

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

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Developments in World Trade

While exports have grown it will be interesting to note that imports grew on a bigger scale for ASEAN. Much reference has been made to ASEAN's success but this should not be seen by trading partners as a challenge or threat in the world market but rather as an opportunity since the ASEAN market is rapidly expanding.

The favourable trade performance should not be interpreted to mean that ASEAN does not face any trade impediments.

- in 1995 alone no less than 5 anti-dumping and CVD investigations or measures have been targeted at ASEAN countries;
- anti-circumvention investigations which are not allowed in the Anti-Dumping Agreement have already been initiated against some of us in ASEAN;
- the liberalization in textiles trade does not seem to be proceeding as expected and many "calls" were made and ASEAN too has not been spared. The integration process under the new textiles regime does not seem to give immediate tangible benefits even though countries have complied with the Textiles Agreement. I hope these countries could give greater consideration to the spirit of the Textiles Agreement;
- trade instruments purportedly used for environmental reasons by some of our major trading partners are another big concern for ASEAN. While work is still ongoing in the Committee on Trade and Environment as well as in other international fora, these trading partners have chosen to "beat the gun" and imposed unilateral measures at the sub-national level, and this is already affecting our exports of timber products.

WTO Activities

In the first year of implementation of the WTO Agreements, the key preoccupation has been the fulfilment of notification obligations. We in ASEAN have given particular importance to such obligations and have endeavoured to meet all notification requirements. Under the single undertaking we, like many other developing countries, have been suddenly burdened with notification requirements and it would be unfair to find fault in this first year of implementation where it would be impossible to expect full compliance. While recognizing the importance of notifications as a means to monitor implementation of the Agreements, some latitude of flexibility needs to be exercised in the formative years of the WTO. ./.

One concern we would like to point out is the attempt by certain Members to impose further obligations on notifications which in our opinion are otherwise not prescribed in the Agreements. To cite an example, where a developing country Member is allowed a transitional period for implementation of an Agreement or part of the Agreement, certain Members have been asking developing countries invoking such provisions to provide justifications. In other instances, we detect unreasonableness in some of the issues raised in the review of notifications. We hope this is not a "backdoor" attempt to deny the least-developed countries the agreed special and differential provisions in the Agreements.

Technical Cooperation

ASEAN applauds the Director-General's statement with regard to technical cooperation and the special emphasis on the LDCs. Funds are of course getting scarce -- hence the need to ensure cost effectiveness and maximizing the synergies amongst the related agencies, i.e., WTO and UNCTAD.

Also we should not forget there are other smaller developing countries which will undoubtedly need technical assistance. It is therefore crucial that besides maximizing the synergies, the WTO's technical cooperation activities should also aim at maximizing benefits -- landing multiplier effects and as to as many countries as possible, and capable of being followed through. There should be more effective monitoring and evaluation.

Perhaps with a view to achieving this, there could also be the possibility, inter alia, of the WTO undertaking programmes including training in collaboration with regional arrangements and regional commissions of the United Nations.

Singapore Ministerial Conference

As regards the Singapore Ministerial meeting, ASEAN wishes to underline the following points:

- issues of implementation are the priority;
- for the new issues, we would only remind the need for consensus building;
- it would be in our common interest not to overload the agenda and avoid building too high an expectation.