

**ANSWERS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT  
QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE**

**Phil HOGAN**

**Commissioner-designate for Trade**

**1. General competence, European commitment and personal independence**

**What aspects of your personal qualifications and experience are particularly relevant for becoming Commissioner and promoting the European general interest, particularly in the area you would be responsible for? What motivates you? How will you contribute to putting forward the strategic agenda of the Commission? How will you implement gender mainstreaming and integrate a gender perspective into all policy areas of your portfolio?**

**What guarantees of independence are you able to give the European Parliament, and how would you make sure that any past, current or future activities you carry out could not cast doubt on the performance of your duties within the Commission?**

I have been Commissioner for Agriculture & Rural Development for the past five years, during which time I have had responsibility for the Common Agricultural Policy. The Common Agricultural Policy is one of the oldest and most successful European Union's policies, which maintains its relevance through its essential support for millions of European farmers, most of them responsible for small and medium-sized farmers, reflecting Europe's traditional farming system. That farming system ensures that farmers contribute to the maintenance of the rural environment and the vitality of rural communities as well as guaranteeing food security to Europe's citizens.

As a public representative in Ireland for over 30 years before becoming a Member of the College of Commissioners, I have always pursued a pro-EU agenda. I have seen at first hand the benefits that a small country can achieve through membership of the EU and the solidarity that the EU can offer to all Member States, by ensuring greater prosperity through the Union and the effective use of the budget to develop infrastructure and support vulnerable sectors of society. In all my political roles – municipal Councillor, member of the Irish national Parliament, Minister (and former President of the Council of Environment Ministers) and Commissioner – I have been consistently motivated by a sense of public service and serving the best interests of the public who elected me to represent them. In my time as Commissioner, I have greatly appreciated the contribution that the European Parliament can make to the development of EU policy that benefits all our citizens.

International trade is one of the key drivers in the ongoing growth of the European economy and the full and effective implementation and enforcement of existing agreements can ensure that economic prosperity can continue to be generated to the benefit of all our citizens, whether they are businesspeople, farmers, workers, service providers or consumers.

I welcome the President-elect's reference to 'draw on all of Europe's talents'. I believe this starts at home and I will, of course, fully subscribe to this undertaking in the composition of my Cabinet. I have been long concerned about the lack of female representation in politics and, as Irish Minister for the Environment & Local Government, I introduced legislation providing for minimum levels of gender participation in elections, which has resulted in a noticeable increase in the level of female representation in parliament. There is a wide range of Civil Society Dialogues under the remit of the Directorate-General for Trade and I am committed to ensuring that all such groups and any other similar panels are gender-balanced in the future.

I am also very pleased that, under the leadership of President Juncker, we have made significant strides in improving the level of female representation in the senior ranks of the European Commission and my own Directorate-General in the current mandate – the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development – has been to the fore in this regard. In terms of policy development, I intend to instruct my services to consider gender impact when preparing policy initiatives. Specifically, I believe that the inclusion of Trade and Sustainable Development chapters in our trade agreements can ensure that the effect of those agreements is a positive one in our trading partners in such areas as ensuring a positive gender agenda.

I can assure the European Parliament that I am acutely conscious of the solemn undertaking that, as a Member of the Commission, I took in front of the European Court of Justice. I am very conscious of the obligations set out in the Treaty and the requirements of the Code of Conduct for Commissioners. I subscribe fully to President-elect von der Leyen's insistence on the 'highest levels of transparency and ethics for the College as a whole.'

During the past five years, I have been guided at all times by the need to act independently and impartially and fully in accordance with all of the relevant requirements.

## **2. Management of the portfolio and cooperation with the European Parliament**

**How would you assess your role as a Member of the College of Commissioners? In what respect would you consider yourself responsible and accountable to the Parliament for your actions and for those of your departments?**

**What specific commitments are you prepared to make in terms of enhanced transparency, increased cooperation and effective follow-up to Parliament's positions and requests for legislative initiatives? In relation to planned initiatives or ongoing procedures, are you ready to provide Parliament with information and documents on an equal footing with the Council?**

As a former President of the Environment Council and, particularly, as Commissioner for Agriculture & Rural Development, I greatly value the constructive interaction with the Parliament. As a former national parliamentarian, I greatly respect the roles of Members of the European Parliament as the directly elected representatives of the citizens.

During the past five years, I regularly engaged with the Parliament's Committee on Agriculture & Rural Development and met Members of the European Parliament on any occasion of a plenary session in Strasbourg and I intend to maintain that practice if I am appointed to the position of Commissioner for Trade.

