



Council of the
European Union

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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council

To: Delegations

Subject: Conclusions at the start of the 13th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization

Delegations will find in Annex the Council conclusions at the start of the 13th World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference, as adopted by the Council on 25 February 2024.

**Conclusions at the start of the 13th Ministerial Conference
of the World Trade Organization**

1. The European Union is committed to an open and rules-based multilateral trading system, with a modernised WTO at its core. The last Ministerial Conference (MC12) in June 2022 delivered many positive outcomes that WTO members should build on. The EU supports a meaningful package of outcomes for the 13th World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference (MC13) that could serve as a stepping stone for further reforms to be agreed no later than at MC14. It also calls on all WTO Members to contribute constructively according to their needs and capacities. The stability and predictability of a rules-based system are needed more than ever to act as a bulwark against an increasingly fragmented economic order.
2. The Council strongly welcomes the accession of Comoros and Timor-Leste to the WTO and notes that these accessions are expected to make a positive and lasting contribution to economic reform and sustainable development in both countries. Their accession, the first ones since 2016, shows the continuing appeal and staying power of the WTO as a multilateral organization.
3. The Council highlights the importance of reforming the WTO's core functions, so that it can continue to deliver effectively on its objectives and tackle the challenges of the 21st century. Having a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system and agreeing on a lasting multilateral solution to the current blockage of the Appellate Body are absolute priorities. The Council underlines the utmost importance and urgency of reform and recalls the MC12 commitment to having a fully-functioning dispute settlement system accessible to all Members by 2024.

4. Meaningful reform is also needed regarding the WTO's monitoring and deliberating function, as well as the WTO's role as a negotiating forum to develop new and updated rules. Enhancing deliberation on key issues for the trading system, such as state intervention in support of industrial sectors with the view to ensuring a level playing field, the impact of global environmental challenges on world trade, and trade and inclusiveness, are also key priorities for the EU.
5. The Council hopes that WTO members can complete their ratification procedures regarding the Agreement on fisheries subsidies reached at MC12 so that it can enter into force as soon as possible. This Agreement is of important systemic significance: it demonstrates that the WTO membership can deliver multilateral trade rules, and that the WTO can address today's global concerns about sustainability. The Council also underlines the importance of meeting the WTO Membership's commitment to complete the negotiations on additional rules, to deliver fully on the UN Sustainable Development Goal 14.6 by MC13, in line with relevant EU policies ensuring environmentally sustainable fisheries and consistent with the objective of achieving economic and social benefits. The agreement must be in line with the EU Common Fisheries Policy and necessary support programmes for EU fisheries, and guarantee an appropriate level playing field with the fisheries industries in third countries, taking into account the environmental sustainability objectives of the negotiations.
6. The Council looks forward to the renewal of the multilateral moratorium on custom duties on electronic transmissions and sees the e-commerce Work Programme as a valuable framework. Extending the moratorium goes hand in hand with the ongoing work under the Work Programme, and the Council wants to see both addressed in a single decision at MC13.

7. WTO action remains needed in response to the food security challenges resulting from the war of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. The Russian aggression, supported by Belarus, deliberately violates the UN Charter, disregards the rules-based international order, and undermines international security and stability. Moreover, the continued attacks on Ukraine's civil and critical infrastructure disrupt the international trading system and negatively affect the food security situation worldwide. Following the MC12 declaration on food security, the Council stresses the need for efforts at MC13 to deliver outcomes that address the food security crisis.
8. In the area of agriculture, the Council supports balanced outcomes to advance these negotiations, particularly negotiations concerning reductions of trade distorting domestic support, a permanent solution for the issue of public stockholding for food security purposes, and further transparency on export restrictions. Outcomes must be compatible with the Common Agriculture Policy and with efforts the EU has already made and is making in its relevant policies to adopt non-trade distorting and environmentally-friendly measures.
9. Responding to the development challenge is central to the WTO reform agenda. The stability and predictability provided by the rules-based multilateral trading system is a key factor in supporting sustainable development and helping deliver structural transformation in developing countries. WTO rules help developing countries' progressive integration into global trade and enhance their resilience to external and domestic shocks and downturns. The EU's approach focuses on the needs and challenges of developing countries, particularly least-developed countries (LDCs), and the facilitation of their integration into global value chains. The Council welcomes the decision taken in October 2023 to support least-developed countries on a path to graduation. The decision should be accompanied by a further "LDC package" at MC13.

10. The Council supports the ongoing plurilateral cooperation of WTO Members through Joint Statement Initiatives, notably on e-commerce, domestic regulation in the services sector, investment facilitation for development and in the area of trade and the environment, which allow Members to address pressing topics more intensively. The Council welcomes the conclusion of the negotiations on domestic regulation in the services sector in December 2021 and investment facilitation for development in July 2023. The Council supports the implementation of the outcomes of the Joint Statement Initiatives.
11. The Council approves the draft Declarations and Statements on:
- *Joint Ministerial Declaration on the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement (WT/MIN (24)/W/5)*
 - *Ministerial Statement on fossil fuel subsidies (INF/TE/FFSR/W/3)*
 - *Sanitary and Phytosanitary / Sustainable food systems declaration (WT/GC/264)*
 - *Ministerial Declaration on strengthening regulatory cooperation to reduce technical barriers to trade (WT/MIN(24)/W/3)*
12. The Council supports the Commission in its efforts to make MC13 a success and looks forward to good coordination between Member States and the Commission in this regard. The Council will assess the progress made with a view to reaching a balanced outcome in line with the conditions set out above. To this end, the Council looks forward to the Commission's proposals in relation to the texts of the draft Declarations and Statements discussed within the WTO.
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