

: Programme

As at 17 September 2020

International sef: Expert Workshop **The World Trade System after COVID-19:** **Pathways towards welfare-oriented** **trade policy**

24-25 September 2020 (all times in CEST!)

**University of Duisburg-Essen, Duisburg - Gerhard Mercator House
and ONLINE**

Conference languages

English

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THE TOPIC

The world trade system, with its core goal of continuous liberalisation of global trade, was already in deep crisis before the coronavirus pandemic. Key elements of this system, with the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its heart, risked being eroded by geopolitical power struggles and protectionist foreign trade strategies. With more regionalisation and bilateralisation of international trade relations, global agreements were becoming less significant. There was a lack of appropriate solutions to challenges such as the obstinately high level of global inequality, the ongoing destruction of vital natural resources, and the need to protect individuals from exploitation. The specific development concerns of weaker states and regions were often ignored.

And now COVID-19 has exposed a further weakness of global trade liberalisation: the crisis vulnerability of a world economy structured on a division of labour and global supply chains, with its resulting high level of mutual dependence. Factory closures in China at the start of the pandemic and massive restrictions on freight movements had tangible economic impacts worldwide early on. The collapse of markets has devastated entire supply chains. New export bans on critical goods – foods and pharmaceuticals, for example – undermine free trade, which had been adversely affected by factors such as market access restrictions and state aid-induced distortions of competition before the pandemic. The export of critical goods from countries that urgently need them themselves is also problematic. This particular dilemma can only be resolved through international cooperation.

Which lessons should be learned from the flaws that the coronavirus pandemic has exposed? What action is needed to make the world trade system more resilient and sustainable? Can the goal of trade liberalisation be replaced by a focus on welfare as the main purpose of trade? How can vulnerability in global supply chains be reduced? What might a cooperative system for the fair distribution of critical goods look like? Which stakeholders and alliances will play the key role in shaping the future world trade system?

At the International sef: Expert Workshop 2020, we will be discussing these questions with a select group of around 30 international experts from research, politics, business and civil society. Starting with an academic and political analysis, the aim is to identify strategies and stakeholders with the potential to help build a more sustainable global trade system that is focused on the common good.

On a practical note, as international travel may still be impossible or subject to restrictions when the Workshop is scheduled to take place, we are proceeding on the basis that only a smaller number of participants will be able to attend in person. For all other attendees, particularly experts from overseas, the Workshop will be run as an online event.

: Thursday, 24 September 2020

- 13.15 hrs Registration and light refreshments
- 13.45 hrs Welcome and introduction
- Dr Michèle Roth**
Executive Director
Development and Peace Foundation (sef:), Bonn
- Dr Cornelia Ulbert**
Executive Director
Institute for Development and Peace (INEF), University of Duisburg-Essen,
Member of the Executive Committee of the Development and Peace Foundation (sef:)

SESSION I

COVID-19 OR THE PRELUDE TO WORLD TRADE SYSTEM RENEWAL?

The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly exposed the weaknesses of the world trade system in its current form - the lack of solidarity among members, the poor resilience of global supply chains and the inability to provide essential goods, among other things. Given that the world trade system was in deep crisis even before COVID-19, it now seems to have eroded almost completely in some areas. Was it COVID-19 itself that caused the implosion of the world trade system? Or has the pandemic simply revealed the need for more international cooperation, including in trade? Viewed from diverse regional and stakeholder perspectives, which lessons should be learned from the crisis? And how can these lessons be collated in a meaningful way?

- 14.00 hrs Input
- Anabel González**
Nonresident senior fellow
Peterson Institute for International Economics, Washington D.C.
Former minister of trade of Costa Rica
- 14.20 hrs Comment from a regional perspective
- Andreas Machwirth**
Director International Economic Relations and FDI
Ministry of Economic Affairs, Innovation, Digitalisation and Energy
of North Rhine-Westphalia, Dusseldorf
- 14.30 hrs Comment from a business perspective
- Thomas Panzer**
SVP - Head Supply Chain Management, Pharmaceuticals Division
Bayer AG, Berlin
- 14.40 hrs Discussion
- Chair
- Dr Clara Brandi**
Senior Researcher
DIE - German Development Institute, Bonn
- 15.30 hrs Coffee break

SESSION II:**AGENDA 2030 AND THE NORMATIVE REALIGNMENT OF WORLD TRADE**

The focus of world trade – and the economy more generally – on perpetual growth and profit maximisation has long been open to criticism. With the adoption of Agenda 2030, however, other measures of human development moved to the heart of political debate, with more significance attached to aspects such as welfare, sustainability, human rights and combating inequalities. Is this change in perspective reflected in world trade policy as well? Which criteria should guide efforts to align a future world trade system towards Agenda 2030? What can be done to ensure that more thought is given to the specific interests of developing countries? Which stakeholders have the potential to drive this reform, and in which forums? And what are the countervailing forces?

