

23rd January 2020

Dear Executive Vice-President Vestager,

Dear Executive Vice-President Dombrovskis,

Dear Vice-President Jourová,

Dear Commissioner Hogan,

Please accept our warmest congratulations on your appointments to the new College. We, the undersigned Ministers, would like to take this opportunity to express our joint position regarding the importance of digitalisation and the data economy for the EU's future, for the global competitiveness of European companies, and for job creation in the EU.

We have entered a new phase of globalisation, with digital transformation at its heart. Data have become the backbone of economic activity, trade and competitiveness, as well as a vital element throughout many companies' value chains. Businesses of all sizes across all sectors need to access, use and transfer data. Examples of such sectors are artificial intelligence, information technologies, food industry, manufacturing, resource extraction, transport and logistics, and the medical industry. It is crucial to establish a cross-border trustworthy space for data flows, access to data and data sharing partnership.

It is important to continue discussing future rules on cross-border data flows based on the needs and interests of European economic operators and consumers. We need effective tools to address digital protectionism in third countries while ensuring the protection of personal data. In this context, we would like to emphasise the importance of including rules on data flows in the EU's trade policy, its trade agreements and in particular in the ongoing plurilateral e-commerce negotiations in the WTO.

The WTO rules will create a stable global framework, enable businesses to harness the full potential of e-commerce, and ensure a level playing field. The e-commerce negotiations are of strategic importance in demonstrating the WTO's credibility and strengthening its function as a rule-making organisation. We welcome the fact that the EU has been playing a leading role since the beginning of the WTO negotiations. The Commission should continue to be proactive in these negotiations to support the competitiveness of EU businesses and their capacity to generate employment. Particularly, we encourage the Commission to engage proactively towards ambitious rules on data flows and, to this end, make use of the flexibility given by the negotiating directives.

Finally, we would like to underline that the relevance of e-commerce and the need for ambitious rules on data flows should also be reflected in other EU trade negotiations as well as in the Commission's future Trade and Digital Strategy.

We wish you every success in your new role and we stand ready for future discussions in order to deliver a better future for European businesses and citizens.

Yours sincerely,

Liliya Ivanova
Deputy Minister of Economy
Bulgaria

Karel Havlíček
Minister of Industry and Trade
The Czech Republic

Simon Kollerup
Minister for Industry, Business and Financial Affairs
Denmark

Kaimar Karu
Minister of Foreign Trade and Information Technology
Estonia

Ville Skinnari
Minister for Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade
Finland

Peter Altmaier
Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy
Germany

Luigi Di Maio
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
Italy

Heather Humphreys
Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation
Ireland

Edgars Rinkēvičs
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Latvia

Albinas Zananavičius
Vice - Minister for European Affairs and Trade
Lithuania

Jean Asselborn
Minister of Foreign and European Affairs
Luxembourg

Silvio Schembri
Minister for the Economy, Investment and Small Businesses
Malta

Krzysztof Mazur
Undersecretary of State in Ministry for Economic Development
Poland

Ana Paula Zacarias
Secretary of State for European Affairs
Portugal

Virgil-Daniel Popescu
Minister of Economy, Energy and Business Environment
Romania

Xiana Margarida Méndez Bertolo
Secretary of State for Trade
Spain

Anna Hallberg
Minister for Foreign Trade and Nordic Affairs
Sweden

A copy of this letter has been sent to:
Thierry Breton, Commissioner for the Internal Market
Didier Reynders, Commissioner for Justice