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European Services Forum priorities to WTO MC14

The European Services Forum (ESF), representing the interests of the European service sectors in international trade and investment negotiations, calls upon all WTO Members that will gather in Yaoundé (Cameroon) for the fourteenth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to deliver some meaningful results for the world business community.

Priority number one for the European services businesses is the extension of the WTO Moratorium on Customs Duties on Electronic Transmissions and of the related E-Commerce Work Programme. Our preference would be for a permanent ban on such duties, but if this is not achievable MC14 must extend the Moratorium, preferably for more than two years. Otherwise, the WTO risks losing credibility by opening the possibility of raising tariffs on services transactions.

ESF is a fervent supporter of the multilateral trading system and hence it strongly encourages WTO members to agree an ambitious WTO Reform roadmap. The services sectors have benefitted from the countries' schedules of commitments in the framework of the General Agreement of Trade in Services (GATS), where binding Most Favoured Nation and National Treatment commitments provided legal certainty to trade and investment. But the promise of built-in agenda thirty years ago has not been fulfilled, and the business community is calling WTO members to adapt their engagements to the new reality.

In particular, we believe that the WTO should allow countries that want to move ahead taking commitments among themselves without occurring new obligations for non-participating countries to do so. With a broader membership since its inception, it is normal that not all WTO members want to move at the same pace. But open plurilateral agreements should be welcomed. This is particularly true for the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement (IFDA), that is now gathering 128 countries with a strong majority of developing countries. ESF calls upon the WTO countries to incorporate this agreement, as an annex 4, into the core rules of the WTO. It will demonstrate to the business community that the WTO is still an organisation that can deliver.

Furthermore, ESF has followed closely the negotiations of the Electronic Commerce Agreement (ECA) and considers the result finalised in July 2024 and now endorsed by 72 countries as a crucial first step in setting up global digital trade rules. ESF calls upon these countries to find an acceptable legal way to trigger an early implementation of this plurilateral agreement. All interested members should be invited to join, and the second phase of the talks should start as soon as the ECA agreement enters into force.

END

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List of members supporting the above position

- Amazon
- Amfori
- Apple
- Architects' Council of Europe –ACE
- BDO
- Bureau International des Producteurs et Intermédiaires d'Assurances – BIPAR
- BUSINESSEUROPE
- BUSINESSEUROPE WTO Working Group
- BSA The Software Alliance – BSA
- Danish Shipping
- DHL Group
- Digital Europe
- EK - Confederation of Finnish Industries
- EuroCommerce
- European Banking Federation - EBF
- European Community Shipowners' Associations – ECSA
- European Express Association – EEA
- Fédération de l'Industrie Européenne de la Construction – FIEC
- FratiniVergano European Lawyers
- General Council of the Bar of England & Wales
- Google
- IBM Europe, Middle East & Africa
- Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW)
- Insurance Europe
- Irish Business and Employers' Confederation - IBEC
- Le Groupe La Poste
- Microsoft Corporation Europe
- Mouvement des entreprises de France – MEDEF
- PostEurop
- Svenskt Näringsliv (Confederation of Swedish Enterprise)
- TechUK
- TheCityUK
- UPS