

ESF call to WTO members to adopt the Proposal at MC12 To work towards commencing services market access negotiations

The European Services Forum (ESF) represents the interests of the European services industries in trade and investment negotiations. Its main mission is to encourage governments around the world to open up their services sectors to foreign companies in similar conditions than national businesses.

ESF takes note of the “Text Proposal for MC12” that was tabled on 26 August 2021 by Australia, Canada, Chile, New Zealand, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (Document RD/SER/156).

These proponent countries note the recent exploratory discussions in the WTO Council for Trade in Services (Special Session) on the interests in further liberalisation, including services sectors impacted by Covid. And they recall the build-in agenda in GATS Article XIX, where WTO members agreed to enter into successive rounds of negotiations every five years. The text proposal hence concludes by suggesting the following proposal: “..., we agree to intensify work towards commencing market access negotiations with a view to a-contributing the more sustainable, inclusive and resilient economic growth.”

ESF would like to draw the attention of the fact that this “built-in” agenda for Services was a condition for a built-in agenda for agriculture negotiations as well (Article 20 of the Agreement on Agriculture). And indeed, agriculture negotiations have already commenced, with some results recorded in Bali and Nairobi, and are continuing with possible additional result in Geneva this year. Since links were agreed between progress in Agriculture and in Services by all WTO members (including the EU Member States), the European services industries emphasise that market access negotiations for services are long time overdue. Commencing services market access talks is a prerequisite for a balanced outcome in interest of Europe

The European Services Forum herewith calls upon all WTO members to endorse this proposal that should be part of the forthcoming ministerial declaration at the end of the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference that will take place in Geneva from 30th November till 3rd December 2021.

The world of trade in services has dramatically changed in the last decades. The GATS schedules of Commitments that entered into force 25 years ago are now out of date and need to be revised and improved to reflect the reality of the need of businesses, in particular but not only, regarding the digitalisation of the global economy. The Covid 19 pandemic has had a serious negative impact on many services sectors like transport, retail and tourism, and many others. With the view to speed up the recovery, negotiations should aim at opening services sectors markets, to allow the development of all economies, which will hence create jobs and growth. The negotiations should start by including in the revised schedules the better access already provided by many trade agreements that have been implemented since.

List of members supporting the above position

- Amfori
- Architects' Council of Europe –ACE
- British Telecom Plc
- BDO
- Bureau International des Producteurs et Intermédiaires d'Assurances – BIPAR
- BUSINESSEUROPE
- BUSINESSEUROPE WTO Working Group
- BSA The Software Alliance – BSA
- Conseil des barreaux de la Communauté Européenne – CCBE
- Danish Shipping
- Deutsche Post DHL
- DI – Confederation of Danish Industries
- Digital Europe
- EK - Confederation of Finnish Industries
- EuroCommerce
- European Banking Federation - EBF
- European Broadcasting Union - EBU
- European Community Shipowners' Associations – ECSA
- European Express Association – EEA
- European Federation of Engineering and Consultancy Associations – EFCA
- European Satellite Operators Association – ESOA
- European Public Telecom Network – ETNO
- Fédération de l'Industrie Européenne de la Construction – FIEC
- FratiniVergano European Lawyers
- General Council of the Bar of England & Wales
- Google
- Huawei Europe
- IBM Europe, Middle East & Africa
- Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW)
- Insurance Europe
- Irish Business and Employers' Confederation - IBEC
- Law Society of England & Wales
- Le Groupe La Poste
- Microsoft Corporation Europe
- Mouvement des entreprises de France – MEDEF
- Oracle Europe, Middle East & Africa
- Orange
- PostEurop
- Prudential Plc.
- Svenskt Näringsliv (Confederation of Swedish Enterprise)
- TechUK
- Telenor Group
- TheCityUK
- UPS
- Vodafone
- Zurich Insurance