

Professor Danuta Hübner

“To credibly leverage the EU’s regulatory power, Members States must ratify EU trade and investment agreements”

Third meeting of the Conference on the Future of Europe Working Group on “EU in the World”

European Parliament, Strasbourg, 21 January 2022 (online)

We all know that EU trade policy focuses not only on growth and on job creation, competitiveness of our businesses or upgrading the resilience of our economies, it also engages in combatting climate change and promoting environmental, labour, and human rights globally.

Trade policy helps us promoting European values on the global stage.

We all know that in the past decades the EU has spared no efforts to ensure that trade functions in a rules-based environment founded on predictable norms and stable procedures.

We must be committed to continue those efforts in the future. Only such environment creates win-win situations at a global level. Power based trade may lead to zero sum outcomes.

When we look at the EU’s regulatory power, it can be in my view leveraged in two ways:

1. Through convincing our trading partners to commit to stringent obligations regarding labour rights, environmental policies, or level playing field standards via trade or investment agreements; this requires our credibility; or
2. We can leverage EU regulatory power by making sure that the EU is in the lead in international standards setting bodies.

Our ability to build global alliances with other democracies in this context is fundamental. It makes our agency globally much stronger and effective. Again, this requires credibility.

Unfortunately, most of our recently concluded agreements are not in force as they are mixed agreements and wait for Member States national and regional parliaments' ratification.

This greatly undermines our credibility and impedes the so-called "Brussels effect".

This must change as the Union cannot defend European values and enforce rules that are not in force. The Union needs to find a solution to speed up and ensure the ratification process.

We cannot afford an internal struggle for competences in this area. Here, there is a work to be done.

Trade is a policy area where member states willingly pool their sovereignty recognizing that their collective power is far greater than the sum of parts.

Let us stick to it. It makes us stronger.