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Subject: Flash - dinner with various consumer Organisations' CEOs

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Replaced Ignacio tonite at a dinner with 8-9 leading persons from various european consumer associations (BEUC, Which?, Swedish Consumer Association, Test Achats, UFC - Que Choisir, Altro-Consumo, Slovenia, Danish Consumer Council).

They're overall supportive of trade agreements which increase consumer choice, lower prices and hence create opportunities, jobs, etc.

I presented the overall state of play, where we come from, the current political climate, the current public perception in some key MS like Germany and steps ahead. Did not have to provide many details as [**ART 4.1b**] was part of the group and is also a member of the Advisory Group.

Issues raised:

1.- impact on multilateral trade liberalization but also standardization efforts (consumers of all nations are about higher standards, not just European and American ones).

2.- ISDS: known criticisms. suggestion to focus on the real risk: expropriation, get rid of all the other imprecise and indirect obligations for host states.

I provided usual answers. also invited to reflect upon two facts:

- 9 BITs between USA and MS over 25 years: no case despite gigantic legislative changes due to implementation of entire Acquis communautaire (accession). these BITs will stay if we don't have TTIP with investment protection with, by the way better standards.

- MS have hundreds of BITs with third countries - and among themselves. The risk of BITs being abused is therefore already there, all over the place. Hardly anyone campaigns against the existing BITs.

3. Transparency

- viz EP: EC doing a great job, as recognized by MEPs in private or Schultz in his letter to the Ombudsman. You should discharge yourselves of the democratic imperative if you report to the EP. I noted that this perception isn't shared by all - citizens or national politicians.

- viz the public. yes the Advisory Group is a plus. [**NOT RELEASABLE**]. need to make sure the Group also contributes to the process, e.g on the public consultation on investment protection. Some in the blogosphere criticized BEUC for joining the Advisory Group ("u're now part of the EU Security Apparatus").

4. representation / input.

If negotiations lead to changes to rules consumers care about, such as privacy rules, food protection, financial services regulation, then consumers will be quite angry because such changes would have been agreed outside normal procedures where they feel they have a say. people don't think they are represented by trade negotiators in such issues. It would be different if it were a pure trade deal dealing mostly with trade liberalization.

5. Communication on TTIP is very abstract - should highlight concrete and realistic benefits for consumers.

- ideas: suppress transatlantic roaming charges for telephone calls and mobile data transfers
- align personal tariff allowance for goods purchased online and travel allowance
- highlight effective access to more goods & services but with same level of consumer protection.
- increase consumer protection laws for online transatlantic sales
- improve traceability of meat products

"consumers are not, as consumers, interested in more growth or more jobs. they want to feel that negotiators are committed to improving consumers' interests and not just pursuing business interest without undermining consumer interests." "make the deal palatable for consumers".

Suggestion to further discuss this issue at a later stage.

6. financial services regulation

US financial products of disputable quality still in abundance. scope for addressing this in TTIP ?

7. precautionary principle

Will it be endangered ? our high Standards are at risk.

8. data flows / privacy standards.

Usual question and answer.

With many thanks to Miranda for the briefing materials which helped me pepper my responses to references to their successive contributions of the last months.

Damien

Sent from my PDA, apologies for brevity and spelling mistakes