

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, let me express my sincere gratitude to the Mission of Kazakhstan for hosting this timely event and your kind invitation.

I was asked to deliver remarks on the contribution of the Eurasian economic union to the multilateral trading system and on the current state of play at the international trading system.

Let me start with a slightly broader context.

I would begin with mentioning what all politicians and economists are saying now. The modern world is in danger. The world is facing the situation when recipes of the past, which previously provided a certain stability and order, do not work any longer.

The threat of a new global conflict has more than ever come close to us since the end of the World War II. Its results, as you probably remember, gave birth to the modern financial and economic architecture of the world. It were the colossal post-war changes that gave rise to the Bretton Woods Institutions, and to a large extent were the forerunners of the GATT Agreement, the predecessor of the institution where we are now.

The multilateralism, both political and economic, is in a clear crisis. The current system of international trade, as its part, and the institutional embodiment of international trade - the WTO - are also in crisis.

While states are looking for a universally acceptable alternative of a new international system, we are facing an increase in national egoism in politics, an increase in voluntarist economic sanctions and protectionism in economy. The definition of "trade wars" is firmly entrenched in the lexicon of the media and has become a commonplace characteristic of the current international situation. Moreover, at the same time, we no longer have tangible progress in the negotiation processes at the WTO platform.

There is only one way out - a wide dialogue. And it should be the dialogue both on politics and economy.

I would like to recall the philosopher and to repeat his "being determines consciousness" that is especially relevant in the modern world. Everything is interconnected and, in my opinion, it is naive to think that you can agree on missiles without agreeing on the rules of behavior in the global economy, and in international trade in particular.

That is why, as some of you may know, Belarus has consistently been advocating for the resumption of a comprehensive negotiating process on key issues of international security, which is similar to Helsinki process in the 70s of the last century. The global dialogue on security must embrace economic security. Such dialogue will allow all of us, and first of all the great powers, to eventually come up with new rules of the game that are acceptable to everyone. The rules that will bring security, political and economic stability back to the world.

Unfortunately, I have to assume that our world will stay in transition, as we know it now, for quite a long time, perhaps, for several dozen years.

It is difficult to navigate in the stormy ocean all alone. Many people will agree with such judgment, and this is one of the obvious reasons for the increasing number and quality of regional and sub-regional economic integrations all around the Globe.

Some analysts believe that the future global order will represent a world of interacting regions, rather than the world that concentrates around great powers.

Membership in a regional or a sub-regional economic organization gives a stronger voice and a greater visibility to small and medium sized states. It gives them a possibility to influence the global state of play. A beautiful ambition, isn't it? It is only achievable if those regional projects are being built on equal footing.

Therefore, we should explore much more the potential of interaction between regional integrations, first of all, in the sphere of economy and trade.

Over the years, Belarus, as well as the Eurasian Economic Union, have been advocating for partnership and compatibility of regional integrations.

I note with pleasure that Belarus in partnership with the UNECE and the Central European Initiative were among the pioneers in this matter. In 2016 and 2017 Minsk hosted international conferences on "integration of integrations". This is the way how the leaders of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia call this topic.

The current President of Germany, Mr. Steinmeier, called it "connectivity" at the international conference of the same name topic during the German presidency in the OSCE in 2016.

Those international events served as a platform for discussion of the opportunities of how to bring closer the economic integrations in the pan-European space.

I think that the future WTO has to take into account this rise of the regions and should promote their greater connectivity, harmonization and integration.

There is a clear added value and further potential in this trend to contribute to the international trading system.

As I touched a point from the future of the WTO, you should understand that Belarus, as an acceding country, follows the talks and rumors on the WTO reform.

In this future context let me say a few words on the very serious challenge that the world faces, on technologies. It is not a novelty in the UN walls, but I would like once again to point out here in the WTO the paradoxical or dual role that technologies play in shaping the modern world and the obvious nexus between technologies, from one hand, and trade and development, from another. And shouldn't we try in this context glancing at the future role for the WTO to play in achieving the SDGs?