I support fully President-elect von der Leyen's desire to 'strengthen the Commission's special partnership with the European Parliament.' There is no doubt that we need to bring Europe 'closer to home' and to strengthen the links with our citizens. The record turnout in the recent European Parliament elections show that citizens have an appetite for the EU. The Members of the European Parliament, as their directly elected representatives are best placed to reflect their interests and concerns. I want to better understand those interests and concerns and commit myself to greater engagement with the European Parliament in the pursuit of that objective. Moreover, I respect fully the Parliament's prerogative to exercise its democratic oversight effectively.

In my dealings with the European Parliament, I have always been prepared to take political responsibility for matters within my field of competence and, without prejudice to the principle of collegiality; I intend to continue that approach in the future.

In keeping with the President-elect's commitment to the highest levels of transparency, I am well aware of the unwavering interest that the European Parliament takes in trade policy and the importance and sensitivity of many of the trade-related issues. In that regard, I want to reiterate my commitment to ensure that regular briefings are given to the European Parliament before and after each round of bilateral and multilateral negotiations. I want to address its interests and concerns fully and honestly and I know that this can be done only by establishing a relationship of trust and maintaining a regular dialogue with its Members and I am committed to such a dialogue.

I agree with the European Parliament that it is right that both Parliament and Council are treated on an equal footing and I am committed to doing so. Already, the Commission has in place arrangements to ensure that documents sent to the Council's Trade Policy Committee are also sent at the same time to the European Parliament's International Trade Committee (INTA). This practice will be maintained.

In addition and where appropriate, I will endeavour to make certain presentations to both Parliament and Council on the same day and, in this light, I will be happy to attend extraordinary meetings of INTA, should they prove necessary.

Transparency has to be at the heart of what we do and how we do it. While I believe that the EU is the world's most transparent public authority conducting trade policy, there is always more that we can do. As institutions of the EU, we owe it to one another if we are to proceed in an atmosphere of mutual trust but, as institutions of the EU, we also owe it to our citizens

to ensure that those on behalf of whom we work are as well and fully informed as possible, having necessary regard to the protection of our negotiating position. I believe that this transparency will help all institutions in ensuring that our trade policy responds to citizens' concerns.

In that endeavour, I look forward to working closely with the European Parliament to see how best we can achieve this objective.

## Questions from the Committee on International Trade

### **3. Trade Strategy**

**In times of increasing trade tensions at global level and of deep crisis within the multilateral trading system, which priorities and policy steps (including legislative initiatives and new agreements) would the Commissioner-designate identify for creating and effectively implementing an EU trade and investment strategy, ensuring that the EU remains a global player able to safeguard and promote EU values, key policy priorities and economic interests, contributing to a rules-based and fairer trade, tackling unfair competition (including social and environmental dumping) and ensuring a global level playing field for European companies, especially SMEs, and the interests of consumers and workers, and, in this context, how does the Commissioner-designate intend to actively involve Parliament from the earliest stage in the process of elaborating these priorities and policy steps?**

I am a firm believer in pursuing an open and fair trade policy that strengthens the EU's position in the world, promotes our values and protects our interests. International trade is the lifeline of the EU's economy. It accounts for almost 35% of the EU's Gross Domestic Product<sup>1</sup>, it generates jobs and it ensures that consumers and companies have access to the best possible products at the best price.

I recognise that trade policy will be operating in a particularly difficult environment in the near future. The international rules-based trading system is facing its deepest crisis since its inception, as the rules at the core of the system are increasingly being challenged by some of the major global players. In the context of enhanced technological and geostrategic competition between the U.S. and China, trade and economic issues are also increasingly linked with geopolitical and security related ones.

In this complex environment, the President-elect has entrusted me to focus my efforts on levelling the playing field, strengthening Europe's global leadership, ensuring trade's contribution to sustainable development and climate action and making trade more transparent. In this respect, I will pursue the following priorities and actions.

