

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

CONTRACTING PARTIES
Thirty-Eighth Session
Ministerial Meeting
(24-27 November 1982)

Original: English

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This is just the time when we need a Ministerial conference in GATT. The very seriousness of the present situation calls for economic co-operation, for concerted action and for maintaining an open and strong multilateral trading system. If we do not manage to abide by such policies and if we attempt individually to save ourselves as best we can through unco-ordinated, national protectionist policies, the situation could quickly worsen much further. It could then at worst deteriorate to such an extent that the entire liberal trading system that was founded after the Second World War and further developed since then, might collapse under the strains of a full-fledged economic crisis.

In order to break the tide of protectionist pressures which all our governments are facing, we must also attack the underlying causes of restrictive measures. Now that inflation in industrialized countries seems to be brought down to a controllable level, it is important that productive investment be sought, and that activities be created to bring down unemployment world-wide.

On this background we should attach the greatest importance to the political declaration patiently worked out in advance of this meeting. We, responsible representatives of governments, should take with us back home and defend to the best of our ability our common commitment - and I quote from the draft declaration: "to abide by our GATT obligations and to support and improve the GATT trading system, so that it may contribute vigorously to the further liberalization and expansion of trade based on mutual commitment, mutual advantage and overall reciprocity, and the most-favoured-nation clause".

These are objectives which are difficult and even impossible to reach if we try to reach them in isolation. But I maintain that they are attainable if we all join forces. And if we manage in practical policy, as it is said in another part of the political declaration " ... to ensure that trade policies and measures are consistent with GATT principles and rules", - I am not unduly concerned by the admittedly moderate progress in drawing up elaborate commitments and obligations in the more specific chapters of the Ministerial document.

What has been done with regard to these chapters, I would think, is to establish a programme of work and priorities for the 1980s. It will be our responsibility in the time to come to see to it that this programme will be permitted to progress according to the time-schedule we have agreed on.

Saying that I am not unduly concerned by the lack of more far-reaching decisions in what can be called the operational parts of the paper before us does not mean of course that I am satisfied and content in all respects.

Thus, I must express disappointment at the lack of substantive progress in drawing up more concrete, well-defined rules for recourse to the GATT safeguard clause. It is to be regretted that so far it has not proved possible to arrive at a system which could provide both for greater transparency and for greater security for the trading community. However, all efforts must now be devoted to the task we have set ourselves, i.e. to arrive at a comprehensive understanding in the safeguard sector by the 1983 session of the contracting parties. My Government attaches utmost importance to solving this question. Hence, we are prepared to show flexibility with regard to the different elements of such a system in order to reach a common understanding within the time-limit set.

Turning to agriculture, I know that there are many who are particularly dissatisfied by what is considered to be inadequate progress in integrating this sector more fully into the GATT system.

But still, I think we can all take a certain satisfaction in the fact that greater attention and greater transparency will now be given to agriculture within the GATT framework, where a special committee will be established and where all measures relating to this sector will be examined in a broad context, taking into account the specific characteristics and problems of the agricultural sector.

One of the most encouraging features in the 1970s was the dynamic rôle which developing countries played in the world economy. Developing countries contributed significantly to the dynamism of world trade, not least through their demand for exports from industrialized countries. This dynamic rôle has weakened in the most recent years, due to a number of problems linked to the crisis conditions in the international economy: sluggish demand and falling prices for the raw material exports of developing countries, barriers to their exports of manufactures, serious debt servicing problems, higher deficits and a very disturbing reduction in growth. While striving to cure the underlying economic problems as a whole, we must turn our attention to ways and means of strengthening North-South trade and the benefits which developing countries derive from it.

I hope that some tangible progress could be made in the near future, for instance through improvements of the generalized system of preferences by easing its rules of origin, expanding its coverage, increasing its predictability in the larger term, and removing all custom duty as far as the least developed countries are concerned. We should also start considering possible new ways of progressing in this area.

Given the present economic circumstances, the GATT must give first priority to implementing and safeguarding what has been achieved, particularly in the Tokyo Round. However, there are also some new areas to which GATT should pay attention. Among those, trade-related services is an important subject, complex as it is. We would welcome the inclusion of a study on trade in services in the work programme to be adopted.

At the opening I pointed to the rather gloomy economic situation which forms the background for this meeting. There are elements in this situation which might lead to defeatism. Maybe the situation is such that the man - no doubt a pessimist - was right who said that the difference between an optimist and a pessimist is that the latter is better informed!

However, we should take advantage of the fact that we are better informed today, better informed than in the 1930s. Let us learn from the experience that resort to protectionism in difficult times is a process which unfailingly will lead to losses for all. Therefore, the importance of this meeting can and should be a common commitment by us all to uphold the principles of liberal trade and of preserving and strengthening the institutional system to which we are all parties.