

Overall aims for the Ministerial Meeting

In broad terms the European Community

The WTO and civil society

A major challenge for all WTO Members is to strengthen public understanding of, and confidence in the multilateral system. Some sectors of our societies are concerned about the impact of globalization on their livelihoods and uncertain of the benefits provided by a trading system based on international rules. We must introduce measures to improve transparency of the workings of the WTO, and greater engagement with representatives of the civil society. In doing so we must be prepared to demonstrate to all interested groups the economic and social benefits that result from an expansion of trade, as well as the stability that the rule-based system brings.

The future

The WTO must look forward. Economic growth and well-being can only be sustained by continued reform and continued liberalization, because the world economy is changing rapidly and the multilateral system has continually to keep up with those changes. Traditional concepts and patterns of trade are now inextricably linked with international patterns of investment, with communications technology, with the explosive growth of trade in services, and with major issues involving competition policy, the management of the environment, and sustainable development. All these issues demand a response. Framing that response is the key challenge of the WTO in the years to come.

The Community is convinced that these challenges can be met only if we embark on a new, comprehensive round of trade negotiations: a Millennium Round. The Community has therefore been at the forefront of those who have called for such a trade round to start at the beginning of the next century.

We need a comprehensive trade round essentially for two reasons. First, to maintain our sovereign control in the face of rapid and far-reaching economic change. Only by embracing this change can we remain the masters of it. Simply to stay still, we need to set a far-reaching agenda for further liberalization of trade and investment. If we do not, then in view of the pressures the international economy is now under, we risk slipping backwards. As the recent difficulties in Asia have shown, more liberalization, not less is needed. A liberalization underpinned however by multilateral rules, bringing transparency, fairness and predictability.

The second reason for a comprehensive round is to ensure balance. The WTO's built-in agenda foresees negotiations to further liberalize agriculture and services starting at the end of 1999. Those negotiations are going to be more meaningful, more successful and lead to a more significant outcome if placed within a broader negotiating framework. Because it is through a comprehensive approach involving a broad range of issues that all participants can identify gains and in doing so offset any opposition to further liberalization that may arise in specific sectors. In short, only a comprehensive approach can allow us to benefit our widely different constituencies. And only a comprehensive approach will, I submit, allow us to integrate to an acceptable degree the concerns of the broader civil society.

We have therefore argued in favour of a comprehensive round starting in 2000, covering the

b1 161.52 279.12 Tm/F17 11 T0r2d

Timing

A comprehensive trade round needs careful preparation, and must be able to deliver results fast, given the growing speed of economic development. A round encompassing the subjects the Community has identified can be concluded