

KAREL DE GUCHT
MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels, 17/11/12
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Dear Mr Higgins,

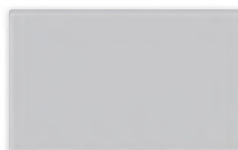
Thank you for your message of 13 November 2012 in which you sent me the joint statement made by a group of 14 European business organisations in favour of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Japan.

As you are aware, the Council decided on 29 November to give the Commission the green light to start negotiations with Japan by approving the negotiating mandate. This is a very positive development since I fully share your view that a deep and comprehensive FTA with Japan could generate considerable economic benefits for Europe by fostering growth and jobs.

I also agree with you that in order to be truly beneficial such an agreement will need to focus not only on trade in goods but also on issues such as services, public procurement, IPR, investment protection and regulatory cooperation. The treatment of non-tariff barriers will also be of fundamental importance and this is the reason why we intend to set out a strict and clear parallelism between the elimination of our import duties and non-tariff barriers in Japan.

Let me finally use this opportunity to thank your organisation for its support to the launch of EU-Japan FTA negotiations. The business community has a key role to play in promoting the benefits of our free trade agenda to European stakeholders, and its support to the negotiation process will be essential at all stages.

Yours sincerely,



Karel De Gucht

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