

WTO GENERAL COUNCIL - 3 OCTOBER 2012

STATEMENT BY ANGELOS PANGRATIS, AMBASSADOR OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

[AGENDA ITEM I. REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE TRADE NEGOTIATIONS COMMITTEE]

Mme Chair, allow me first to begin by welcoming the Russian Federation at the first General Council following its accession to WTO. This is an important moment for the entire multilateral system as it expands to include a big and important country with a dynamic economy.

The EU congratulates Russia on the entry into the WTO and looks forward to Russia's participation in the multilateral trading system. It is useful to recall on such momentous occasions that membership in the WTO entails benefits for members but also important obligations and the overall responsibility for making the multilateral system function properly. Some questions have already arisen in terms of the fulfilment of such obligations. We are addressing them bilaterally with Russia and hope that our attempts will be successful.

I also welcome Vanuatu and congratulate them on their first participation to a General Council meeting.

Moving on to the interesting statement made by the TNC chair, I first thank him for his comprehensive report.

In the current circumstances, for the EU, the starting point remains the guidance of MC8: we remain committed to look at issues on their own merit, make progress where it can be achieved and explore new approaches, of course, with the positive and constructive spirit required by all.

We believe that concrete steps forward in areas where work is already taking place, is the best way to overcome the present stalemate and build the stepping stones that can restore the negotiating function of the WTO and enable us to move towards conclusion of the whole DDA.

In this respect, we welcome the positive engagement undertaken regarding discussions on the agreement specific proposals and the monitoring mechanism within the special session of the Committee on Trade and Development. We thank the Chair of this special session for his constructive approach and believe that there is a real room for progress on those issues.

The same holds true for the discussions on Trade Facilitation. They are progressing at technical level, with most Delegations realizing the vast benefits that an agreement would bring both in terms of its intrinsic economic value, as well as systemically, showing that the WTO is capable of delivering at least some part of the DDA. We need to come together now to move these negotiations forward and to constructively respond to any lingering concerns regarding the Trade Facilitation agreement and its eventual implementation.

In the same spirit, we need to find solutions to advance in other areas.

On agriculture, the EU is ready to discuss constructively new ideas that have recently been put on the table – keeping in mind the overall balance of the agricultural "package".

More broadly, the EU commends the efforts being made by Members and the chairmen of the negotiating groups to find solutions to breaking the continued stalemate in various areas of negotiations.

Discussions on the review of the ITA show that market access negotiations are possible. An informal process has now started. Countries that have produced products lists for the expansion of the coverage of ITA are now discussing on the basis of one single compiled list of products. We need to start moving now into a negotiation phase. A useful process on NTBs has also begun. We hope that all countries will continue to make efforts to achieve results in both processes.

Mme Chair, we are now effectively 14 months away from the Bali Ministerial. We should make sure that we use this time wisely and with a sense of urgency to not find ourselves a year from now searching for creative ways of explaining why we have not taken the steps that Ministers at MC8 asked us to make. We need to move forward and start responding again with real negotiated outcomes to the demand and expectations of our societies.

Thank you for your attention.

(ENDS)

AGENDA ITEM "ANY OTHER BUSINESS"

UKRAINE'S ARTICLE XXVIII NOTIFICATION

STATEMENT BY ANGELOS PANGRATIS, AMBASSADOR OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

I have a short statement to deliver on behalf of the EU with the support of Croatia.

The EU would like to express our very serious concerns about Ukraine's recent announcement of its intentions to renegotiate a significant part of its WTO commitments. This request for negotiation is the most comprehensive made since the WTO was created, affecting almost 400 tariff lines.

The EU is of the firm opinion that the procedure set out in Article XXVIII GATT is not meant for renegotiating a significant part of the accession commitments of WTO Members. It is all the more surprising that this happens so shortly after Ukraine's accession.

The EU considers that Ukraine's request raises very obvious and very serious systemic concerns as it risks undermining the credibility of Members' commitments to their WTO obligations.

The EU believes that the coverage of the tariff changes in itself could make it extremely difficult - in practical terms most probably impossible - for Ukraine to maintain a "general level of reciprocal and mutually advantageous concessions not less favourable to trade", as required by Article XXVIII of the GATT.

Of course, the fact that Ukraine has not yet provided any information about the scope of the tariff changes and the level of the future bindings only adds to the uncertainty in this respect.

The EU is seeking to receive from Ukraine sound explanations of the reasons underlining this action and urges Ukraine to inform all Members in a transparent way about planned tariff changes.

Overall, the EU invites Ukraine to carefully consider its position on this issue.

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