

PREPARATIONS FOR THE 1999 MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

Negotiations on Agriculture

Communication from Switzerland

The following communication, dated 20 July 1999, has been received from the Permanent Mission of Switzerland.

Proposal

1. Negotiations shall aim, based on Article 20 of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture, to continue the process of reform of trade in agriculture through further reductions of export subsidies and domestic support, as well as further market access commitments, with the long-term objective to establish a fair and market-oriented agricultural trading system, fully recognizing the multifunctional character of agriculture.

Background

2. As far as the future negotiations on agriculture are concerned, Article 20 of the Agreement on Agriculture sets the course to be followed. Switzerland is ready to continue the process of reform in accordance with the terms of that Article and the negotiating mandate proposed above is mainly based on its contents, as well as on the other objectives and concerns mentioned in the preamble to the Agreement on Agriculture.

3. Switzerland would like to place special emphasis on two aspects. Firstly, Article 20 clearly states that the continuation of the reform process should be progressive. It is within this context that Switzerland is prepared to consider strengthening its commitments in the areas of export subsidies, market access and domestic support, respectively.

4. Secondly, the multifunctional character of agriculture is now widely recognized and should form a fundamental part of the negotiations. Moreover, Article 20 provides for non-trade concerns to be taken fully into account in the future negotiations. A growing number of Members – industrial and developing – are applying such multifunctional agricultural policies. The importance and weight attached to a given non-trade concern may vary between countries, depending on their particular situation and the level of public awareness. Accordingly, solutions should be found which enable all these concerns to be taken into account, in particular by extending the measures allowed under Annex 2 to the Agreement on Agriculture ("Green Box").

5. As far as Switzerland is concerned, food security, meeting the needs of a scattered rural population, protection of the environment and landscape conservation are important tasks assigned to agricultural policy. The question of supply is being formulated not just in quantitative but also in qualitative terms; the consumers want not only to have high-quality products but also to be fully informed about the nature of the products they are being offered. These are concerns which should also be properly taken into account.