First, to preserve a stable and predictable international trading environment based on clear and enforceable rules. The EU, its companies, its workers and its consumers, can only thrive in an international environment that is based on the rule of law and not on the law of the jungle. This is especially true for SMEs, which are often the most vulnerable to protectionist measures. To address this challenge, I intend to pursue the reform of the World Trade Organization - to create a new deal for the organisation, which puts it back at the centre of

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<sup>1</sup> 2017 figures

global trade. To do this, a new balance will have to be found in the organisation by creating new rules where needed, to level the playing field (such as on industrial subsidies and forced transfer of technologies), reforming the dispute settlement system, facilitating the integration of plurilateral work undertaken by interested WTO Members in the WTO framework and addressing the issues of development, climate and more broadly, the Sustainable Development Goals. My objective will be to launch a broad initiative by the end of 2020, following the next WTO Ministerial Conference. An important part of this effort will be to build partnerships with other WTO Members to pursue the reform effort. I will work toward a positive, balanced and mutually beneficial trading partnership with both the U.S. and China. With the U.S., we will focus on working together on advancing our shared interests, including linked to levelling the playing field. With China, we will need to continue emphasising the need to make a greater contribution to and take greater responsibility for the reform of the multilateral trading system, while continuing to develop a fair and balanced trading relationship.

Second, to create opportunities for the EU by opening markets or keeping them open. My focus here will be first and foremost on reaping the full benefits of the deals we have already reached by ensuring the full implementation of existing agreements and the enforcement of our rights. This will be key in the context of the growing threat of protectionism worldwide. I will be supported in this work by the new role of Chief Trade Enforcement Officer, who will be Deputy Director-General in DG Trade, who will work under my direct guidance. Beyond implementation and enforcement, I believe it is also important to seek new opportunities. I intend to pursue the conclusion of ongoing negotiations, including the negotiations for a free trade agreement with Australia and New Zealand, the negotiations with China on a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment and the plurilateral negotiations on e-commerce at the WTO. When the conditions are met and when there is a clear interest for the EU, I will propose to open new ones. Continuing to build a mutually beneficial trade and investment partnership with Africa will be particularly important.

Third, to ensure that trade policy contributes to our broader policy objectives, notably on sustainable development, the fight against climate change and more broadly in upholding our values. I will contribute to the design and introduction of a Carbon Border Tax, fully compliant with the rules of the WTO, working closely with the Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal and with the Commissioner for the Economy. I will also ensure that we make full use of existing tools, such as the dedicated chapters on sustainable development in every new trade agreement, as well as in existing ones, the monitoring of the implementation of climate, environmental and labour protections enshrined in EU's trade agreements, with a zero-tolerance approach to child labour, or the revision of the EU's General System of Preferences to ensure that it keeps contributing to eradicating poverty and supporting the development of beneficiary countries.

Fourth, to protect EU companies and workers from unfair competition and pursue a level playing field. I intend to make full use of our trade defence instruments, and seek a level playing field in procurement. I will also consider introducing new tools, such as upgrading the EU's Enforcement Regulation to allow the EU, in accordance with international law, to suspend concessions when others adopt illegal measures and simultaneously block the WTO dispute settlement process. I will also look at finding ways, together with the Executive Vice-President for a Europe fit for the Digital Age, to address the distortive effects of foreign subsidies in the internal market.

Finally, I believe that trade policy has a role to play in strengthening the EU's security and position in the world. This is notably why I will keep a close eye on the full implementation of the new system for screening Foreign Direct Investments and work with the Council and the EP on further strengthening the EU's system of controlling the exports of dual-use items.

I firmly believe in the importance of maintaining an open and dynamic dialogue with all stakeholders regarding the development of all aspects of our trade policy. In this context, I invite the European Parliament to further develop and share its views on the trade challenges we face and what best policy steps have to be considered to address them.

#### **4. Coherence of trade policy with other external and internal EU policies**

**Which concrete measures will the Commissioner-designate take in order to ensure the coherence of the Common Commercial Policy (CCP) with the other external and internal EU policies to promote, amongst others, European standards/values, the Sustainable Development Goals at global level, gender equality, and to advance the climate goals of the EU through trade?**

Good trade policy begins at home. Having spent the last five years engaged as a partner in trade negotiations in my current capacity as Commissioner for Agriculture, I know the importance of ensuring coherence between our internal and external policies. President-elect von der Leyen has also underlined that one of the priorities of this 'Geopolitical' Commission will be to align the internal and external aspects of our work.

In the complex world of today, the solutions to the major challenges we face – be it climate change, geopolitics, or digitalisation – cannot be found in one area alone. The size and strength of the internal market is one of our most important assets. For trade policy to be able to leverage that in a manner that benefits the European citizen, coherence between our internal and external policies is essential. Similarly, if trade policy is to contribute to the harnessing of globalisation and for the achievement of the Commission's headline ambitions such as the European Green Deal, it must work in close tandem with other policy areas – such as labour and social policies including gender equality, as well as development cooperation, digitalisation, climate and environmental policies. Doing so will also support those in need who cannot cope individually with the challenges of globalisation.

