

Ms Urve Palo
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ESTONIA

Wednesday 5 July 2017

Concerns: Publication of mandate trade agreement EU-Japan

Dear President of the Council,

In the first place, we would like to congratulate you with the start of the Estonian Presidency. We are looking forward to fruitful cooperation.

The European Commission is on the eve of concluding an ambitious trade agreement with Japan. We, as Members of the Council, committed ourselves to increase transparency in our trade policy in 2015.¹ Now is the time to deliver on our promises. Therefore, we urge the Council to rapidly decide to publish the negotiating directives for the trade agreement between the EU and Japan.

Many millions of jobs in the EU depend on trade, which is and will remain a powerful engine for growth. To maintain and strengthen public support for trade policy, it is essential for negotiations to be as transparent and inclusive as possible. This way, national parliaments, civil society and the public at large can express and bring forward their priorities and concerns. This requires the European Commission to engage in a continuous debate with civil society, labour unions, the private sector and the broader public. The objective should be to inform the public about the content of trade agreements as well as about the developments in each trade agreement. General information should be publicly available. Specific information on current negotiations, such as a report on each negotiating round and EU text proposals should be made available online, and further negotiating documents should be made accessible for MEPs as well as national parliamentarians, civil society and other stakeholders, to the extent possible.

Transparency is not only a responsibility of the Commission. Member States need to do their part in increasing transparency. We have to do this at home, by proactively inviting stakeholders - labour unions, civil society, and private sector actors alike - to discuss the different trade agreements. We have to inform our citizens via our own channels, and explain and take responsibility for the negotiations in national parliaments. But also collectively, as Council, we can contribute by making negotiating directives (the mandate) public. We should preferably do this as soon as possible after the adoption, but at least before finalizing the negotiations. In the case of the trade agreement between the EU and Japan, now is therefore the appropriate moment to publish the mandate. We fully endorse the recent letter by Commissioner Malmström to you, in which she called for the publication of the mandate and indicated there will be no negative impact on the EU's negotiating position vis-à-vis Japan.

¹ Conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council (Trade) of 27 November 2015

As Council, we need to step up our efforts to promote an informed debate and a deeper dialogue with society at large. Transparency has to be a feature of each and every step of the process, because transparency is key to trust. Therefore, the Council should swiftly decide to publicize the mandates and negotiating directives of all ongoing trade agreements, starting with the negotiations for a trade agreement with Japan.

With kind regards,



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Austria



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