

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

WT/MIN(98)/ST/29

18 May 1998

(98-1987)

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
Second Session
Geneva, 18 and 20 May 1998

Original: English

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Statement Circulated by Mr. Ján Foltín,
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On behalf of the Slovak delegation, I wish to express my gratitude and appreciation to the Swiss Government for cordial and warm welcome and excellent organization of this Conference. In the outset I would like to ensure all participants that Slovakia will in a positive way contribute to the success of this undoubtedly important event in global context.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of establishment of multilateral trading system it is the most appropriate time to pay a tribute to the system which to large extent contributed through its principles and rules to the global growth, stability and liberalization of trade relations and even more important to make objective assessment of its achievements.

It has been a top priority to integrate Slovakia into the world economy. GATT and later WTO enabled us to fulfil this task in a quick, broad and transparent manner. Strong commitment to multilateral trading system is thus parallel to birthday of our sovereign State. By reaffirming the primacy of the multilateral trading system, which contributed to remarkable growth in trade in goods and services we support further comprehensive multilateral liberalization, where all members would find their possibility to address concerns they may have. We are aware of them and future success of the system would depend on how we will be able to respond adequately to these sometimes complicated issues.

We are also convinced that regional arrangements which specifically for Central Europe have played and play positive role and for Slovakia even more important in complete reintegration of our economy in broader context. We expressed this view in Singapore and our conviction that regional approach is not in conflict with multilateral system but contributes to liberalization effort on global basis remains. In spite of some worry expressed, which has become a frequent phenomenon within the WTO, ever growing number of such agreements proved to have rational background. It is our mutual task to discuss openly existing concerns and we just can encourage this process aimed at reasonable solution. In this regard we renew our commitment to compatibility and consistency of existing agreements with the multilateral trading system.

With satisfaction we state growing interest of countries seeking accession to the WTO, which is confirming attractiveness of WTO as a truly global organization safeguarding stability, predictability and legal security in international trade relations. We are very keen to speed up the process of accession of applicant countries which are our traditional and perspective trade partners. Rapid accession, however, should be based on the quality of market access commitments and overall adherence of domestic legal system to WTO the rules. Commercially viable terms should be a cornerstone of accession process and leading principal in the whole process.

A clear signal for this Ministerial Meeting, that balanced agenda which includes proper assessment of implementation and realistically drafted future agenda being partially given by existing commitments but also by ambitions taken from emerging necessity. Effective implementation of commitments is a priority matter for us. It should be acknowledged, however, that there are difficulties in implementation of the Agreements especially for developing countries and to some extent for countries in transition. We are not questioning liberalization as such, and had reiterated it many times, but some aspects of its implementation, as far as speed, scope, manner of assertion or unequal benefits sharing should be taken into account. Thorough, broad and objective assessment of existing commitments is a common denominator for effective functioning of the system as well as for possible inclusion of new areas, brought on agenda in Singapore, into negotiating process. Meaning of objective analysis we understand as open dialogue taking into debate both positive and negative consequences of liberalization for all areas covered by respective agreements from the aspect of different countries of various degrees of development. We believe that this is the right starting point for future negotiations and precondition of many countries for serious considering of further liberalization efforts.

Economic difficulties of Asian economies have sent a strong message which have to be addressed, since they are challenging international trading system. We should be aware of negative consequences of financial crisis, which may strengthen tendencies for protectionist pressures. It is inevitable to prove that adequate answer is to keep markets open and multiply efforts to continue in economic reforms based on multilateral liberalization. Current developments also confirmed close interrelationship or interdependence of trade with financial and fiscal policies. Coherent approach in seeking solutions should be found in a complex way where improved coordination between WTO and IMF is vital.

"Future is present" in built-in agenda. We reiterate our support for initiation of negotiations in committed areas, namely agriculture and services in an agreed timetable. As far as agriculture is concerned, Slovakia, having obeyed general rules of liberalization formulas during fundamental reform in this sector has left it too opened and thus more vulnerable. Here, our effort would rather incline to pressure on partners to do more in opening up their markets than to seek protectionist path, aimed at creating competitive equilibrium.

Successful conclusion of negotiations on basic telecommunications and financial services have proved our ability to find compromise even in most sensitive issues. Slovakia has contributed to these results as an active participant and expressed in concrete terms its supportive approach to liberalization trends. Additionally, we have joined ITA initiative in given time-frame which as a consequence, further strengthened liberal environment in Slovak market. However, the latest trends in broadening scope and product coverage seems to go well beyond original intentions is creating certain concerns and would not be a way how we would like to see the liberalization process. Our preference is comprehensive rather than narrow sectoral approach, where share of benefits for each member may be better achieved.

Liberal regimes resulting from liberalization efforts in decades need today more than before certain possibilities to correct negative developments, therefore we encourage to speed up the work on effective and fair mechanism for remedial purposes, especially in services area where work on emergency safeguards, subsidies has not been completed.

We reaffirm our desire to pursue issues of crucial importance for further improvement of economic environment aimed at sustainable development, growth and job creation. In this context development in Asia has sent also messages on crucial importance of serious consideration of investment issues. Trade and investment, being a matter of examination as a result of Singapore, should become a topic of priority in future WTO agenda together with other relevant issues as trade and competition as well as trade facilitation. Proper addressing of these complex issues would significantly contribute to our ability to react in a prompt manner to the realities of today's economic developments.

While we are supportive to discuss electronic commerce as a truly perspective topic, we are convinced that further analysis of this issue before committing ourselves, is necessary. Perhaps, Council for Trade in Services would serve as an institutional basis, since there is some rational behind.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate position of Slovakia, that we are positive in adopting of ambitious, comprehensive, but balanced agenda addressing issues, which are to be included into mandate for the next ministerial meeting with creating realistic future-looking agenda and adequate time-frame for the preparatory work on negotiations in the coming "round for the next century".
