

countries that are prepared to abide by its rules and disciplines. I would remind you that the NAFTA accession clause does not limit membership to the Americas — that expansion is in no way constrained by a north-south axis — although clearly interest at this point is highest in this hemisphere, starting with Chile. Yet what should — and must — remain the litmus test for membership is a willingness to commit to more intensive, more comprehensive rules-based trade.

On the other hand, as we focus on new members, we must also focus on the opportunities for deepening the NAFTA — a logical outcome of the greater economic integration of North America. In the NAFTA we have created certain mechanisms and rules to help make this happen. In the months and years ahead, some 25 NAFTA commissions, committees and working groups will deal with the nuts and bolts questions of enhancing our free trade area. The higher political profile has gone to the Labour and Environment Commissions, but there are many other NAFTA groups that will meet regularly to address the more prosaic stuff of trade — rules of origin, quality standards for agriculture, telecommunications standards, labelling of textile and apparel goods, temporary entry for business people — and so forth.

By far the two most important — and most far-reaching — of these working groups are the ones established recently to clarify how subsidies and dumping should be dealt with in our free trade area, and how we should work to establish common rules of trade among the three NAFTA partners. It will not be an easy task to agree on these issues, but our success in this endeavour will signal whether North America's common economic interests can transcend narrower domestic concerns.

This, in turn, will have implications well beyond North America. It would show other countries that refuse to address our market access and market reform objectives that, in addition to our commitment to the World Trade Organization [WTO], North America has a long-term strategy and a clear policy direction. It would demonstrate that we at least are committed to a more open, more structured, more plurilateral international economic order. It would also underline for those countries unwilling to move toward greater liberalization that they risk being left behind in the wake of dynamic regionalism.

Indeed, perhaps the principal value of the NAFTA in the long run is its potential to set in motion an external, competitive dynamic to reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers worldwide — its potential, that is, to kick-start a new round of global trade liberalization. For ultimately, it is to the multilateral trading system in general — and to the newly created World Trade Organization in particular — that we must look for the long-term future of free trade.