Working closely together with my colleagues in the College of Commissioners will therefore be of utmost importance. This has also been reconfirmed by President-elect von der Leyen in both her Political Guidelines and the mission letter sent to me. She has emphasised that the Commission is one team where all of its members work together following a whole of government approach. This approach will be the basis for my work.

Furthermore, as part of our mandate, all Commissioners have been requested to ensure the delivery of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals within their policy area. The College as a whole will be responsible for the overall implementation of the Goals.

For this reason, I undertake to pursue a responsible and fair trade policy that will allow us to build partnerships, protect our market from unfair practices and ensure our values and our standards are respected.

As regards the more specific question on concrete measures I aim to take, I would like to underline that I have been given a clear mandate to use our trade tools to support sustainable development. I will make use of all the tools available to me in order to pursue our sustainability and climate objectives, and our values.

For example, when it comes to the relationship between trade, climate and the environment, I believe that a multi-pronged approach is necessary. First, this involves helping to minimise the risk that trade growth harms the climate or broader environmental protection efforts. Second, we must ensure that trade policy contributes to combatting climate change and protecting the environment through the spread of environment-friendly goods, services and technologies but also by incentivising trading partners to implement relevant international agreements. Third, we need to deploy measures to avoid carbon leakage. Here, one of my priorities will be to contribute to the design and introduction of a Carbon Border Tax, which pursues our climate objectives in compliance with the rules of the World Trade Organization.

More broadly, every new trade agreement concluded will have a dedicated chapter on sustainable development, as is already the case with recent Free Trade Agreements. In addition, Sustainability Impact Assessments will continue to underpin our efforts to promote sustainable development in our trade agreements. Moreover, to ensure that our agreements are effective, an important part of my work will be to monitor the implementation and enforcement of climate, environmental and labour protection commitments in our trade agreements, which must live up to the highest standards, with a zero-tolerance approach to child labour.

## 5. Parliamentary scrutiny

**How will the Commissioner-designate ensure that, in line with the current well-established practice, INTA is immediately and fully informed at all stages of trade and investment negotiations (from the earliest preparatory steps to implementation) and that Parliament's views are duly taken into consideration before negotiations start and throughout the process, and, in particular, that no provisional application of trade and/or investment agreements (including trade chapters of association agreements) is requested before Parliament has given its consent on those agreements?**

Parliamentary scrutiny of the EU's trade and investment agreements is fundamental to building EU citizens' trust in the EU's trade policy. Parliamentary consent gives the agreements the legitimacy that they need and deserve.

This is why I am a firm believer in working openly with Members of Parliament and I would strive for a special partnership with the European Parliament and ensure the highest level of transparency and communication. I will inform the Parliament immediately and fully at all stages of trade and investment negotiations, as well as on all other aspects of trade policy beyond our negotiations.

I realise that when it comes to trade policy, information sharing on an equal footing between Parliament and Council is already a well-established policy and I intend to work with Parliament on the same basis in order to keep you informed and seek the views of Parliament throughout all stages of the negotiations. In practice, this means that:

- Before the start of the negotiations, I will make sure that the Parliament is informed as soon as we intend to propose the launch of negotiations with a new trading partner. Whenever the trading partner and the Commission agree on a scoping paper to outline the level of ambition, I will provide Parliament with a copy so that an informed discussion can take place and that Parliament can set out its views.
- I fully stand by the decision of the outgoing Commission to publish the draft negotiating directives it transmits to Council when seeking the authorisation to open negotiations. This practice will be continued, in line with the President-elect's commitment to ensure the highest level of transparency. This will allow the European Parliament and national Parliaments, as well as stakeholders and civil society to judge for themselves what the Commission is proposing to negotiate. When Parliament sets out its position, I will carefully take this into account throughout discussions in Council on the decision to open trade negotiations and will encourage Council to wait until it has heard from Parliament before it finalises its position. I will also reiterate to Council the importance of publishing the authorisation and negotiating directives once these have been adopted.
- During the negotiations, I will ensure that the Commission continues to share the same documentation with the European Parliament as we submit to the Council. I will make sure that INTA is regularly briefed on the progress being made at key stages of the negotiations. I believe that the monitoring groups that the International Trade Committee has established for each negotiation constitute a particularly good setting to have more regular and in-depth discussions. Either in monitoring groups or in the Committee itself, the Commission will be ready to brief Members of Parliament before and after each round of talks. I also hope that you will regularly invite me to appear in front of the committee, so that I can brief you in person and so that a political discussion takes place on the different files in the context of our trade and investment policy.

