

ICC and B20 Trade Dialogues event: summary of points raised by business representatives

7 June 2018

The ICC and B20 convened a meeting of business representatives at the WTO headquarters in Geneva on 7 June 2018 to discuss a range of issues. The meeting included break-out sessions on four topics: e-commerce; investment facilitation; micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs); and sustainable development. The summary of the discussions is as follows.

Importance of the trading system

Business representatives expressed strong support for the WTO and the rules-based multilateral trading system. They said the stability and predictability of the system is crucial for supporting growth, development and job creation.

Participants highlighted the negative impact of protectionism and called for businesses to speak up for an open, rules-based trading system. They underlined the need for ongoing negotiations at the WTO to ensure the system remains responsive and relevant.

The WTO could help businesses and governments meet the challenges of the 21st century, participants noted, by ensuring the fourth industrial revolution is inclusive and the benefits of technological innovation and e-commerce are shared widely.

Delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals, including on targets related to the environment, climate change, food security, infrastructure, gender equality and employment, would help smaller businesses participate in world trade flows and create a more enabling environment for facilitating investments. Business leaders welcomed current discussions at the WTO in these areas.

Investment facilitation (EXTRACT)

Business representatives highlighted the following points:

- **their recognition of the importance of the envisaged investment facilitation framework under discussion in the WTO:** participants highlighted their support for the joint initiative and their readiness to contribute to the development of a framework on investment facilitation; they agreed about the important role of the WTO in increasing the scope of key issues such as investment facilitation.
- **the need to maintain a multilateral approach and to promote negotiations on investment facilitation** but participants highlighted that businesses need a better understanding of the negotiating scenario at the WTO and the possible ways forward.
- **the need to identify the operational steps to eventually implement an agreement on investment facilitation:** participants discussed how to make the case that a multilateral approach is more effective than a bilateral path. Clear answers to these questions and an evidence-based process are needed to be able to move forward.
- **the benefit of opening the door of the WTO to businesses to address investment facilitation** but participants highlighted it is fundamental to avoid bureaucracy and an excessive focus on "modus operandi" in this process as the discussion is about competition for investment and not about how we control investment.
- **the paramount importance of ensuring a prominent focus on regulation and coordination within a trade and investment framework:** Some participants proposed the possibility of establishing a business advisory group and a best-practice forum to advance discussion on this issue.
- **governments' lack of understanding of the key elements to attract investment:** participants underlined that governments need to understand the business case: the importance of legal certainty, application of the law, assurance of market access (information, less red tape and transparency), strong governance models and protection against corruption. They highlighted that investment facilitation can help educate governments in better understanding what an enabling environment for investment means.