



STATEMENT | 29 June 2020

Statement by Commissioner Phil Hogan on election of new WTO Director-General

The World Trade Organisation is in crisis and requires all members to engage sincerely in meaningful reforms of this important international body.

The recent surprising decision by the Director General, Roberto Azevêdo, to retire early should be seen as an opportunity for political leaders globally to seize this chance to make changes to the rules, the functions and structure of WTO in order to meet the demands of 21st century trade.

Not since the foundation of the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) in 1947, has the need for an independent "global referee" that binds the participants of trade agreements to rules and disciplines been more important.

The European Union, as one of the largest trading blocks in the world, will continue to work constructively with like-minded countries to achieve the objectives of a more effective and efficient WTO. All members that want free, fair and sustainable trade should do likewise.

So, a new Director-General of the WTO should be appointed without delay. However, in recent days, it has become evident that the original timeline for this appointment in early September 2020 will be delayed and therefore create uncertainty in the leadership of the organisation at this critical time.

The current global trade challenges should require all members to work together. Regrettably this is not happening today. Let me outline the priorities from an EU perspective:

- The post Covid 19 economic recovery.
- The escalation of trade rhetoric and the unnecessary imposition of tariffs on EU goods by the USA rather than negotiating solutions to trade irritants is unacceptable and requires ongoing focus.
- The need to provide a level playing field with China as part of the negotiations towards an Investment Agreement in 2020 is essential for EU companies.
- The recent confirmation of the ambitious October 2020 timeline for the Brexit negotiations will require our attention.
- The implementation and enforcement of our EU Free Trade Agreements in 76 countries around the world requires new impetus for EU businesses and stakeholders.

This important EU Trade Agenda requires the full and careful involvement of the European Union and in particular, the Trade Commissioner.

Accordingly, I have decided that I will not be putting my name forward for the position of Director-General of the World Trade Organisation. I have informed the President of the Commission today. In consultation with, and with the approval of President von der Leyen, I will return to my duties of Trade Commissioner with immediate effect. We will work together to implement our important work programme on behalf of our EU Citizens as well as implementing our Trade Agenda with renewed vigour.

Can I express my gratitude to President von der Leyen for her generous advice and support throughout the evaluation of my potential candidacy for the WTO Director-General. I am grateful to the Irish Government and in particular, former Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar for agreeing to nominate me. I have also considered carefully the views of Heads of Government and Trade Ministers in reaching this decision.

Finally, can I thank the many Trade Ministers and ambassadors of the 164 Members of the WTO for their encouragement and offer of support.

This decision today will allow other potential candidates (including European nominees) to consider their candidacy before the close of nominations on the 8th July next.

The EU will work constructively with the new Director-General of the WTO to achieve our mutual objectives. My best wishes to the candidates in the coming months.