

Virtual Informal WTO Ministerial Gathering, 21 January 2022

Personal Concluding Remarks by the Chair, Federal Councillor and Head of the Federal Department for Economic Affairs, Education and Research, Guy Parmelin, Switzerland

28 Ministers and high officials representing a broad spectrum of the WTO membership attended this year's Informal World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Gathering in virtual format. In concluding and with warm thanks to all participants for their contributions, I would like to summarise the main points from our discussions as follows:

- Ministers regretted the postponement of the twelfth WTO Ministerial Conference (MC12) due to the epidemiological situation. Many expressed their hope that MC12 will be held in person when circumstances permit.
- Ministers supported the continuation of work on all issues under negotiation with a view to achieving tangible results as soon as possible and underlined their readiness to intensify negotiations building on progress realized so far. Given the uncertainties about the timing and format of MC12, many favored a pragmatic approach to conclude negotiations on a given issue if sufficient progress has been achieved. All issues would have to be treated with the same intensity in order to reach meaningful and balanced outcomes in all areas. Many Ministers expressed their readiness to help advance and conclude negotiations.
- Ministers expressed their concerns about the considerable social and economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis. Ministers highlighted the important contribution that the WTO should bring to fight the current pandemic and future health crises as well as to foster economic recovery. They notably stressed the need to make rapid and concrete progress to promote the development, production, equitable access and efficient distribution of essential medical products, including vaccines. In this perspective, most Ministers considered that the WTO response to the pandemic should include the role of intellectual property protection and the TRIPS Agreement as well as the Walker process on rules and practices governing trade flows.
- Ministers concurred that a comprehensive and effective agreement on harmful fisheries subsidies, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 14.6, should be concluded as soon as possible. To that end, Ministers showed their readiness to

continue the negotiations on outstanding issues in a focused manner based on progress achieved so far.

- Many participants argued for meaningful decisions to create the basis for effective negotiations on agricultural trade policy reform. Several Ministers highlighted food security as an issue of particular priority. In this context, several Ministers mentioned *inter alia* domestic support, export restrictions and public stockholding as priority issues.
- Ministers widely acknowledged the need to reform the WTO and highlighted the importance of a fully and well-functioning WTO dispute settlement system to provide security and predictability to the multilateral trading system.
- A number of Ministers highlighted the role of development and diverse issues related to the special and differential treatment of developing and least developed countries (LDCs).
- Several Ministers welcome the conclusion of the negotiations on Services Domestic Regulations. They also called for progress in the ongoing negotiations on E-commerce and on Investment Facilitation and supported further work in Trade and Environment, Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment as well as Micro-, Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises.
