Opening Ceremony MILE 17

Introduction by P.Van den Bossche, Director of Studies

WTI, Bern

16 September 2016

Distiguished guests, colleagues, MILE 17 students, ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the opening ceremony of the MILE programme. This opening ceremony is for the students among you as well as for me a memorable moment. The new MILE students embark today on a journey of learning and discovery of which they have been dreaming for a long time. They are starting on a programme, which is one of the most demanding of its kind. The truly interdisciplinary nature of the programme makes the MILE a challenge for even the best prepared. The lawyers will struggle with the economics; the economists will struggle with the law; and the political scientists may find themselves struggling with both the law and the economics. There is no gain without pain … but I promise the MILE students that they will emerge from the year of hard work ahead of them much enriched and better prepared for whatever career they may want to pursue in the broad field of international economic governance.

As I said, this opening ceremony is also for me a memorable moment. It marks the start of my first year as Director of Studies of the WTI. You, MILE students, are my first class, and saying this reminds me of a movie I once saw in which a lieutenant confessed to his platoon – just before leading them into battle – that this was his first combat operation; this announcement left the soldiers horrified, convinced that this would not end well. In the end, it did end well. Bear with me. Bear with me also because throughout the coming year I will still be much involved in some of the biggest battles ever fought in the field of interntional trade law: as from next week, *Russia – Pigs*, soon thereafter *EC – Airbus (21.5)*, and later *US – Boeing (21.5)* and *Australia – Plain Packaging*. But rest reassured that in my absence, you are in the very capable, experienced hands of the MILE programme coordinator, Dr Octavio Fernandez, the MILE programme director, Jin Glover, the WTI Director of Administration, Margrit Vetter, the Academic Writing Consultant, Melanie Mettler and the MILE Fellows Rosa Losada and Jack Williams. I am happy to say that in the movie I referred to earlier, the battle has won because the lieutenant let his experienced platoon sergeant lead the men into battle. In any case, later this semester both Prof. Pierre Sauvé and I will each have individual meetings with each of you to discuss your post-MILE ambitions. We will do this after you had time to settle in.

You could not have picked a better moment to start the MILE programme. We live in challenging times for international economic governance. Populist anti-globalism is spreading fast and growing ever stronger. Anti-globalism is obviously not the way forward; it is plainly mistaken but it would be equally mistaken not to recognize that for too many people economic globalisation has not brought prosperity and peace but, on the contrary, hardship and insecurity. While not always given sufficient credit for what it has achieved and continues to achieve, the multilateral trading system, the WTO system, is in crisis; and so are – and it gives me (as a convinced multilateralist) no pleasure to say so – regional economic integration efforts. Will the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) ever come into force? Will the negotiations on the Trans Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) ever come a successful conclusion? These are indeed challenging times and will continue to be so in the future. We need young people like you, dear MILE students, to take on the challenges facing international economic governance in the decades to come.

We have an impressive line-up of speakers for this opening ceremony and let me introduce each of them briefly and then let them speak one after the other without me intervening again. The keynote lecture of this opening ceremony will be given by Ms. Tara Erath, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of the United States in Bern. We are very happy to have Tara Erath with us this afternoon. As a career diplomat, she has been posted in countries all over the world, including in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Belgium, France, Brazil and Afganistan. Most recently, before coming to Bern, she was the Director of the State Department’s Office for Nordic and Baltic Affairs in Washington D.C. In many of her postings she was the Economic Counsellor at the US embassy. She has the career that many of you dream off. In her keynote lecture, Tara will address some of the challlenges of international economic governance today I referred to earlier. She will also share with us some of her personal experiences as an economic counsellor.

Next, we will hear from Prof. Thomas Cottier. Without him, none of us would be here. Thomas Cottier is the founder and first Managing Director and Director of Studies of the WTI. Thomas will talk about the genesis of the WTI, its achievements over the past 17 years, and his experience with MILE students.

After Thomas, we will hear from dr. Lee Ann Jackson. Lee Ann is a Counsellor at the WTO Secretariat and a member of our flying faculty; but she is not here to talk about her course but about an internship fund that has recently been established at the WTI in honour of her father, Prof. John Jackson. Professor Jackson, who passed away last year, was the most influential international trade law academic of his time, a mentor to many of us and a dear friend of the WTI community. Lee Ann will talk about her father and his link with the WTI, the establishment of the fund named after him and our ambitions with this fund.

Next, we give the floor to one of our distinguished MILE alumni, dr Fernando Pierola, Senior Counsel at the Advisory Centre for WTO Law in Geneva, and also a member of our flying faculty. Fernando will talk about his experience as a MILE student and how that experience has affected his professional career.

Finally, the programme indicates a word of welcome by Prof. Joe Francois, the WTI’s Managing Director. Unfortunately, Joe has fallen ill, but the WTI’s Deputy Managing Director, Prof. Manfred Elsig, will briefly address you to welcome you to the WTI and hand-out some small welcome gifts.

And now, without further ado, let me ask Tara Erath to take the floor.