

Thus, MERCOSUR's track record is mixed so far. On balance, however, it is the most ambitious attempt yet to deepen formal economic integration among selected Latin American states. Moreover, the Treaty of Asunción (Article 20) provides for accession by certain other countries.<sup>15</sup> Despite its limitations, MERCOSUR represents the most important, treaty-based trading area among developing countries, with a population of almost 200 million and a joint GDP of US\$750 billion, approximating the combined GDP of China, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Thailand. MERCOSUR countries, whether collectively or individually, are well positioned to play a major rôle in the coming debate on hemispheric free trade.

### 3. And Promises to Keep

The recent past has witnessed important, concrete changes in the way the international community, including in the western hemisphere, views trade and investment interdependence. Real gains have been made. And despite a certain negotiations fatigue following the conclusion of the NAFTA and the Uruguay Round, further path-breaking proposals are now in play.

An important part of the action remains multilateral, or at least plurilateral among developed countries. In this regard, the push to complete the Uruguay Round's unfinished business on trade in services and government procurement, the WTO accession negotiations with China and others, and the recent OECD decision to begin negotiations to establish a Multilateral Agreement on Investment were mentioned above. Preparations are now also underway for the first WTO ministerial meeting scheduled for December 1996 in Singapore, a meeting that could identify an agenda and put in train a process that will lead to the launch of the next comprehensive trade "Round" by the end of the decade. Interestingly enough, however, most of the headlines and a significant share of the available negotiating resources and creative energy is focused on regional initiatives.

Without question, regionalism weighs much more importantly today than was the case following the conclusion of the penultimate great multilateral negotiations - the Tokyo Round that ended in 1979. The evolving negotiating agenda is now very complex and increasingly expansive. More players everywhere are prepared to engage more substantively than before, although some newly industrializing economies more clearly than others depending on the issue. In addition, several developing countries

---

<sup>15</sup> But only other members of the Latin American Integration Association (most commonly known by its Spanish acronym ALADI) - Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela are the ALADI members apart from the MERCOSUR partners.