

Steering Committee of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO
The Co-Chairman

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Mr Pedro Agramunt
President
Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Subject: *Participation in the Steering Committee of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO*

Dear President,

Since 2002, the European Parliament and the Inter-Parliamentary Union have been jointly leading the way in a process known as the Parliamentary Conference on the World Trade Organization. At present, the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO has firmly established itself as a permanent process with a well-developed system of links with the WTO, affirming the role of the Conference as a de facto parliamentary dimension of that intergovernmental organization.

The Conference brings together legislators who, as members of standing and select committees in their respective parliaments, specialize in international trade and finance. As defined in its Rules of Procedure, it is a forum for the exchange of opinions, information and experience, as well as for the promotion of common parliamentary action in the area of international trade. The Conference oversees and promotes the effectiveness and fairness of WTO activities; promotes the transparency of WTO procedures and improves the dialogue between governments, parliaments and civil society; builds capacity in parliaments in matters of international trade and exerts influence on the direction of discussions within the WTO.

The smooth functioning of this process is ensured by the Conference Steering Committee composed of representatives of 22 national parliaments, four international and regional parliamentary organizations and assemblies, as well as the WTO Secretariat. The Committee is co-chaired by IPU and EP representatives (currently Mr Krister Örnfjäder, Member of the Swedish Riksdag, and myself, Chairman of EP's Committee on International Trade).

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has been actively involved in the Conference since its start, and has a seat on the Steering Committee. We welcome this participation and active engagement, which has been a useful contribution to our work. We were, however, a little surprised that during the last meeting of the Steering Committee in Geneva on 13 June 2016, the representative Mr Jonasson repeatedly took the floor, stating that he was expressing his personal opinion, where he did not hesitate to criticise different elements of EU trade policy.

While we welcome the active participation of Members and of course are not afraid of criticism, we do believe that when a Member is representing a political institution, it should not merely be his or her personal opinion that is expressed. In order to ensure active involvement and a broader political representativity, for the benefit of the work of the Steering Committee, we would hope that all parliaments discuss and prepare their participation in the meetings, so that Members can act within the framework of a clear mandate supported by their colleagues.

The European Parliament delegation has shared this assessment with the IPU Co-chair of the Conference, who was sympathetic to these arguments.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Lange', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Bernd Lange