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Titre: Meeting report: TRADE-CSR Europe 4 December 2020

Meeting: DG TRADE – CSR Europe

Participants

- DG TRADE: [Redacted]
- CSR Europe: [Redacted]

Date

Thursday 3 December 11h00-11h45.

Summary

CSR European provided an update on their recent actives on responsible business conduct (RBC) and due diligence, which was followed by a general exchange of views on due diligence developments. CSR underlined the need for a wider approach on RBC and to take account of the existing (sectorial) work already done by many companies.

Detail

CSR Europe highlighted that due diligence is an issue across policy areas and that it is important to ensure coherence amongst the various initiatives at EU level, and between EU and Member State level. Future legislation should be part of a broader Action Plan of accompanying measures for change in local communities. CSR Europe explained the relevance of developing standards “bottom up”, relying on what is already being done in different sector (cars, textiles, cacao). E.g. much have happened in automobile industry last 7-8 years in developing instruments for companies and their suppliers, incl. best practises on how to scale them down to the factory floor. CSR Europe also expressed an impression among the industry that the Commission lacks trust industry led (“bottom up”) standardisation.

DG TRADE provided an update on the state of play and developments regarding new measures of due diligence and increased expectations to address issues in the supply chains regarding issues such as core labour standards as well as deforestation. The EP, including the INTA committee, are taking a keen interest. The issue is also high on the agenda of a number of Member States some of who have legislation in place (e.g. FR), others are considering / discussing (like DE). DG TRADE also recognised the need of a larger framework or action needed to address underlying issues/ have accompanying measures. Given the horizontal approach, the future obligation would need to apply to companies’ across sectors. Where pertinent, this can then be complemented by sectorial initiatives, actions or guidance in pertinent areas. E.g. the Multi-stakeholder dialogue for sustainable cocoa launched on September 22, including due diligence/RBC, as a complement to, rather than substitute for, future legislation.
DG TRADE asked how the uptake of international guidelines such as the OECD and ILO guidelines could be further promoted – lists of best practices or other actions? CSR Europe found that the problem with the OECD and ILO guidelines were that they were not always clear for all items and somewhat repetitive.

DG TRADE was also interested in understanding how companies could need to work together in accompanying measures or actions, e.g. trainings for SME, etc. Could industry associations play a role? Commission would also be interested to better understand existing internal procedures. It would be helpful to have a form of “flow chart” showing how due diligence is implemented through the supply chain, what is the role of different actors, etc.

CSR Europe explained that companies are very engaged in discussions on business and human rights. In some third countries sensitive issues are also difficult to address at company level (e.g. some human rights issues). For this, and also issues like biodiversity, European diplomacy is needed. CSR Europe would look to see what material can be shared to help illustrated application of requirements across supply chain.

End.