

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

RESTRICTED

Spec(82)80
24 November 1982

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

Original: French

OPENING STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. FRITZ HONEGGER,
PRESIDENT OF THE CONFEDERATION,
HEAD OF THE SWISS DELEGATION

As representative of the country in which GATT has established its headquarters, I deem it a privilege and an honour to address you at the start of this meeting of CONTRACTING PARTIES at ministerial level. I have pleasure in wishing you, on behalf of my Government, a very cordial welcome to my country and to express the hope that your stay here will be a pleasant and, above all, a fruitful one. I should also like to begin by paying a tribute to our President and thanking him for having opened this Ministerial meeting with such clear and straightforward remarks.

Our Ministerial meeting, the first in nine years, is no ordinary occasion. It has been convened at this particular time because all our countries are concerned by the fact that certain commercial policy actions are endangering the system of open international trade governed by the General Agreement. They have therefore felt the urgent need to react in order to prevent this trading system from ultimately giving way under protectionist pressures.

Our task is thus clear: we are here to close ranks in the struggle against protectionism in all its forms. We now have a unique opportunity to reverse the harmful trends which have lasted all too long and to prevail against the current which has nearly swept us away. For both economic and political reasons, it would be irresponsible of us not to seize it. Trade disputes which are not resolved in the multilateral contractual framework tend to assume a political dimension.

We have a real possibility of success. For, by restoring a convincing stability to the open trading system, we shall encourage productive investment and thereby make an essential contribution to world economic recovery. It would mean yielding to unpardonable resignation and ignoring reality to take the view that international trade only follows the general economic situation and is incapable of influencing its revival.

I recognize, however, that our task is far from easy. Distressed as we are by rising unemployment, we shall need much conviction and firmness to resist the temptation to solve immediate problems by jeopardizing our longer-term future. But to yield to that temptation would be to ignore the cost of the alternatives. A return to bilateralism would constitute a

./.

strong brake on recovery and lead to the search for trade equilibriums at a level lower than that attainable today in the multilateral framework. In saying that, I am also thinking of the fate of the developing countries whose growth must not be endangered.

In the economic sphere, the responsibility of governments does not end at their frontier. We all share in the global responsibility for developing the whole of our economies. We must therefore assume that co-responsibility jointly - in a collective action. A collective action is necessary because it can be more effective than the sum of our individual efforts. It will also be valuable as mutual encouragement to hold firm.

To succeed, we shall have to begin by restoring confidence among us and by ceasing first to look for, in others, the causes of the difficulties which beset us. We shall also have to be prepared to commit ourselves to behaviour towards our partners of the kind we ardently wish them to show towards us. It is in that spirit that we shall achieve two results:

- First, we shall be effectively consolidating and strengthening our commitments and our respect for the rules, principles and objectives of the General Agreement and for the functioning of the institution of GATT;
- Secondly, we shall be defining, clearly and convincingly, the future orientation of the application of the General Agreement, bearing in mind the new requirements and forms of international trade. GATT has never been an institution of the past. It addresses the present and will serve to prepare the future.

To that end, we must agree not to correct without respecting, not to claim without contributing, and not to talk without acting. Intentions without corresponding commitments would lack conviction and would not meet the legitimate expectations of the economic community.

* * *

There is no longer time for exhortations or for declarations of goodwill. To restore confidence we must deserve it. For what is no doubt the first time, a Ministerial conference of GATT must not only initiate new work but also produce conclusions. That will mean completing, at the ministerial level, the negotiation of essential points in the operational field, that are as yet unresolved. We look to you, Mr. President, to organize that late-hour negotiation and are at your beck and call to assist you.

In wishing this conference all the success that the international trading community is entitled to look forward to, I express the hope that it may result in restoring to the rules, principles and objectives of GATT their full effectiveness in the trading policies of the contracting parties. The present economic context needs this more than ever.