This degree of interaction and engagement with Parliament that I intend to pursue will help me tap into the knowledge and positions of Members so that whenever possible such views can be taken into account in the course of the negotiations.

Once the negotiations are concluded, I will make myself available to Members to discuss the outcome of the negotiations.

Finally, let me say a word on provisional application. In trade policy, there has been a long-standing commitment by Trade Commissioners to ensure that Council does not provisionally apply a trade agreement before the Parliament has given consent. This adds political legitimacy to the application of an agreement. I am glad that President-elect von der Leyen has explicitly confirmed this principle. You can therefore count on me to work for parliamentary consent before an agreement in my area of responsibility is provisionally applied.

## **6. Defending multilateralism and WTO as the core of the international rules-based trade system**

**What is the Commissioner-designate's proposed strategy to a) revive and further promote multilateralism in international trade in all relevant fora, including also by linking trade with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement; b) overcome the challenges to the WTO's rule-making function and dispute settlement system; c) to further strengthen the parliamentary dimension and democratic scrutiny of the WTO, and d) to establish a Multilateral Investment Court?**

Multilateralism is in Europe's DNA. The EU, because of its very nature, is suited to thrive in a rules-based international environment. The defence of multilateralism is therefore one of our strategic objectives, in terms of trade policy but also beyond. However, it is probably in the area of trade that the EU has the biggest role to play - because of its position as one of the world's trading superpowers and the EU having exclusive competence with regard to trade policy. By speaking with one powerful voice, the EU can play a central role in shaping the international trading environment.

If confirmed as Commissioner in charge of trade policy, I will make the defence and promotion of multilateralism my first priority, in line with the mission letter from the President-elect. Internally, this will mean dedicating the necessary resources to developing our approach to strengthening multilateralism and the links between trade and the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement, as well as working with other Commissioners to ensure that our multilateral interests are fully integrated into all relevant external and internal EU policies. Externally, alliance building will be essential to succeed in our plan to update and upgrade the multilateral trading system and I will intensify efforts to build partnerships in support of multilateral solutions.

The WTO is in need of reform. This system of trade rules needs to be adapted to all of the realities of today. It has brought many benefits to us and others, and it needs to be improved and strengthened. This is a project for the entire international community. And indeed, it is only by working together that we can be successful.

The EU has already put forward several ideas for reforms addressing the WTO's three main pillars: the negotiating function, the dispute settlement function and the monitoring and deliberative function. At the heart of these ideas is the need to update the WTO's rules to adapt them to today's realities, including developing rules on issues such as e-commerce and to better deal with distortions caused by subsidies, as well as the need to update the institutional framework itself, to allow for example for greater use of plurilateral approaches. Indeed, this is absolutely critical in an organisation of 164 Members at vastly different levels of development. Similarly, the issue of how development is addressed in the organisation needs to be updated so that flexibilities and support are available and adapted to those countries that actually need them.

If confirmed as Commissioner in charge of trade policy I will continue to intensify our efforts to reform the organisation. I firmly believe that in order to find a solution to the current deadlock, we need to establish a new balance in the organisation - one which will allow it to regain its central place in global trade, which reflects the realities of today and which allows its Members to regain trust in the system.

In order to achieve this, my objective will be to launch a broad initiative by the end of 2020, following the next WTO Ministerial Conference with a view of reaching a comprehensive

agreement by 2022. Such an initiative will have to address a comprehensive set of issues including creating new rules where they are needed (such as on e-commerce, industrial subsidies and on forced technology transfers), reforming the dispute settlement system, facilitating the integration of plurilateral work undertaken by interested WTO Members in the WTO framework and addressing the issues of development, climate and more broadly, the Sustainable Development Goals. Building support among the EU's trade partners for such an initiative will be a central part of my work.

In parallel, on the specific issue of the crisis of the WTO Appellate Body, which risks to stop functioning after the 11 December 2019, I will continue the work on interim arrangements aiming at safeguarding the EU's and other Members' rights in WTO disputes in case the appointments remain blocked. This will notably build on the agreement reached with Canada in July 2019 to set up an interim appeal arbitration arrangement based on existing WTO rules.

