former Soviet Union. That is to say, the sustainability of development is threatened not only by crises but also by systemic transformation in the formerly state-controlled economies.

Regrettably, the draft Ministerial Declaration almost completely ignores the need to take account of the specific needs of the countries in transition, although their status has been clearly established by the Uruguay Round Agreements. Instead, the draft text contains language on small and vulnerable economies, with a "safeguard" provision that they should not be treated as a sub-category of WTO Members.

Belarus, as an economy in transition, firmly believes that trying to achieve a universal level playing field at the expense of those whose specific situation is disregarded can be dangerous for the future of the WTO. Recent accessions only confirm this trend. Moreover, it is easily foreseeable that some Members will find themselves in difficulty with regard to their effective participation in the new round of negotiations simply because their terms of accession do not leave them much to offer. It is, therefore, not the inclusion of specific interests that creates sub-categories but rather their rejection.

Institutional deficiencies and lack of instruments of economic governance prevent the majority of reforming economies from making efficient use of the WTO Agreements and facilities just as much as it is true of the developing countries. As to the countries in accession, particular complexity of the task for them lies in coordinating unprecedented economic and social reforms with taking far-reaching commitments on the international scale. In this respect we remain convinced that integration in the multilateral trading system should be regarded as a tool to assist the process of reform, and not a conditionality thereof.

We realize that similar problems also remain unsolved in a number of WTO Member countries. Accordingly, we are calling upon the WTO, UNDP, UNCTAD, World Bank and the donors to channel their technical cooperation resources to the implementation of institutional reforms required for WTO accession by providing support to all countries in need thereof.

What we witnessed at the previous Ministerial is a demonstration of just how critical it is to take the fullest possible account of the legitimate concerns of each and every participant in the multilateral trading system. There is a growing consensus that the opening of national markets should be implemented in stages adapted to each individual case. Liberalization should progress in parallel with growth in domestic demand, strengthening of competitiveness of goods and services in external markets and increase in export revenues. Better addressing the needs of developing countries and economies in transition will enable the WTO to reach faster results once a consensus has been achieved, and prevent situations whereby major international issues serve as trade-offs to bargaining of the agenda, as we saw in Seattle.

Regarding the new round of multilateral trade negotiations and the WTO work programme, it is important to avoid a one-sided approach, be it to the benefit of the developed or developing countries. The WTO agenda should include, among others:

- Improvement of market access across a broad range of sectors, both "new" and those previously negotiated;
- revisiting, to the extent necessary, of WTO legal texts for a more comprehensive coverage of developmental and economies-in-transition issues, including extension of special and differential treatment provisions to economic transition programmes, where appropriate;
- fast-track enlargement of the WTO membership based on a time-frame;
- promoting coordination between the WTO and other international agencies, particularly UNCTAD, including efficient resource sharing for technical cooperation.

The Republic of Belarus is actively involved in regional and sub-regional integration. In this respect Belarus is appreciative with regard to integration initiatives undertaken in other parts of the world which enable developing countries and economies in transition to increase their competitiveness and accelerate their accommodation to the dynamic multilateral trading system. We also welcome the support on the part of the WTO to new integration initiatives on regional, inter-regional and transcontinental level.

In the meantime, Belarus expects a positive attitude by the international community towards its own integration efforts within the CIS, the Eurasian Economic Community of Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as well as Union of Belarus and Russia. These should in no case be considered as an attempt to restore a system of state-controlled or locked-type economy.

We join all those who have expressed their appreciation with regard to the accession of the People's Republic of China to the WTO and see it as a milestone in the GATT-WTO history as it makes the Organization ever closer to becoming truly universal.

We also believe that the universality and transparency objectives would only gain in credibility if the World Trade Organization were to grant official working status to all of the six official languages of the United Nations, including Russian, Chinese and Arabic.

The Republic of Belarus will continue to invest every effort in the process of its accession to the WTO, as well as thereafter in the future work of the Organization as a Member. In the course of the multilateral trade negotiations Belarus will be prepared to table substantive proposals with a view to further consolidate and strengthen the multilateral trading system.