16.00 hrs	Roundtable Dr Koen Berden Managing Director Trade Impact BV, Rotterdam Professor Bernard Hoekman Director, Global Economics at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies European University Institute in Florence Aileen Kwa Coordinator of the Trade for Development Programme South Centre, Geneva
16.45 hrs	Discussion Chair Dr Clara Weinhardt Assistant Professor in International Relations at Maastricht University Non-Resident Fellow at the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) in Berlin
17.45 hrs	End of Day 1
18.00 hrs	Group dinner

: Friday, 25 September 2020

09.00 hrs Welcome coffee

SESSION III

THE GLOBAL DIVISION OF LABOUR – REDUCING RISKS ALONG PRODUCTION CHAINS

The coronavirus pandemic has clearly exposed the vulnerability of global supply chains. At least two trends can be observed. Firstly, production lines were disrupted when factory closures or freight transport issues prevented suppliers from delivering production inputs. Secondly, due to a sharp downturn in demand, businesses have cancelled many of their contracts: this is particularly noticeable in the garment industry, for example. This has already had catastrophic consequences for millions of workers and could mean that many of them face unemployment in the longer term. How are businesses responding to this challenge? Are we seeing a shift away from the outsourcing of production? How can global supply chains become more resilient to crises? And what can be done to protect the weakest links in the supply chains more effectively? How can binding corporate human rights commitments help in a crisis like this? Which stakeholders need to work together to build resilience in the global division of labour, and which legal frameworks (particularly in trade law) need to be in place?

09.15 hrs Roundtable

Dr Nazneen Ahmed

Senior Research Fellow

Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), Dhaka

Dr Christian Haller

Manager Corporate Responsibility

ALDI Nord, Essen

Eva-Maria Reinwald

Promoter for Business and Human Rights

SÜDWIND Institute for Economy and Ecumenism, Bonn/Siegburg

Lena Schweighöfer

Specialist Corporate Responsibility

ALDI Nord, Essen

9.45 hrs Discussion

Chair

Dr Christian Scheper

Senior Researcher

Institute for Development and Peace (INEF), University of Duisburg-Essen

10.45 hrs Coffee break

SESSION IV:**RULES FOR THE SUPPLY OF CRITICAL PRODUCTS – A TASK FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

The relationship between business and workers is one of mutual dependence, manifested in international supply chains. There is interdependence, too, between states (and societies), mainly evident in the outsourcing of entire industries. Already before the coronavirus crisis, standard drugs and vaccines were affected by supply issues even in highly developed countries. At the peak of the pandemic, we saw sometimes virulent competition between countries over access to essential medical protective equipment or a possible future vaccine. The question for the future is how worldwide access to vital goods and resources can be safeguarded – and which particular measures are required in times of crisis. What does this mean for the governance of world trade? And how might the World Trade Organization contribute, through crisis management mechanisms, to safeguarding this access for all countries in future, irrespective of their economic power?

11.15 hrs

Inputs and Roundtable

Willy AlfaroDirector, Trade Policies Review Division
World Trade Organization (WTO), Geneva**Thiru Balasubramaniam**Geneva Representative
Knowledge Ecology International (KEI)**Professor Simon J. Evenett**Professor of International Trade and Economic Development
University of St. Gallen,
Coordinator of the Global Trade Alert

12.00 hrs

Discussion

Chair

Dr Claudia SchmuckerHead, Globalization and World Economy Programme
German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), Berlin

12.45 hrs

Light lunch

SESSION V:**PATHWAYS TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE WORLD TRADE SYSTEM**

The future of the world trade system is still undecided. A realignment of its governance towards Agenda 2030 is possible, but so is a fall back into disorder, driven by (seemingly) national interests, with the powerful prevailing over the weak.

Building on the findings of the previous panel, this session will focus on strategies that show how the current crisis can be utilised for a comprehensive reform of the world trade system and its alignment towards global welfare. Which common interests of countries, international institutions, businesses and societies in various world regions could serve as starting points for reform? Where is there potential to create synergies? How can reform-minded stakeholders pool their resources? And which forums might they use?

13.30 hrs	Input
	Professor Amrita Narlikar President German Institute for Global and Area Studies, Hamburg
	Comment
	Shada Islam Director New Horizons Project, Senior Advisor European Policy Centre, Brussels
14.00 hrs	Discussion
	Chair
	Dr Cornelia Ulbert Executive Director Institute for Development and Peace (INEF), University of Duisburg-Essen
14.30 hrs	Outlook
	COVID-19 – a chance for more justice in world trade?
	Dr Christian Scheper Senior Researcher Institute for Development and Peace (INEF), University of Duisburg-Essen
14.45 hrs	Closing remarks