

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

WT/MIN(01)/ST/55
11 November 2001

(01-5651)

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
Fourth Session
Doha, 9 - 13 November 2001

Original: English

CROATIA

Statement by H.E. Mr Neven Mimica
Minister for European Integration

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, I have the honour and great satisfaction to address the Ministerial Conference for the first time since Croatia became a Member of the World Trade Organization. I would also like to express my gratitude to our Qatari hosts for the excellent organization of this Conference, which we all hope and believe, would be a successful one.

Success here in Doha, which is, in our view, the launching of new, comprehensive round of multilateral trade negotiations, is practically an imperative. As we are all aware, another Seattle-like failure would simply be detrimental to the multilateral trading system. The actions that we shall take here on Tuesday are even more important in the light of the tragic events of 11 September and their harmful effects on the global economy. However, despite the predictions of recession and slowing in the world trade, these events should not be an excuse for increasing protectionism and barriers to the world trade. The only feasible option for overcoming the present difficulties is further trade liberalization and strengthening of the WTO system in order to adjust it to the challenges of the 21st century. We believe that is the main prerequisite for a stable and successful growth and development of our national economies, in particular of those with small and open domestic market, such as Croatia.

Croatia is determined and committed to contribute to this process by basing its future development upon open and export-oriented trade and economic policies compliant with the WTO rules. Following that line, Croatia, as a recently acceded country is honouring all its WTO commitments with the firm conviction that the country's active participation in the multilateral trading system is contributing to its economic growth. It is with that same conviction that we support continuous multilateral trade liberalization within the WTO, based on overall balance of rights, interests and obligations of all Members. In this context, looking towards new round of negotiations, I would like to stress that commitments, which Croatia has taken during the accession process, in particular regarding market access, exceeded in many aspects those taken in the Uruguay Round. In this respect, I would like to reiterate that we would have serious difficulties in accepting possible new commitments in that area before the expiration of the transitional period agreed during the accession process. We therefore believe and expect that an appropriate form of flexibility will be put in place to accommodate these concerns.

Despite these concerns, Croatia has repeatedly expressed its strong support for the launch of the new, comprehensive round of multilateral trade negotiations, as one of the most appropriate tools for long-term economic growth and sustainable development.

Only a comprehensive and balanced negotiating agenda directed towards enhancing market access, as well as towards strengthening, developing and consolidating the rules and disciplines can satisfy the interests of the WTO constituency by large. In addition to enhanced access to foreign

markets, Croatia is in favour of establishing multilateral framework on investment and competition, thus supporting negotiations in these areas. Furthermore, in the context of achieving a balanced agenda that will, to the largest possible extent, satisfy the interests of all, we need to seek that other areas of particular interest and importance to the membership should adequately be addressed.

For Croatia, as a small and open transitional economy, there is another important issue - developing of regional cooperation and trade liberalization, what we see as a complementary and not conflicting process with the multilateral trading system. In this respect, the process of integration within the larger network of regional free trade agreements is of utmost importance for us. Croatia has made some important steps toward regional cooperation by signing a number of free trade and other agreements, among which we would like to stress the particular importance of one - namely the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU, Croatia's main trading partner.

However, some of Croatia's neighbouring countries and trading partners are still outside the multilateral trading system. We support their accession to the WTO as soon as realistically possible, as we are convinced that adherence to the WTO rules and principles would render their economic policies predictable and integrated into the global economy. In the meantime, we believe that regional trade agreements based on these same principles could serve as a bridge to their full membership in the WTO.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that the draft Ministerial Declaration, as we received it before the Doha Conference, constitutes a good basis for negotiations on a mutually satisfactory basis. Naturally, like the other Members, we have a number of areas of concerns, some of which are significant, that we are seeking to address in our negotiations. However, we hope that all WTO Members would have enough strength and wish to overcome the current difficulties, so this new round of negotiations would be a success giving a boost to faster growth and development.

The Croatian delegation and I personally will do our utmost to contribute in attaining this objective.
