

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON
TARIFFS AND TRADE

ACCORD GÉNÉRAL SUR
LES TARIFS DOUANIERS ET LE COMMERCE
GATT/843
4 May 1964

Opening of the Kennedy Round

STATEMENT MADE BY MR MAURICE BRASSEUR, BELGIAN MINISTER
OF EXTERNAL TRADE, IN HIS CAPACITY AS PRESIDENT OF THE
EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY
ON 4 MAY 1964

It is by practising the art of synthesis that discussions are most fruitful. Accordingly, the European Economic Community is particularly gratified over the work which is being officially inaugurated today.

Indeed, on this first anniversary of our joint decisions of May 1963, today's meeting will enable us to evaluate the progress made so far and, in the light of that progress, will give us an opportunity to assess the obstacles still outstanding.

In the name of the Council of the Community, over which I have the honour to preside at present, I wish here to reaffirm our interest in the success of these negotiations. Indeed, that is commonplace. I have personally participated in nearly all the ministerial meetings of the Community in the past twelve months, and I can truthfully say that the Council has had many and detailed discussions of the problems now before us.

A focal point of these discussions has always been the deep desire of each of the member States and of the Commission to seek the ways and means most likely to enable the negotiators to succeed in their task.

There is no denying that the task is a tremendous, difficult and ambitious one. For the first time in the history of GATT, we have departed from the method of negotiating on a product-by-product basis. This time, we are trying to ensure a significant expansion in world trade by means of an organic plan for dismantling tariff and non-tariff barriers, and on the basis of mutual advantages.

MORE

Such a plan carries two prerequisites: first of all, new negotiating methods must be found, and secondly, a new philosophy must be defined.

The essential features of the philosophy have already been presented to you by representatives of the Commission. It has been drawn up in the conviction that it offers the most realistic prospects for a significant and durable expansion of trade.

Of course, in certain respects our views do not perhaps fully coincide with those of other major countries participating in this conference. At least, however, we share with them the same desire to see the work of this meeting lead to concrete results which will not be merely token successes.

We must not let ourselves be put off by any such divergencies, which are only natural in a gathering of free nations such as GATT; indeed, the contrary would be grounds for concern, for absence of discussion would be a sign of limited interest, if not indifference, towards these problems.

There is something to be gained from any sincere discussion. A frank confrontation of the views of all participants is therefore desirable. The starting point should be the two-fold principle that every argument comprises some well-founded elements, and that errors which are objectively found to exist must be frankly acknowledged.

That, I believe, is a reasonable attitude.

That will be the attitude of the Community.

The late President Kennedy, to whom we largely owe the initiative of these negotiations, rightly said that the philosophy of a free market - a broader economic choice for men and nations - is as old as liberty itself. It is not the philosophy of a party. And he went on to state that the Trade Expansion Act must present itself as the expression of a nation, not of a single party or fraction of a party.

This same spirit must preside over our work. We are all in agreement on the substance and the essential objectives of the task. The outcome of our deliberations cannot and must not be solutions which would reflect only partial opinions.

The aim must be to arrive at reasonable and reasoned solutions which are the synthesis of all the valid trends of opinion; and such synthesis in the results will be an expression of the unity which must henceforth prevail among us.

MORE

In fact, this work of confrontation of opinions has been in progress for several months past; and the results already achieved are of appreciable value.

There is still disagreement on some problems, for example that of disparities and several cases where the divergencies relate to formulas rather than to the actual substances of the problems. Moreover, it is time to begin discussing the questions which we have not yet tackled.

Indeed, the problems of trade between industrialized countries are not limited solely to disparities. The latter undoubtedly constitute an extremely important problem, but in endeavouring to solve it one must not forget other questions. Progress towards the solution of the latter might in fact assist the discussions on disparities.

On the other hand, the Community wishes to stress an important aspect of this meeting which is that trade between industrialized countries is only one of the topics of our conference. For there is also the development of trade between industrialized countries and developing countries, and there is also the development of trade between developing countries themselves. Those are urgent problems, and I am glad to see that we have already made some progress in this field, for example by practically accepting the principle of non-reciprocity.

That does not suffice, however. Other ideas relating not only to the reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers but also to the question of regulating the operation of world markets have been presented both in this forum and in the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. These ideas are all interlinked, and I hope that account will be taken of all these elements in our work, and particularly in the discussions of the sub-committee dealing with problems of under-development.

All this goes to show how vast, complex and delicate is the subject matter to be dealt with here. It is, therefore, not surprising that there are still some points requiring clarification; and we cannot hope to solve the problems very quickly.

There is, of course, one concern of which we are fully aware, namely that of not protracting these discussions endlessly and of reaching conclusions as soon as possible.

While on the one hand, however, we must not waste precious time in long drawn-out discussions, I must warn you against the contrary excess which would hurl us into hasty decisions. First of all, we should together examine in detail all aspects of the complex problems before us, just as it is essential that we should manage to convince each other of the soundness of some arguments and the defects which may be inherent in others.

MORE

Hasty decisions which do not take account of such considerations, decisions which attempt to settle certain complex and delicate problems by more or less elaborate texts, decisions which in vague and roundabout wording conceal the ulterior motives of those who have not been able to convince themselves that such and such a solution is justified - such decisions, gentlemen, would frankly be bad ones. That would be only a semblance of success, and that is not what we need.

It will be the task of the representative of the Commission of the European Economic Community to present the Community's views in practical terms and in more detail. As you know, the European Economic Community is participating in this meeting as an economic and commercial entity. In accordance with the Treaty of Rome which binds us, the Commission is responsible for conducting these negotiations. In fact, the Council has already given the Commission the necessary mandate and directives, for this purpose.

The success of the task before us is of vital importance for the future of our countries. Our negotiators will now have jointly to conceive solutions which are at the same time bold and reasonable, equitable but generous. We need them in order to encourage harmonious and rapid expansion of international trade, whose vitality will strengthen our national economies for the growing betterment of our peoples.

END