

# INAUGURAL CEREMONY

ADDRESS BY MR. GEORGIOS PAPASTAMKOS,  
VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Members of Parliament,  
Ambassadors,  
Delegates,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to welcome you to the Eighth Parliamentary Conference on the WTO on behalf of the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz. As this conference is a joint effort by the European Parliament and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, allow me to express a special word of gratitude to our partner, the IPU, and to the World Trade Organization for allowing this to take place for the second time on its premises.

Allow me to warmly thank and express our gratitude in particular for his longstanding help and contribution to the organization and success of these Parliamentary Conferences, an inspired and reliable counterpart, to Mr. Pascal Lamy.



The very high attendance of almost 300 participants from more than 70 countries underscores the global interest of parliamentarians in the World Trade Organization and their growing influence over matters discussed in Geneva. This dimension is of vital importance if we intend to increase the democratic legitimacy and transparency of the WTO. The multilateral trade system of the WTO, as an organized projection of globalization, contributes to the strengthening of security and stability in international trade, and causes a spill-over effect of increasing economic interdependence with international political cooperation.

As parliamentarians, we must exercise a constant scrutiny of what is negotiated on the citizens' behalf by governments in order to influence the negotiating process and make it accountable to our citizens. At such a conference in Geneva, our voices come together to amplify our message and have a global impact on the multilateral trading arena, where negotiations often take place very far from our capitals.

We last met in March 2011. The atmosphere then was rather optimistic. We saw a glimpse of hope that it was possible to take the Doha Development Agenda forward. Since then, some progress has been made. However, the 8<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference in December 2011 was not exactly a breakthrough. Some claim that the Doha Round is dead, but the EU and the European Parliament in particular still believe the Round is very much alive, and a conclusion is needed more than ever.

All WTO members have a shared responsibility to achieve this, be they developed, emerging, developing countries or even LDCs. We live in a changing world. This is also reflected in the WTO. The WTO serves as a guarantor of the world trade system, based on rules and principles. We very much welcome Russia's membership of the WTO, and its presence among us here today, and see this as a new opportunity for

developing a real multilateral, rules-based system. I hope we will all be ready to face this challenge. What is at risk, if the DDA negotiations fail, is the lost opportunity for further progressive trade liberalization and stronger multilateral rules, which would trigger global growth and development. No deal would mean losing the opportunity to integrate developing countries more effectively into the global economy. A collapse could seriously undermine the credibility of the WTO at a time of global geo-economic uncertainty.

This session of the Parliamentary Conference should therefore prompt governments to achieve real results at the 9<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference, which will take place in Bali (Indonesia) late next year. The EU will continue to play a leading and constructive role in ensuring the success of the negotiations. Our message as parliamentarians at this Conference has to be one that conveys the significance of trade for growth, employment and poverty reduction, all the more so in times of crisis. I welcome this choice of topic for the substantive theme of this Conference. Connecting our markets gives us more opportunities for development and jobs.

It is no secret that the European Union is facing one of its most difficult economic times ever. Being the largest economy in the world, this of course has a direct impact on other economies, and on the daily life of our citizens, where so many have lost their jobs. More than 11 per cent of the workforce, or 26 million Europeans, are unemployed today. This is 10 million more than just four years ago. For young people under 25, the rate is twice as high as for the whole population, with 23 per cent being without a job. In my own country, Greece, the unemployment rate has climbed in less than two years to 25 per cent, while for young people this rate stands at more than 50 per cent. Behind these figures one can find everyday people suffering and struggling to make ends meet. As politicians we need of course to respond to this situation!

Trade is part of the answer. Trade is an integral part of our so called EU2020 Strategy, with the triple objectives of smart, inclusive and sustainable growth. As the EU is globally one of the most open markets, more than 30 million European jobs depend on our exports to the rest of the world. This is an increase of 50 per cent compared to 20 years ago. And the contribution will only increase in the future, as 90 per cent of global economic growth by 2015 is expected to be generated outside Europe, a third in China alone.

Trade generates growth by fostering efficiency and innovation. It increases our competitiveness. It gives consumers a wider choice at lower prices. Nevertheless, globalization can also lead to production moving elsewhere, very often from regions where there are few other options or job opportunities. Lifting the growth potential of our economies is a major challenge, but time is of the essence.

Now, I wish to return to what can be achieved in Geneva in the coming months. In the current stalemate, each path of multilateral negotiations must be pursued. Negotiators should seize opportunities to finalize sectoral agreements whenever this is possible. I consider that the outcome of the 8<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference, such as the waiver on services for LDCs and the extension of the (plurilateral) Agreement on Public Procurement (GPA), is further evidence that pieces of the puzzle for a global deal can be found in a pragmatic manner. Trade facilitation and services are also specific areas where progress has been possible and for which deliverables by the WTO membership can be produced by the end of next year. Services will precisely be one topic of discussion by the panel tomorrow, so your input is timely to influence ongoing negotiations.

Each negotiation must remain as much as possible within the DDA and the multilateral trading system. They should all contribute to building a context and outlook that are conducive to a global agreement. It should be possible to "multilateralize" unilateral, bilateral or plurilateral commitments.

In conclusion, I can assure you that the European Parliament is deeply and firmly committed both to the parliamentary dimension of the WTO and to the multilateral trading system embodied in our host institution.

I wish you all a successful session and hope that the Conference will further contribute to mutual understanding, and will send a clear message to all the ambassadors and governments of the need to continue their efforts and engage on every track of negotiations. Lastly, I hope it will contribute to greater involvement of parliamentarians and the general public in trade policy. I thank you for your attention.

