

: Programme

sef: Policy Lunch

**Data Protection vs.
“Free Flow” of Data?
Inclusive digitalisation and the
planned WTO e-commerce agreement**

17 November 2021, 12.30-13.45 hrs (CET), online

Conference language: English

Supported by

Minister for Federal, European
and International Affairs
of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia



#sefLunch

BACKGROUND

In late 2017, the Friends of E-Commerce – now comprising 86 countries – began informal negotiations on a possible WTO agreement on e-commerce. While the members have already achieved alignment on issues such as online consumer protection and authentication in e-commerce, other topics remain highly contentious and are the reason why India and many African group countries are not currently taking part in the negotiations. From a social and development policy perspective, the further liberalisation of e-commerce, particularly the institutionalisation of the presumably free flow of data, and exemption from customs duties on electronic goods and transmissions are controversial issues. Developing countries are worried that the planned rules will deprive them of their development opportunities and worsen existing inequalities.

From Europe's perspective, too, various pressing issues need to be addressed, including the continent's digital sovereignty, safeguards for its General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the development of its own digital economy.

The original timetable envisaged by the Friends of E-Commerce, which had planned to announce a breakthrough in negotiations at the WTO's 12th Ministerial Conference, is now unlikely to be met. Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that the Ministerial Conference – postponed due to the pandemic and now scheduled to take place from 30 November to 3 December 2021 – will generate fresh momentum in work on the agreement.

Given the significance of the planned agreement, a broader social and political debate about the European position is urgently needed. The sef: Policy Lunch is intended to make a contribution here. Questions to be discussed include the following:

- Who are the main beneficiaries of permanent liberalisation of data flows and customs duties in e-commerce? What are the risks and drawbacks?
- How can the EU's stringent rules on data protection and the Commission's efforts to enhance digital sovereignty be aligned with the negotiating goal of "free flow of data" in the WTO framework?
- What can be done to address global inequalities in e-commerce? How can developing countries in particular benefit more from the opportunities afforded by digitalisation?

12.00 HRS

REGISTRATION AND LIGHT LUNCH

12.30 HRS

WELCOME

Hans H. Stein

Director

Representation of the State of

North Rhine-Westphalia to the EU, Brussels

Dr Michèle Roth

Executive Director

Development and Peace Foundation (sef:), Bonn

12.40 HRS

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Maija Celmiņa

Policy Assistant for the

Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis

European Commission, Brussels

Sven Hilbig

Senior Policy Advisor, Trade Policy and Digitalisation

Bread for the World, Berlin

Sanya Reid Smith

Legal Advisor and Senior Researcher

Third World Network, Geneva

Chair

Dr Niclas Poitiers

Research Fellow

Bruegel, Brussels

Followed by discussion with the audience

13.45 HRS

END OF EVENT

SPEAKERS' BIOS



Maija Celmiņa, European Commission

Maija Celmiņa is Policy Assistant for the Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis of the European Commission in Brussels. Her main focus is on digital trade, including e-commerce and digital transition. Before joining the European Commission, she has been working already at the digital economy as Corporate Affairs Director for Lattelecom (2012-2014).



Sven Hilbig, Bread for the World

Sven Hilbig is a lawyer and works as a trade and digitalisation policy adviser for the Protestant development organisation Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World). He was previously employed by the Heinrich Böll Foundation, where he worked on various aspects of the economy/ecology nexus. From 2001 to 2006, he was a researcher and legal adviser with the human rights organisation Global Justice in Brazil.



Sanya Reid Smith, Third World Network

Sanya Reid Smith is a Legal Advisor and Senior Researcher at the Third World Network, an active international organisation specializing in development issues and North-South affairs. Sanya is a law graduate and has a biochemistry degree. She has also studied economics. At Third World Network, she analyses the implications of trade agreements on economic and social sectors and various policies in developing countries.



Dr Niclas Poitiers, Bruegel

Niclas Poitiers joined Bruegel as a research fellow in September 2019. His research interests include international trade, international macroeconomics and the digital economy. He is working on topics on e-commerce in trade as well as European trade policy in global trade wars. Furthermore he is interested in topics on income inequality and welfare state policies.

He holds a Ph.D. in Economics from Universitat de Barcelona, a M.Sc. in economics from the Universität Bonn, and a B.Sc. from Universität Mannheim.