

EU Trade Policy: Open markets essential for post-COVID recovery

Commenting on the launch today of the EU Trade Policy Review, EuroCommerce Director-General Christian Verschueren said:

“The COVID pandemic and restrictions arising from it have hit many businesses hard over the past 12 months and also hit international trade. The Commission review of the EU’s trade policy is a welcome step to reinforce the measures the EU and governments have taken to boost the economic recovery. Open markets in Europe and outside will be a powerful driver for the EU economy to pick up again.”

Retailers and wholesalers rely to open markets to ensure that consumers have access to a wide choice of the products they need. We therefore support the concept of “open strategic autonomy” but will be pressing the need to ensure that this does not lose sight of the “open” part of the approach. Global value chains are a reality and key to European competitiveness, and trade has made a massive difference to the lives of many millions of people across the globe. The COVID-19 crisis has shown the need for reliable supply chains, particularly for sensitive products. But it has equally shown that this is best achieved by diversifying, rather than restricting, sources of supply.

Our sector is committed to harnessing and accelerating the digital and sustainability transformation for the future competitiveness of Europe’s economy. Trade should be used to help drive both, reducing barriers to investment in e-commerce and digital services, eliminating tariffs and non-tariff barriers on environmental goods and technologies, and promoting international standards and common circular economy definitions in trade agreements. The EU should also lead in encouraging a common approach to waste and recycling and promoting services to prolong the life of products.

Finally, we support the EU proposals on reforming the World Trade Organization (WTO). These are timely, with the confirmation of Ms Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as new WTO Director-General and the stated aims of the new US administration to re-engage in multilateralism.

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EuroCommerce is the principal European organisation representing the retail and wholesale sector. It embraces national associations in 31 countries and 5.4 million companies, both leading global players such as Carrefour, Ikea, Metro and Tesco, and many small businesses. Retail and wholesale provide a link between producers and 500 million European consumers over a billion times a day. It generates 1 in 7 jobs, providing a varied career for 29 million Europeans, many of them young people. It also supports millions of further jobs throughout the supply chain, from small local suppliers to international businesses. EuroCommerce is the recognised European social partner for the retail and wholesale sector.