



Statement by EU Commissioner Cecilia Malmström

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Speech by European Commissioner for Trade Cecilia Malmström

Plenary session of the eleventh Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO)

Madam Chairwoman, Director-General, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The successes of our last two Ministerial Conferences brought some optimism that despite significant differences of views among its Members, the WTO is still capable of delivering important negotiated outcomes. One could also detect certain openness for more pragmatism going forward. Unfortunately however, we start this year's Ministerial Conference with more questions than answers, and little sense of concrete progress over the past two years. The system is being challenged, Members show insufficient collective ownership and are divided on key questions such as what the WTO should be doing. And there are growing calls for conducting business outside the multilateral setting.

In this context, MC11 provides us with a pivotal opportunity to discuss what we collectively want from the WTO, and to provide political guidance for achieving it. We need to break out of the logjam that has prevented this organisation from playing the part it should in global trade. This has to be done through a concerted effort of WTO Members.

The problems are many but essentially boil down to one fundamental issue: an inability to discuss issues of concern to Members and to agree on a suitable way forward. This has manifested itself with procedural blockages on topics which are indisputably critical for today's global trade, and a futile discussion regarding the existence or not of a mandate. The problem is systemic and is beginning to jeopardise the entire organisation.

We clearly have a lot of unfinished business that must be addressed. But at the same time, we cannot close our eyes to the fact that there are issues in the broader trade world that need to be discussed, such as e-commerce, services or the concerns of SMEs. And we must seriously address legitimate development requests of a large part of the Membership. It is essential that we have candid political discussions on these topics here at MC11. This is 2017 - we need to show that the WTO can answer to modern claims and expectations.

However, discussion for the sake of discussion will only get us so far. We need to have a clear objective in mind. For the European Union this is clear: to preserve and strengthen the rules based multilateral trading system. For it to thrive, it has to develop. For it to develop, it needs to address the concerns of its Members. Failing this, it will wither. This would be to detriment of everyone, but most of all the poorest developing countries.

Shoring up the WTO requires three things from MC11. First, concrete decisions on issues such as fisheries subsidies with clear rules regarding certain egregious types of subsidies. Second, decisions on a clear path forward for issues such as e-commerce, domestic regulation in services and SMEs, which are key for global trade. Third, a clearer sense of the most effective ways for the WTO to support development. Our work in the WTO also needs to be underpinned by a renewed commitment to transparency.

I am disappointed that despite intense work and discussions over the last two years, we arrive in Buenos Aires with so many issues open. The EU made a strong effort to help advance on key issues. We regret that progress on domestic support in agriculture and on some other issues has not been possible. We do hope to achieve some concrete outcomes, but the risk of failure is real. I hope Members here will show leadership. We will work with our Argentinian hosts to deliver as successful a Ministerial Conference as possible.