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Time to put the European Green Deal at the heart of trade policy

Opinion piece by our MEP's Anna Cavazzini and Saskia Bricmont

Trade Commissioner nominee Valdis Dombrovskis faces a packed in-tray. The EU's trade policy needs a complete overhaul in order to be adapted to the EU's new sustainability goals and to harness globalisation.

Phil Hogan's resignation put a big question mark about the future of EU trade policy in everyone's minds. Crucially, whoever takes over from him in the EU's trade portfolio has the enormous task of bringing the European trade policy in line with the EU Green Deal in accordance with the initial intent of the Commission when it first published the EGD in December 2019.

We see many challenges ahead for the nominee Valdis Dombrovskis, which have to be tackled head on before the end of the year, and which will be a focus of our Group during his hearing.

First of all, the European Commission is undergoing a full review of its Trade Policy. This is a huge opportunity to finally eliminate all trade and investment rules that conflict with climate protection and to make the European Green Deal and the Sustainable Development Goals the reference point of EU trade policy, with enforceable sustainable development chapters. We in the Greens have several demands and concrete recommendations when it comes to this.

The EU is also currently in negotiations to modernise the controversial Energy Charter Treaty. This infamous investment agreement allows highly damaging (fossil) energy investors to sue states for policies that hurt their investments, even when it comes to climate protection policies – at the expense of taxpayers, and of course the climate. If Executive Vice President Dombrovskis is confirmed as Hogan's replacement, he should set a deadline by end of this year to conclude negotiations for the modernisation of the Treaty, otherwise the EU should exit from it as soon as possible.

Thirdly, the agreement with the Mercosur countries might soon be up for a vote, despite strong evidence that it will lead to more deforestation and emissions and undermine further the rights of indigenous people. There are rumours that the European Commission might try to split the trade agreement from the overall association agreement in a way that the voting rules change from unanimity to qualified majority, in order to bypass the increasing resistance to the agreement from several Member States or regions like, France, Austria, Wallonia and even Germany. Yet the new Trade Commissioner

should by no means go down this undemocratic route or use a rhetoric trick like a de facto toothless Protocol or interpretative statement. We cannot go forward with this agreement while the Amazon is burning down at record speed and as legitimate contest is growing from the agricultural and consumer protection sectors.

Another huge task before the incoming Commissioner is the initiative to reform the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which is supposed to be published before the end of the year. At the moment, WTO rules limit the political leeway that governments need for their legitimate social and environmental policies in accordance with higher international societal commitments. The new Commissioner must put forward proposals to ensure that WTO rules support the goals of climate protection and sustainable development.

Last but not least, the coming months should see the finalisation of negotiations on future UK-EU relations. Unfortunately, we see no substantial progress, while the window for a deal is closing fast. What is clear is that future relations must be based on high social and environmental standards.

Despite the difficulty of losing the Trade Commissioner at such a crucial time, there is now the chance for a new beginning. The EU trade policy needs a complete overhaul in order to be adapted to the EU's new sustainability goals and to harness globalisation in a different fashion, to reconcile Europe with its citizens. If we have only 10 years ahead of us to prevent irreversible damage from climate change, we cannot afford to lose any more time.

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