Ladies and gentlemen,

I'm glad to be able to talk to you today. Think tanks like CEPS make an important contribution to debates on policy in the European Union. The research and ideas you produce policymakers informs the decisions the institutions make. And the networks you create, like this meeting today, offer another useful setting for our conversations with stakeholders.

I've been asked to speak to you this morning on the theme of "Trade in an Age of Populism".

It's a good summary of the situation we are in.

There can be no doubt that across the EU and across the world, populist movements have gained traction, influence and, in some cases, access to the levers of power. I don't need to call out individual EU Member States or specific countries outside the EU. We all read the newspapers.
• Most populist movements and parties - of the left and the right, in Europe and elsewhere, in government and in opposition - are deeply critical of open trade policies.

• Populist techniques - over-simplified, distorted, and emotionally charged arguments - have certainly played a role in the opposition to many trade agreements, in Europe and elsewhere.

• And populist ideas inform some criticism of trade liberalisation. There is a clear link between discussions on trade agreements and the wider question of whether our societies should be open or closed. I have always believed that openness to other parts of the world makes us stronger - when I was in Parliament, when I was responsible for migration policy in the Commission and today as Trade Commissioner.

But even I find myself on that side what some are calling a new political cleavage in Western democracy…

… I still believe we have a great deal to gain from engaging constructively with those who have doubts about trade policy today, for three reasons.

First, because not to do so would mean missing an opportunity to remind people about the real but underappreciated benefits of trade.

Second, because we would also be guilty of oversimplification. The trade debate in the EU is complex. It's not just about old school protectionism. But about how trade rules interact with domestic policies in a globalised economy.
The reality is also extremely positive, if we look at specific individual stories:

- Take the example of example AustriAlpin, a company that makes safety buckles for rock and mountain climbers. They employ 75 people in Austria's Tirol region. And they have done very well out of the EU's trade agreement with South Korea. The deal made them more competitive, contributing to expanding international sales that has allowed them to hire more workers.

- Another, closer example is the Huyghe Brewery in Melle, in Flanders. They make 'Delirium Tremens' beer, famous for its pink elephant branding. They are benefitting from the EU's recent trade agreement with Colombia and Peru. In 2015 alone, they doubled their exports to Colombia!

- And one final example is Ewa-Bis, a Polish exporter of apples and other fruit and vegetables. They benefitted when our agreement with Ukraine eliminated customs duties on apples. And they see the CETA deal with Canada as a major opportunity, especially when it comes to facilitating compliance with Canada's sanitary and phytosanitary rules.

These are real unambiguous facts and stories that show the reality of open trade in most cases.

It's the role of all supporters of an open trade policy to get out into the debate and try to use this kind of information to inform people.
Finally, values. We have to show that open markets do not mean abandoning core European values. That means safeguarding the European social and regulatory model at home...

... and using the Single Market as a lever to values like human rights, labour rights and environmental protection around the world.

Crucially, we believe this approach allows us both to respond to criticism and to deliver the results people rightly expect. It avoids paralysis that would in fact contribute to more scepticism about our ability to deliver.

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We have been implementing this approach over the last year, with a great deal of success in my view.

On effectiveness, we've taken several important steps.

(We are in the advanced stages of preparing a new proposal on digital trade for the TTIP negotiations that will serve as a template for our future FTAs.) In parallel, we are also working on a digital trade agenda for the World Trade Organisation.
We have seen less progress on the question of our negotiating directives, or mandates. We believe the Council should disclose them systematically, as has already been done for TTIP, CETA and TiSA. Member States believe a case-by-case approach is better.

We do all agree that it is crucial that texts that are important for tactical reasons in the negotiations do remain confidential. That's in Europe's best interest.

Finally on values, things are moving too...

... both on defending the right to make policy in the public interest at home...

and on projecting our values around the world.

The highly progressive Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement with Canada is the best example of the former.

It's not just a highly effective economic agreement that will remove tariffs, open procurement markets and create opportunities for our food and drinks exporters.

It also makes very clear that the right to regulate and public services are protected. And that labour rights are too. Canada is in the process of ratifying one of the ILO’s main conventions as a result of this negotiation in fact.
• We've signed an Economic Partnership Agreement with members of the Southern African Development Community and are making progress towards signature of agreements with countries in East and West Africa.

• We've reached political agreements with Parliament and Member States on our initiatives to keep conflict minerals out of the supply chain and to impose tighter controls on products used in torture and the death penalty.

• And we've released our first public report into countries compliance with their obligations under the GSP+ scheme, which gives extra access to the EU market to countries that respect human rights, labour rights and the environment.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

For all the work done, it's clear that we also have a lot more to do…

• We need to continue to listen to those who have concerns.
• We need to keep improving our policies.
• And we need to keep fighting approve and implement trade deals, like CETA and others, that can help Europe thrive.

Populism is not going away any time soon. But the more results that we provide, the stronger our defence against it will be.