

Joint statement on EU trade agreements

Brussels, 7 March 2022

The undersigned European associations, as key European industry stakeholders, urge the EU institutions to continue to make EU trade agreements a priority, opening new markets for trade and investment and promoting rules-based free trade, including strengthening the role of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The focus of the EU 2021 trade policy review¹ was to create an open and assertive trade policy. Since then, a number of proposals aimed at creating a level playing field have been put forward and updated, but progress has been more limited on the proactive front. Our organisations want to stress the importance of **openness**, particularly regarding the bilateral Free Trade Agreements agenda. The Covid-19 crisis has clearly demonstrated that, at times of uncertainty, the ability to import and export is critical for our collective resilience.

Supporting open, free and fair international trade means supporting European businesses, European jobs and European prosperity as our economy recovers from the Covid-19 crisis. It means securing the most diversified and high-quality choice of goods and services for European citizens. And, by ensuring a level playing field for our companies, it helps maintain the competitiveness of our European industry, both for SMEs and larger companies.

In this context, we would like to put forward the following recommendations:

1. The EU must ensure that **Free Trade Agreements enter into force as soon as possible**² after negotiations are concluded. This applies in particular to the important EU-Mercosur Association Agreement³, which was reached in 2019 but is still awaiting a decision regarding its implementation. If the EU wants to remain a strong, influential and credible player at international level, it needs to recognise the importance of implementing the Free Trade Agreements that it negotiates without delay.
2. To remain competitive at international level, we support **an expansive EU bilateral trade agenda**, especially considering the many trade agreements have already been concluded and implemented by other countries and regions⁴. The EU needs to keep the first mover advantage to remain a rule-maker rather than a rule-taker. In particular, the EU should continue to pursue regulatory dialogue with the United States in the context of the Trade and Technology Council (TTC)⁵, which should lead to negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement. It should also accelerate ongoing negotiations for Free Trade Agreements with third countries, for example with India⁶ and ASEAN⁷ countries. These well-negotiated agreements will play an important role in enhancing trade opportunities whilst ensuring a level playing field for our companies in these third countries, including through removing tariffs and greater regulatory cooperation.

We count on your support to give full appreciation to the benefits that Europe, its companies and its citizens will gain from an expansive EU bilateral trade agenda.

¹ See the [Communication on the Trade Policy Review \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/eu-trade-policy-review)

² In terms of speed, the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement should be the golden rule. An agreement in principle on the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) was reached in July 2017 and, following the Council green light in July 2018, the EU-Japan trade agreement entered into force in January 2019. The entire procedure was therefore completed in one and a half years. See [EU-Japan trade agreement enters into force \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/eu-japan-trade-agreement-enters-into-force)

³ See <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/eu-mercosur-association-agreement/>

⁴ For instance, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement in the Indo-Pacific region has already entered into force.

⁵ Priority should be given to international technical standards, conformity assessments and elimination of industrial tariffs. See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_5308

⁶ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/49523/eu-india-leaders-meeting-joint-statement-080521.pdf>

⁷ See [Association of South East Asian Nations \(ASEAN\) - Trade - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/asean-trade-agreement/)



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