

Mr Maroš Šefčovič
Commissioner for Trade and
Economic Security;
Interinstitutional Relations and
Transparency
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200

B-1049 Brussels

BEUC-X-2024-100

Brussels, 01/12/2024

Subject: The Consumer Mission Letter

Dear Commissioner Šefčovič,

On behalf of BEUC, the European Consumer Organisation, I wish to congratulate you on your recent appointment as European Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security, Interinstitutional Relations and Transparency. Created in 1962, we represent 44 national consumer groups from 31 European countries. Thanks to our members' markets watchdog role, their product testing and daily contacts with consumers from across Europe, we can support you with evidence-based recommendations to ensure the European economy delivers to consumers. BEUC engages with third countries through its strong cooperation with Consumers International and the Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue.

We were pleased to learn during your European Parliament hearing that the Commission will focus efforts throughout its 2024-2029 term on ensuring that trade policy will support the EU's sustainability goals and that the customs reform will be implemented more quickly.

Consumer organisations can, and must be, part of this process. For you to be a true consumer champion, we believe that the proposals further below should be part of your mission for the next Commission term.

The current shortcomings

Trade policy has improved these past years: it is much more transparent and more focused on preserving the EU's right to regulate. Yet, further changes are needed. Our [research](#) shows that

trade policy is not sufficiently aligned with the Green Deal. We still see market access offers in trade agreements that promote imports of goods like meat and dairy products. Even in small quantities, this clashes with the message of the Farm to Fork Strategy of the Green Deal to reduce the consumption of these products. We also see contradictions between digital trade rules and the EU digital rulebook. The EU keeps adding new layers of complexity in its trade deals concerning data flows and access to source code. These could undermine the ability of the EU to protect consumers' digital rights and implement laws such as the AI Act. Finally, the suppression of the Free Trade Agreement Expert Group in 2019 has reduced the ability of experts to alert trade negotiators of such shortcomings.

When it comes to customs, consumers urgently need the reform to keep them safe from dangerous and illegal products. Our recent member tests on products sold on Chinese marketplaces such as TEMU and SHEIN revealed clear infringements of EU product safety and chemical regulations.

Consumers' proposals for your mission

Fully align trade policy with the EU's internal policies in a new trade strategy

Sustainability should be integrated into EU trade agreements, beyond trade and sustainable development chapters. The EU should design market access offers in line with the objectives of the Green Deal: to help reduce the consumption and production of less sustainable products and increase access to more sustainable ones. The EU should also include clearer safeguards in trade agreements to prevent challenges against EU sustainability rules. To fully preserve citizens' fundamental rights in the digital realm, we call on you to uphold the EU's position on data protection and privacy in trade agreements. We also recommend stopping including rules on access to source code in trade agreements as they risk undermining the ability of authorities to enforce the AI act. To ensure that trade policy will benefit society as a whole, we encourage you to re-establish the Free Trade Agreement Expert Group. Contributions in an expert group are more detailed and complement the discussions in the civil society dialogue. We would welcome a new trade strategy referring to these issues.

Preserve consumer welfare in this tense geopolitical context

The EU will have to adapt to the next US administration and potential tariffs. It will also adopt a new economic security doctrine to address China's practices. Any EU retaliation through increased tariffs could harm consumers' prices and choices, especially if tariffs target products consumers need for the green transition. While ensuring fair competition from third country producers, we count on you to carefully assess the impact of trade defence measures on consumers.

Build a more positive relationship with the UK

We trust that you will be able to build on the recent conclusion of the competition agreement to conclude further deals, especially on market surveillance and enforcement of consumer protection. We stand ready to support you in the context of the domestic advisory group.

Deliver a customs reform that protects consumers

The Commission's proposal to reform the customs regime is a very positive step to protect consumers from dangerous and illegal products. Yet, the reform will only be successful if it really deters importers from bringing illegal products into the Single Market. This requires dissuasive sanctions in case of infringement of non-fiscal obligations, namely compliance with EU law and taking additional measures against dangerous products on online marketplaces.

The way forward

We are aware that you have a busy agenda but hope nonetheless that you will find the time to meet with us. We would be keen to hear your reaction to our proposals and would like to elaborate more about the expectations of European consumers towards European decision-makers.

Please count on our support if you need information about the consumer perspective in trade and customs.

Please find enclosed our priorities for this new Commission.

I wish you a most successful mandate.

Yours sincerely,

Agustín Reyna
Director General

Encl.: *Europe, Consumers Count on You – BEUC priorities for the next European Commission (2024-2029)*