EU COMMERCIAL COUNSELLORS’ MEETING
WEDNESDAY, 12 APRIL 2017, 10.00-12.00, EUROPA HOUSE

2. Debriefing on 18th round of FTA negotiations

Art. 4.1(b)
The 18th FTA round took place the week of 3 April.
After the leaders' meeting in March in Brussels, there is a sense of renewed political commitment from Japan with the appointment of the new (4th) Chief Negotiator, Yoichi Suzuki, who is a trade expert and previously served as Ambassador to France.

In terms of possible dates for conclusion, PM Abe deliberately did not set any new deadline but committed to the objective of concluding negotiations by the end of 2017. This could potentially be achieved if an agreement in principle is reached by the summer, with important meetings coming up, such as the G7 Summit in Taormina in May or the G20 Summit in Hamburg in July.

Negotiations on agriculture remain difficult; Japan has difficulties in going beyond the TPP without triggering negative political reactions. Discussions during this round, while not bringing any conclusive results, saw new ideas brought forward, showing finally a willingness to discuss Market Access in detail. This being said, agriculture reform is one of PM Abe's domestic priorities, and it will therefore be difficult for Japan to engage with the EU on this until the Diet approves the reform (likely in June). On government procurement, progress has been made on the disciplines, while for services, areas such as Mode 4 and exceptions have been discussed. Negotiations on a number of chapters are now well advanced, and we expect that by May more than 50% of the text will be agreed. In this context, it is important that Member States pass positive messages about engagement, but remain prudent about discussing the details.

The 19th round is scheduled for May in Brussels, while another round might take place mid-June, either in Brussels or Tokyo.