Technologies continue to be a driver of the progress in the world and in the same time, technologies contribute a lot into keeping and even into expanding the gap between the developed and developing countries. You will ask me where the nexus is? And I will answer – it is in non-tariff-barriers.

And my thoughts in this moment go to the next door room where my fellow panelists are trying to answer to the very provocative question, whether the time has

come to consider the new WTO rules to address trade barriers, including non-tariff ones primarily arising from competition or antitrust regulatory regimes. Non-tariff barriers are an obstruction, and Belarusian business, just as all other players, face them on an everyday basis.

So it is just the flavor of a part of the Belarus' economic reality enshrined into the debate on the future of the WTO.

Well, let us now move to the proper Belarusian accession's story.

Some might say, if the WTO and the multilateral trading system are feeling so bad, then why Belarus should join it? You would rather stay in the EAEU and the CIS...

Well, we do believe in the government that joining the WTO will make us stronger and more competitive. It will bring many important up-to-date changes into our economic regulations, and in fact, they are already happening. It will open to us new markets and will make Belarus more clear and understandable partner for foreign investors and trading partners.

After our WTO accession, we will navigate in the ocean of international trade together with the rest of the WTO. Eventually there will be for sure the continuation of the WTO story. Every system needs clear rules. If not, the whole system collapses. It is much better to forge the new system from the inside rather than as an outsider. The outsider has no influence and has only one option – “take it or leave it”.

It is also crucial that all other members of the Eurasian Economic Union are already members of the WTO. After we join the WTO, we will have an additional guarantee that all the EAEU members follow the same rules, which are universally recognized. Belarus' WTO membership will certainly contribute to further evolution of the maximum barrier-free trade within the EAEU.

Being a founding Member of the EAEU, which is based on the WTO rules and principles, Belarus *de facto* applies most provisions of the WTO Agreements and therefore is in the high readiness to apply them *de jure* as a full-fledged member. Since 2012, Belarus unilaterally reduces its import duties with a view to implement the changes in the EAEU Common Customs Tariff based on the Russian commitments in the WTO.

At the same time, I would like to stress that being a founding Member of the EAEU put us in a very unique situation in our accession negotiations. Belarus is bound by its commitments within the Union, which gives us less space for manoeuvre and reduces the level of flexibility in our own negotiation process, namely, in such sensitive areas as tariffs, TBT and SPS.

In this regard, we believe that any possible issues of concern of the WTO Members in relation to the EAEU trade regime should be considered at the relevant WTO Committees instead of putting them into the accession process of Belarus. WTO Members have all the instruments in place to address any of their concerns.

Together with our partners from the EAEU, in 2018 Belarus participated in the session of the WTO Committee on Regional Trade Agreements to present the Treaty on Establishing the EAEU and replied all the questions from the WTO Members. We

see it as our modest contribution to the Transparency Mechanism of the Organization before accession to the WTO.

We believe that WTO Ministerial conference should not be left without an accession twice in a row and we urge Membership to engage more actively with the acceding governments in order to reach substantial progress on this matter in Nur-Sultan. Our Informal group of acceding governments will be working towards organizing an accessions-related event at the premises of MC-12 and we encourage the interested Members, especially Article XII Members, to join the preparatory process.

While uncertainty in the world trade is rising, the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference in Nur-Sultan might play an important role laying the foundation of the beginning of a new chapter in the WTO story which is crucial for the sustainable economic growth of the whole world, not only of the WTO members.

Besides that, holding MC-12 in Kazakhstan has a specific symbolic meaning for Belarus. It is the first WTO Conference to take place in the postsoviet region. It is the first Conference hosted by recently acceded Member. What is very important for us, it is the first Conference at the territory of the Eurasian Economic Union. It was Kazakhstan where the Union was born. In 2020, Belarus will be serving as a chair in the Union.

You may be sure that from its side Belarus will make all its efforts in order to contribute to the success of the 12th Ministerial Conference. We wish our Kazakh colleagues, WTO Member States and WTO Secretariat smooth and productive preparatory process.

Thank you for your attention.