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BULGARIA

Statement by H.E. Mr Nikolay Vassilev
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy

At the outset, let me express our appreciation to the Government of the State of Qatar for hosting the Fourth Session of the WTO Ministerial Conference and to thank the WTO Secretariat and the Qatari Organization Committee for their organizational and logistical efforts.

Let me also congratulate and express gratitude to the Chairman of the General Council, to the Director-General and the staff of the Secretariat that worked tirelessly to bridge the existing divergences and to prepare the event.

The rising expectations after the Seattle Ministerial Conference that the World Trade Organization should adequately respond to the challenges and changes faced by the world economy today, properly address development issues and various concerns and take a decision to launch a new round of multilateral trade negotiations confer on our work at this Fourth Session of the Ministerial Conference a special responsibility.

Multilateralism has proven its ability over the last 50 years to contribute to sustained economic growth, prosperity and improved living standards. Trade liberalization has benefited Members' economies enormously. There is no reason to believe that further trade liberalization and strengthened rules will not lead to similar results.

This Conference represents an opportunity we need to take if we really care about the future. It is our responsibility to face reality and take decisions that will shape our economies and the lives of our peoples for the decades to come, decisions that are in the interest of the entire WTO membership and of each single Member.

To further strengthen its role and credibility, the Organization needs the support of an expanded membership. I would like to welcome the newly acceded Members and encourage those negotiating their terms of accession. Their commitment to join is a recognition of the importance attached to the multilateral trading system and the confidence in the benefits that the WTO can provide to its Members, be they small, developing, or big trading partners.

Bulgaria attaches great importance to the success of the Fourth Ministerial Conference at Doha and to the launching of a new round of multilateral trade negotiations. Our delegation's efforts are aimed at contributing to this end. Only a shared commitment to open trade can be a driving force for further growth.

In the way up to Seattle and throughout the preparatory process for the Doha Ministerial, Bulgaria has supported a broad negotiating agenda, which would ensure a balance of the interests and benefits for all WTO Members.

One element of the future negotiations to which Bulgaria attaches special importance is the extension of the additional protection for geographical indications under Article 23 of the TRIPS Agreement to products other than wines and spirits. The majority of the membership of the WTO has supported such negotiations and we were pleased to see that they were foreseen in the second draft for a ministerial declaration, presented by the Chairman of the General Council and the Director-General. In this draft, which is now before us, the extension of the additional protection for geographical indications is dealt with as an implementation issue and shall, therefore, be addressed as a matter of priority and appropriate action has to be recommended by the end of 2002.

The process of globalization has put development in the focus of the work of the WTO. If the multilateral trading system is to maintain and enhance its credibility, it must demonstrate a special sensitivity to the special needs and concerns of its less advantaged participants. Therefore, we strongly support a review of the special and differential treatment provisions with a view to strengthening them and making them more precise, effective and operational. We believe that this is possible only on the basis of objective criteria and economic indicators. Our view is that rights and privileges and flexibilities for the fulfilment of obligations should not be given to subjectively defined categories of countries, but on the basis of objective criteria only. Furthermore, it is our position that special rights, privileges and flexibilities in the fulfilment of obligations, given to different categories of countries, are enjoyed by all Members who fulfil the objective criteria and/or economic indicators underlying such categorization. It is on the basis of this understanding that we are prepared to agree to the adoption of the proposed declaration, in particular its paragraph 37, the decision on Implementation-Related Issues and Concerns, contained in JOB(01)/139/Rev.1, and the procedures, contained in document G/SCM/W/471.

With the proposed Ministerial Declaration we will be establishing a new ambitious work programme for the WTO for the next years. This programme provides for negotiations leading to changes in the existing agreements and to the elaboration of new agreements. There are, however, other issues, not foreseen in this programme, which do not necessitate changes in the agreements but which are nevertheless of particular importance for the functioning of the WTO and for the future of the multilateral trading system.

One such institutional issue, which has been on the agenda of the Organization after the Seattle Conference, is the question of internal and external transparency and participation in the decision-making process of the WTO. We are of the view that the WTO should continue its work on internal transparency and adopt concrete decisions which would provide guarantees against intransparent practices such as, for example, last moment proposals, limited distribution of unofficial documents in electronic format, delays in the distribution of minutes and the derestriction of documents, etc.

Another serious procedural problem, which distracted the WTO from its substantive work for several months before the Seattle Conference, is the need for clear and effective procedures for the appointment of Directors-General. It had been decided that such procedures would be adopted by September 2000 but actually no serious work was undertaken.

We think that these issues should be addressed by the General Council as priority matters and that deadlines should be set for the adoption of concrete decisions on them.

I hope that this Conference will be able to take a decision on the proposed work programme and that after two years we will be able to see its first results.
