

Committee on Agriculture
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Statement by the European Communities

I should like to congratulate you for your quiet and efficient handling of business during this difficult opening phase of the Article 20 negotiations. Like a gifted schoolmaster, you kept us in order without even raising your voice; like an untheatrical conductor, you were able to direct this large orchestra with small but precise movements of your baton.

We have come so far and so fast that it is hard now even to remember the low point from which our discussions began. Dispirited after the set back in Seattle, many doubted whether our discussions would even get off the ground. Yet now after a year in which we have completed an impressive tour of many proposals, we are all in a much better position to judge the size of the task which will face us when we come to the stage where our different positions must be reconciled.

What stands out from the discussions so far?

First, and most evidently, the very large number of detailed and closely argued proposals.

Second, a point which was already evident in Seattle, the important part that developing countries are going to play in these negotiations, as befits their large participation in this organization. Equally, however, it is clear that there is no more a single "developing country" country position in these negotiations than there is a single "developed country" position. Indeed, I think we have to ask whether developed/developing is the most important distinction to be made as we seek to discern where the extremes of the various positions lie and where is the centre point.

Third, as I mentioned when I presented the Community's proposal, there is a worrying point of consistency in almost every position. Everyone seems to want to measure the success of the Uruguay Round by how much extra they have exported. No one, apparently, sees any virtue in importing.

Yet the GATT, which gave birth to the WTO, had as its central objective combating the forces of protectionism and progressively liberalizing trade. If we all want to export and none of us wants to import, we are setting for ourselves an unachievable goal. We also desert the central credo of the organization. But simply to state that protectionism in agriculture is contrary to the credo of the WTO isn't to solve the problem. We have to acknowledge that there are reasons why the process of trade liberalization is especially difficult in the Agricultural sector. What these reasons are was eloquently set out in the major debate we had on non-trade concerns. This debate confirmed the wisdom of the drafters of Article 20 in the important place they accorded to non-trade concerns, along with special and differential treatment for developing countries, in the text.

What conclusions should we draw from the three features of our discussions, so far? For me, three key features; three key conclusions:

1. From the very wide diversity of proposals, I deduce that consensus will not easily be found. We will need a driving impetus from outside as well as from inside our negotiation. Hence our belief that a Wide Round, apart from the benefits it will bring in other sectors, will be of decisive importance also in the negotiations on the built-in agenda.
 2. We will need to give real meaning to special and differential treatment. This does not mean we can have two sets of rules one for developed countries and one for developing countries. We are all members of one organization. But where the needs of **development** justify special treatment, be it preferences, for the small island developing states; be it special access provision for the least developed countries; be it longer time periods for tariff reductions for the most fragile economies, we should be prepared to give it.
 3. We should now move beyond textual analysis of Article 20 in our discussion of non-trade concerns and we should stop seeing non-trade concerns as an obstacle to trade liberalization. Rather we should recognise that finding appropriate mechanisms to resolve legitimate non-trade concerns is the key to making progress in our whole agenda.
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