



MINISTER FOR FOREIGN TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Mr Valdis Dombrovskis
Executive Vice-President
European Commission
Belgium
BRUSSELS

The Hague
14 October 2020

Dear Mr Dombrovskis,

I am writing to congratulate you on your appointment as European Commissioner for Trade, in addition to chairing the Commissioners' Group on an Economy that Works for People and leading efforts to deepen the Economic and Monetary Union. I look forward to working with you and your staff and continuing to build on the excellent collaboration with the Commission on trade.

I followed your hearing in the International Trade Committee earlier this month with great interest. It is clear that EU trade policy must contribute to managing and mitigating the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, while also addressing global sustainability challenges that already existed prior to it. Trade policy should contribute to cooperation and coordination of international efforts to safeguard sustainable development, environmental protection and labour rights.

The EU has been a frontrunner in advancing sustainable development as an integral part of trade policy. The EU has included trade and sustainable development (TSD) chapters in bilateral trade agreements since 2006. These chapters facilitate dialogue and cooperation and thereby leverage bilateral action for sustainable development. Moreover, the EU involves civil society organisations in the monitoring of these commitments. Since the launch of the 15-point action plan, the EU has been aiming to ensure civil society plays a role in monitoring the implementation of trade agreements in their entirety.

Rijnstraats
P.O. BOX 20061
2500 EB The Hague
The Netherlands

T +31 70 348 50 26
E r@minbuza.nl



MINISTER FOR FOREIGN TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

The Netherlands attaches great importance to the involvement of stakeholders - including non-governmental organisations, labour unions and businesses - in the development and implementation of trade policy. I therefore welcome the efforts the European Commission has made to further strengthen these parties' involvement in various parts of the policy process. I appreciate former Commissioner Phil Hogan's engaging stance on strengthening civil society's role in trade policy in his presentation to the Dutch Senate earlier this year, and his positive remarks in response to Senator Ruud Koole's contribution on this topic.

I would like to thank you for confirming the positive stance of the Commission on this issue during your hearing in the European Parliament and I would also like to highlight the benefits of quickly developing a streamlined complaints mechanism for civic society organisations on the EU side. Such a mechanism, with a central role for the Chief Trade Enforcement Officer, would give civil society the opportunity to lodge a complaint when third countries or the EU itself do not comply with the sustainability commitments set out in trade agreements. By establishing this mechanism, the EU would put in place an even more effective and transparent process to receive and follow-up on complaints. In the Netherlands' **view**, the mechanism needs to lay down clear procedures to ensure that complaints are investigated and, where warranted, acted upon. Such a complaints mechanism would strengthen the EU approach to the implementation of trade and sustainable development commitments.

I look forward to a constructive dialogue.

Yours sincerely,

Sigrid Kaag
Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation
of the Kingdom of the Netherlands