

PREPARATIONS FOR THE 1999 MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

Organization and Management of the Work Programme, Including Scope,
Structure and Time-Frames of Future Negotiations

Communication from the CEFTA countries and Latvia

The following communication, dated 25 June 1999, has been received from the Permanent Mission of Hungary.

1. The CEFTA countries and Latvia consider that only a comprehensive and balanced new round of negotiations, allowing for necessary cross-sectoral trade-offs could ensure satisfactory results reflecting the interests of all WTO Members, developed, developing and transition countries alike.

Scope

2. According to the views of the CEFTA countries and Latvia a comprehensive and balanced round should cover the built-in agenda of agriculture and services, the new issues identified at the Singapore Ministerial Meeting, that is investment, competition, transparency in government procurement and trade facilitation, together with negotiations to reduce non-agricultural tariffs. An improvement of the existing WTO rules and certain implementation issues as well as other issues on which consensus could be reached should be also part of the round. Particular attention should be given to measures assisting the integration of least-developed countries into the multilateral trading system.

Modalities

3. The CEFTA countries and Latvia consider that the results of the new round should be adopted in their entirety and apply to all WTO Members. This single undertaking constitutes the only guarantee of equivalent benefits to all Members, and the best means to ensure an end-result acceptable to all. In the view of these countries, any approach other than the single undertaking would make it virtually impossible to strike a generally advantageous balance of rights and obligations.

4. In the framework of a single undertaking CEFTA countries and Latvia would not exclude the possibility of achieving early harvests before the end of the new round itself, provided that they are applied on a provisional basis and that this does not mean that the final package becomes unbalanced.

Time-frame

5. The CEFTA countries and Latvia consider, given the speed of far-reaching changes in the world economy, the new comprehensive trade talks should deliver results fast. In their view the ambitious aims in a new round could be achieved through a relatively short negotiation of maximum three years. The CEFTA countries and Latvia further consider that the subjects may be covered in the new round have been extensively discussed in the WTO and therefore they are relatively well prepared for negotiations. In order to further expedite the negotiating process, the CEFTA countries and Latvia support the idea that the Seattle Ministerial Declaration should be clear, concise and explicit so as to provide an appropriate, firm guidance to the negotiators.

Management and structure of negotiations

6. The most appropriate forum for directing the negotiations would be the meeting of the General Council in special sessions or a trade negotiations committee.

7. To avoid creating complicated negotiating structure, the present subsidiary bodies, preferably in special sessions, could be used as the main fora for the negotiations.

8. The fourth Ministerial Conference might offer an opportunity for Ministers to exercise political supervision of the whole negotiating process.

Proposal

9. Ministers agree to launch a round of multilateral trade negotiations. The scope of the round would include mandated negotiations in services and agriculture as well as non-agricultural tariffs. The negotiations will also cover the issues identified at the Singapore Ministerial Meeting, the improvement of WTO rules, areas related to implementation and other issues on which consensus could be reached. Special attention should be paid to assisting the integration of the LDCs into the WTO system. The results of the negotiations should be adopted in their entirety and apply to all WTO Members in order to guarantee a generally advantageous balance of rights and obligations for the parties. The new round of negotiations will be carried out in maximum three years.