Pursuing this reform agenda will require close cooperation with various stakeholders. More broadly, I firmly believe in the importance of the parliamentary dimension and democratic scrutiny of the WTO, without which an important element of legitimacy would be missing in the work of the organisation. As Commissioner for Trade, I will continue to support this parliamentary dimension and in particular the involvement of the European Parliament in Ministerial Conferences of the WTO. I also commit to keeping the European Parliament fully and regularly informed of developments in the WTO, and particularly on progress in relation to the EU's reform initiative.

Finally, I intend to actively push for the establishment of a Multilateral Investment Court (MIC), which is being discussed within the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) with the participation of over 100 States and numerous non-governmental stakeholders. I believe that the EU should spare no efforts to push for the creation of this truly multilateral body. This implies multiplying alliances with third countries and proposing concrete steps, such as draft texts for the creation of the Court.

## **7. Implementation and enforcement**

**In order to maximise the benefits and minimise the negative impact of trade liberalisation, how will the Commissioner-designate ensure that all aspects of the CCP (including but not limited to all chapters of trade and investment agreements) are effectively implemented (also in terms of raising awareness of new export opportunities) and enforced and, in this context, what will the Commissioner-designate do to influence the full implementation of trade and investment agreements and what would be the EU reaction in case of breach of commitments (e.g. relating to sustainable development and Paris Agreement) by partner countries?**

As Commissioner for Agriculture, I have seen first-hand how much energy we put into negotiating trade agreements. These agreements, be they bilateral, regional, plurilateral or multilateral, offer the predictable and rules-based framework which is vital for the EU's economy to function. But rules only matter if they are respected. In the context of increasing protectionism worldwide, proper implementation and enforcement of our agreements is becoming even more important. It is essential that our trade partners live up to their commitments made in exchange for which we had agreed to give them preferential access to our internal market. This is true for commitments on market access, but equally for rules

including in particular the implementation of the climate, environmental and labour protections enshrined in our trade agreements. It is also a question of credibility for the EU's trade policy as a whole.

If confirmed as Commissioner in charge of trade policy, I commit to further step up our efforts to ensure that our trade agreements are properly implemented and deliver the benefits to our citizens, farmers and companies for which we have fought so hard during the negotiations. To underline this commitment, I will be supported in these tasks by a Chief Trade Enforcement Officer, who will be Deputy Director-General in DG TRADE. He/she will become the public face of our increasing focus on implementation and enforcement activities in the coming years and ensure a more coherent and coordinated approach as well as streamlined procedures to deal with problems linked to the implementation of our agreements – be it on market access or on sustainable development commitments. The Chief Trade Enforcement Officer will work very closely with other Commission services as well as with the European Parliament, Member States and stakeholders. United, the EU has the political and economic weight and influence to stand up to all trading partners and enforce its rights.

This entails more focus on the monitoring of how the agreements work and ensuring that shortcomings are addressed quickly with the trading partner. It also means helping our trading partners in implementing some of the commitments via projects and expertise, notably linked to climate and labour provisions.

In case of breaches, the EU will need to become even more assertive and stand up vigorously for its rights and defend its interests in today's increasingly volatile and hostile trading environment. That is why I am deeply committed also to increase further our enforcement activities to ensure that EU companies are treated fairly. We will make best use of our available toolbox to defend our citizens and companies and ensure that our partners strictly abide by their commitments, including those related to labour rights, environment and climate.

This will involve making full use of bilateral and multilateral dispute settlement systems in case of un-resolved and serious breaches by our trading partners. On the internal front, I will also ensure that the recently modernised trade defence instruments are fully applied, protecting our single market and hundreds of thousands of jobs in the EU from unfair competition and abusive trade practices.

But in today's changing environment, this may not be enough. I will make sure that we strengthen further Europe's ability to protect itself from unfair trade practices and that the EU disposes of the right tools to assertively defend its rights. I will be looking into upgrading the EU's Enforcement Regulation to allow us, in accordance with international law, to suspend concessions when others adopt illegal measures and simultaneously block the WTO dispute settlement process.

Finally, we need to make sure that our companies make the best use of the additional opportunities and markets offered by the far largest network of trade agreements worldwide. Increasing further the use of the preferences granted by the agreements will require closer cooperation with the European Parliament, Member States (including their trade promotion organisations), and regions as well as with business associations and Chambers of Commerce to spread the information. It also requires more engagement and better communication with

our companies and citizens, to bring them on board and ensure trade policy responds to their concerns. And we will need to commit to an extensive outreach programme to reach them.