The EU-US SME Policy Dialogue took place in the new context of EU-US Transatlantic Relations after President Trump took office earlier this year. The workshop, organized this year by US in Wichita – Kansas and where Directors Kristin Schreiber (GROW H) and Signe Ratso (TRADE G) represented the Commission at senior management level, can be considered a success:

- It has kept open a channel of privileged communication with the US administration (USTR, Dept. of Commerce and US Small Business Administration - SBA) at a time when other trade or policy dialogues have been put on hold (e.g. TTIP negotiations).

- The policy objective of enhancing a favourable Transatlantic environment for SMEs continues to be shared between the US and EU (almost 30% of EU trade with the US is done by SMEs).

- Many common challenges were discussed: how to reduce compliance costs for SMEs, ease regulatory burden and red tape, support innovation and start-ups/scale-ups, promote a better access to international markets, develop skills SMEs and entrepreneurs need.

- Policy responses on both sides of the Atlantic were debated between government officials and SMEs representatives with a major objective to be achieved: reducing the information gap SMEs are suffering from (through the connection of entrepreneurs to relevant public support programmes, like the Enterprise Europe Network, innovation hubs offered by US universities, clusters to support internationalization, soft landing services for SMEs going abroad, exchange programme like Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs Global, various trade promotion resources…).

- Difficulties faced in both sides’ markets have not been hidden: REACH or the General Data Protection Regulation are perceived by some US participants as an excessive regulatory burden for SMEs; for European entrepreneurs in the US visa issues or the difficult access to the public procurement market (500 billion US$ of goods and services are purchased annually by the US government) have been highlighted.

In conclusion, USTR representative underlined the common vision of SMEs in international trade shared by US and the EU. New areas to be explored more in depth by the future workshops were agreed: potential opportunities for further cooperation between DG GROW, US SBA and the Dept. of Commerce (notably within EEN), start-up communities and how to match start-ups/scale-ups with larger SMEs (mid-caps), exchange of entrepreneurs to develop their skills… The value of the workshop as an efficient platform of cooperation on SME matters and its relevance for the Transatlantic economic partnership were also highlighted.

Participants to the workshop visited the Wichita State University Innovation Campus and its new Experiential Engineering building specialized in advance manufacturing with 3D virtual reality laboratories. The Campus is instrumental in promoting the startup of business based upon new ideas.
PRESS RELEASE

8th US-EU Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Best Practices Workshop in the framework of the Transatlantic Economic Council (TEC), Wichita, US, on 19 October 2017

The United States and the EU recognize SMEs as critical motors of growth and job creation and key sources of innovation and entrepreneurship. Since 2011, the TEC has included a specific work stream with the objective to enhance transatlantic cooperation on issues relevant for US and EU SMEs in order to increase trade and investment opportunities. As a result eight EU-US SME Workshops have taken place to exchange best practices and find collaborative ways to fulfil that aim. Meetings gather US and EU officials together with Member States’ representatives, SME stakeholders and business associations. Participants discuss concrete examples to stimulate growth in our SMEs in the context of a transatlantic market. The last TEC facilitator meeting of 30 November 2016 approved to host the SME workshop in the US in 2017.

85 participants discussed the following topics at the US-EU SME Workshop in Wichita: Skills development for SMEs and best practices in apprenticeships and vocational training; Transatlantic foreign direct investment in manufacturing; Export strategies, regulatory issues and barriers to trade; Support policies to SMEs, Start-ups and Scale-ups: encouraging innovation and competitiveness; U.S. Export Promotion Resources for Small and Medium Enterprises and EU support for SME Internationalisation; and EU-US SMEs cooperation. A next EU-US SME Workshop is proposed to take place in the EU in 2018.

The SME Workshop was organised by U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Small Business Administration, DG TRADE and DG GROW (DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs).