



➔ **2024 All DAGs meeting**  
**Summary report**

## Summary report

The 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the All DAGs meeting, organised on 18 April at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), gathered a high number of EU DAG members to exchange on Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) and the contribution and functioning of the EU Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs) together with high-level representatives of the main EU-institutions.

Discussions and presentations also included the DAGs' work's linkage to EU autonomous instruments, and in the breakout sessions DAG members were joined by representatives of the European Commission's DG TRADE, the European Parliament's INTA committee, and the Belgian EU Presidency to reflect on the DAGs' present challenges and future perspectives from different angles: from dealing with difficult counterparts and making full use of tools like the Single Entry Point, to ways to improve the impact of the DAGs and the TSD provisions.

To finalise the meeting, the main points emerging from the breakout sessions were discussed with the Commission's Chief Trade Enforcement Officer.

The meeting was moderated by EESC member and DAG coordinator Tanja Buzek.

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### Putting the TSD review into action: what we have done, what we do next

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#### *"DAGs play a key role helping to understand the situation on the ground, set priorities and make change"*

- **Maria Martin-Prat, Deputy Director-General in DG Trade**, provided an overview of the Commission's work since the adoption of the Communication on "The power of trade partnerships: together for green and just economic growth", the so called TSD review, in 2022, and underlined the joint efforts made by the Commission, the DAGs, the European Parliament and the member states.

She highlighted the importance of change on the ground, and listed some notable achievements, including the formation of sectorial trade unions in Ecuador and the ratification of ILO conventions in Japan and South Korea. Progress with regard to both environmental and labour legislation had also taken place in Georgia and Moldova. The support and contribution from the DAGs on practical issues was highlighted, as their presence on the ground helped to understand and prioritise in order to make change. She also emphasised the importance of the DAGs' input on issues such as the Strikes Minimum Service Level Act in the case of the UK, wildlife trafficking of tigers in Vietnam, and the DAGs having given substance to the work plan and prioritised gender as a topic in the joint work with Canada. Regarding negotiations, there were full TSD-chapters in the agreements with Chile, New Zealand, Kenya and Angola. She also underlined the DAGs' role as crucial for the ratification of the trade agreements: enhanced engagement with the DAGs had led to sufficient changes on the ground to allow for ratification of agreements in the EU, with Brussels and Wallonia ratifying the deals with Central America and the Andean countries.

For the future, she mentioned the need to have a country-specific approach, to continue monitoring the implementation of the TSD chapters, to push forward sustainable development in neighbour

countries, to strengthen interaction between the DAGs and keep contacts with counterparts during the year, and to continue the good work with regard to the Single Entry Point. In line with the TSD review, the Commission committed to further strengthen the role of the DAGs, by providing resources for their logistical support, capacity building and functioning. In this context, it was underlined that a new contract for logistical support to the DAGs would be tendered shortly. The Commission would also support the possibility for the DAG chairs to participate in the TSD Committees, where the Parties to the agreements met at Directors' level.

Main message to the DAGs: To implement policy priorities on TSD, the Commission relies on the DAGs. They play a key role helping to understand the situation on the ground, set priorities and make change. Therefore, continue to keep contacts and communication with counterparts throughout the year, and keep drawing attention to issues on the ground – the joint efforts and the work of the DAGs are appreciated.

***"Implementation of agreements are a core element of the policy of the European Parliament – now and in the future, we will have an eye on that"***

- **Bernd Lange, Chair of the EP Committee on International Trade (INTA)**, highlighted the work of the DAGs as unique entities to ensure the involvement of civil society in the implementation of trade agreements; this way it could also be guaranteed that the benefit of trade reached people on the ground, which is crucial, as trade policy today is not only about tariffs but also about sustainability. He suggested a list of six elements to reflect on the work of the DAGs:

1. Composition – and the question of who should sit in the DAGs and how to guarantee a balance between business, trade unions and other civil society organisations. A strong involvement of the organisations, accompanied by a strong communication were mentioned as beneficial elements to the functioning of the DAGs.
2. Resources and the importance of proper funding also of the counterpart DAGs, in order to allow for the participation also of smaller civil society organisations.
3. The regional format of some DAGs, as in the case of the Andean and Central America DAGs, and their potential value versus a country-specific approach – the latter would probably better reflect the issues at stake for each country.
4. The involvement of the DAGs and the systematic participation of DAGs' co-chairs in TSD committee meetings, which would make sense as the DAGs' role is to give advice to the Parties.
5. Strengthened rights of the DAGs and their possibility to act in line with the TSD review.
6. Enforcement, and the contribution of the Single-Entry Point to a transparent and timely procedure in case of violations of the trade agreement provisions.

The debate that followed included different topics such as the horizontal and vertical integration of the DAGs and the need to work on a higher involvement of the institutions. DAGs operating in a multiparty context and their functionality were indeed a matter of concern, as well as the sequencing of the DAG-to-DAG meetings and the TSD committee meeting, not always allowing for proper input from the DAG-to-DAG meetings. It is high time to improve the situation, allowing DAG co-chairs to systematically report to the TSD Committee meetings. The independence and balanced composition of interests of counterpart DAGs is essential for the functioning of the DAGs, and regarding the recognition of trade unions in counterpart countries, it is crucial to check the status and credibility of each organisation in order to guarantee their internal democratic structure, independency and representativeness. The EU's efforts to facilitate the work of the DAGs in

counterpart countries was acknowledged, but this is not enough without a firm commitment from counterpart governments to ensure that DAGs are functioning and fulfilling their tasks. In countries under a socialist regime such as Vietnam, the government shows a lack of commitment towards the TSD requirements, and independent organisations are few and prosecuted. A commitment by the Parties to create representative DAGs with access to adequate resources as part of the agreements could be a solution in this context. The usefulness of cooperation with other institutions and international organisations was pointed out, emphasising the expertise and guidance of the ILO. In particular in the case of multiparty DAGs, there is the need for more frequent meetings within the EU DAGs and also with the counterpart DAGs for enhanced dialogue. In this context, DG Trade was open to input from the DAGs also between the meetings, and the DAGs were encouraged to get in touch with the TSD teams. On the composition of DAGs, DG TRADE was trying to make sure that under the new agreements DAGs are independent and representative, reflecting balanced interests. Regarding the regional DAGs, there are both synergies and challenges with this approach. From the European Parliament, it was suggested to develop a workplan or roadmap, with achievable goals and concrete action points to follow up on in the framework of future trade agreements.

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### **EU autonomous instruments and how they interlink with TSD and DAG work**

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***"To ensure that we bring along our partners in the transition to cleaner energy and a decarbonized economy and achieve progress for all requires actions across all policies, including trade"***

- **Dora Correia, Director in DG Trade**, highlighted the DAGs' link to TSD in general and the EU Green Deal in particular, ensuring that we bring along our partners in the transition to cleaner energy and a decarbonized economy and achieve progress for all requires actions across all policies, including trade. Trade can be a useful accelerator of the green transition and bring about a just pathway towards a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy. As part of the tools to achieve this, she discussed the integration of EU autonomous instruments – such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), the Circular Economy Package, the regulations on Corporate Due Diligence and on Forced Labour – with the TSD agenda. In that regard, she highlighted three aspects: 1) the negotiation of trade agreements and the conversations with counterparts at the pre-ratification stage, as a privileged platform for engagement on EU sustainability related legislation, 2) the conversation on autonomous instruments at the time of TSD implementation, with detailed discussions in the TSD committees on CBAM and deforestation, including contributions of other Directorates-Generals to explain the new instruments, and 3) the role of the DAGs in that cross-section. An important part of the EU Green Deal legislation stemmed from requirements and pressure from civil society, and the DAGs could contribute to the implementation by engaging with counterparts and explaining the underlying policy objective of the autonomous instruments in order to avoid misconceptions and build momentum and political pressure in favour of sustainability development. The DAGs' active involvement and reporting on implementation issues and progress contributed to this work. Green and sustainability-driven autonomous instruments are there to stay; they must be implementable, fully WTO compatible and with legal certainty. From the Commission's side, the strategy included raising awareness and engaging with partners, developing tools to facilitate the implementation of the green deal legislation, and helping the countries through technical assistance and capacity building. The DAGs have a critical role to play in the external strategy for the implementation of the autonomous instruments.

- **Tetyana Payosova, Senior Associate and Expert on WTO, trade and EU regulatory matters**, commented on the EU CBAM and deforestation regulations. She underlined that both are quite complex, affecting at once large companies and SMEs, introducing new sets of rules with which EU operators and foreign producers and operators must comply, and she addressed three main stakeholders' concerns: companies do not have time enough to prepare for the implementation and compliance, timely guidance is not always present, and there is limited possibility to rely on international or industry-specific standards with a risk for proliferation of fragmented measures (in particular in the case of CBAM). Reporting on CBAM has also been delayed due to technical issues, and the information system for EUDR is not yet available. The European Commission has however been responsive and flexible, and provided capacity building and other tools to prepare for the compliance with the new rules. Her message to the DAGs was that there is appetite for more international cooperation on international standards, measuring, reporting and verification.

- **Emmanuel Moyart, Team Leader, Trade, from the Private Sector Development and Engagement (TPSDE) Facility**, described the work of the advisory on-demand facility for EU Delegations and Headquarters, managed by DG INTPA, also commented on concerns regarding the new EU regulations. After assessments in countries like Bolivia, Burundi, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Cote d'Ivoire, Peru, among others, they have identified the challenges of traceability and legality (informal production, illegal plots, labour legislation issues etc.). He underlined that accompanying measures, such as roadmaps and dissemination of information, are paramount to tackle the identified issues. As opportunities with regard to the EUDR, he mentioned product differentiation, forest conservation and modernization of agriculture, among others.

The debate that followed focused on challenges of the CBAM regulation for suppliers and EU SMEs, the risk for the EU being known as protectionist for certain countries, and the costs of the implementation of autonomous tools, in particular for the SMEs, with a risk for trade re-orientation and exclusion of specific countries or supply chains. There had been an evolution of the debate on these instruments towards a positive externality, but there is a fine line between pushing the green transition forward and preserving European competitiveness. In the current situation, the need for awareness raising, facilitation of implementation and technical assistance to counterparts was underlined.

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### **How do we realise the true potential of the DAGs for our common goals?**

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#### **Round table 1: Labour and human rights issues in trade agreements: how to deal with challenging counterparts?**

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- **With the participation of Haydee Castillo, Human Rights Activist, Nicaragua**, who testified on the crisis situation in Nicaragua, where civil society organisations have been cancelled and activists prosecuted and punished. At present, there are no civil society organisations or independent trade unions in place. She welcomed the EUDR and considered it key to further strengthen political dialogue and cooperation, to stop human rights violations and to encourage social dialogue. On trade, she highlighted the need for more rigorous measures and evaluations regarding the products exported to the EU, where the assessment should include also the respect of human rights and the protection of the environment and biodiversity. She underlined the importance that trade agreements benefit all, including smallholder farmers. With her experience as a member of the Central America DAG, now in political exile, she claimed the need for a Civil Society Forum that would bring back hope and genuine legitimacy to civil society.

The discussion that followed focused on human rights violations in trade partner countries, as in the case of Nicaragua or Vietnam, and possible solutions. Concerns regarding possible double standards applied by the EU and a lack of coherence in certain cases were raised. Some of the solutions proposed were a country-by-country approach, an evaluation of agreements in place – with the participation of civil society representatives as part of a special commission and conditions to partners as an outcome, and – in case of violations – considerations of sanctions and even suspension or threat of suspension depending on how this would affect the people in the country. The so-called Magnitsky act was mentioned as a means to sanction not a country but individuals, companies or entities involved in human rights violations. Regarding new agreements, pre-ratification commitments with the establishment of a roadmap linked to the negotiations and the involvement of provisional DAGs prior to the conclusions of agreements to point to areas of concern were also suggested. The importance of the wording of the agreements was again pointed out as crucial to ensure the establishment and independence of DAGs. Finally, it was highlighted that trade agreements should not only be used as trade policy tools but also more broadly as foreign policy tools to export our values. The future of relations with India, being reluctant to a TSD-chapter and certain issues with other counterparts with regard to civil society representation and ratification of ILO conventions were also discussed in this roundtable.

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**Round table 2: The Single-Entry Point – what lessons learnt from the first TSD case? What opportunities?**

- **With the participation of Ben Vanpeperstraete, EU DAG member**, who explained the case of a complaint that had been filed with the Single Entry Point regarding precarious working conditions in mines of Colombia and Peru. This was followed by an update on the case by DG Trade and a general discussion. DG Trade highlighted that it was relatively easy to follow up on this complaint because it was very well prepared. The procedure consisted of 3 steps: legal assessment, engagement with the partner countries, and implementation. A list of around 30 activities was agreed to be followed to address the complaint. This list covered a much broader spectrum than just the complaint, meaning that there was room for the relevant DAG to monitor the situation. The list of activities was presented as technical, thus depoliticising the procedure. This procedure was facilitated by 6 to 7 discussions with Peru on the matter. The relevant EU Delegation was appointed to follow up on the case, with a budget of around EUR 5 million and a time framework of two years, after which a review would be carried out.

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**Round table 3: How to scale up DAGs from monitoring to a full advisory role?**

- **With the participation of Christophe Payot, Director of the Belgian EU Presidency**. During the discussion, four recommendations were provided: First, DAGs must be functional, on both the EU-side and the counterpart-side, which sometimes lack financial resources, something that might hinder independence. Second, it is important to increase the visibility of the DAGs and engage all EU-institutions to raise awareness of their role. Third, in order to improve the functioning of the DAGs, it is important to receive information on the TSD committee agenda well in advance and to put in place mechanisms which ensure that the Parties follow up on the recommendations of the DAGs. Fourth, to advise the Parties, the DAGs – or at least the co-chairs – must have the possibility to share their joint statement and report to the TSD Committee.

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#### **Roundtable 4: The impact of TSD on the ground – setting priorities**

- **With the participation of Ulrich Weigl, Head of Unit in DG Trade.** The discussion focused on how to measure the impact on the ground. It is sometimes difficult to point to concrete outcome, but developing activities together with partner countries was however considered as essential, and the country-focused approach is key to generate conversations in both directions. The importance of the TSD chapter as an integral part of EU trade relations was highlighted. Furthermore, it was observed that non-committed language in the trade agreements makes both cooperation and implementation difficult. It was suggested to increase the meetings within the DAGs, adding inter-sessional meetings, and to step-up the conversations with the Commission and the European Parliament.

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#### **Paving the way forward, together**

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***"DAGs should not just monitor but aim to come up with concrete proposals"***

- **Denis Redonnet, Chief Trade Enforcement Officer in DG Trade,** highlighted the DAGs' role in providing useful contributions to the implementation of EU trade agreements, through the civil society mechanisms. He also mentioned the first experience with the complaint mechanism for TSD issues, that he assessed positively. The idea of the mechanism was to create a system allowing for more structural input earlier, and therefore to give a more structural response. It has indeed enabled the Commission to act and engage in bilateral technical dialogues with counterparts (Columbia and Peru) and establish a list of jointly defined cooperation activities (with Peru), backed up by a technical and financial programme. It would be looked into on how to involve civil society also at this stage. The process will be long and it will be important to continue engaging with people at the complaint stage and with the partner country concerned, and to keep the process as transparent as possible, though part of it has to be handled at state-to-state level behind closed doors. Regarding the role of the DAGs, a move from monitoring to advising would be welcomed, and efforts will be made to improve the DAG-to-DAG relations by continued support the EU DAGs and by giving visibility to the work of the DAGs.

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#### **DAGs' statements 2023-2024 following meetings with counterparts**

- 27 July 2023 **EU-Central America DAGs** [Joint statement](#)
- 5 September 2023 **EU-Korea DAGs** [Joint conclusions](#)
- 20 October 2023 **EU-Andean DAGs.** [Joint statements](#)
- 7 November 2023 **EU-UK TCA** [Joint statement](#)
- 28 November 2023 **EU-CARIFORUM Consultative Committee** [Joint statement](#)
- 28 November 2023 **EU-Vietnam DAGs** [Unilateral statement by the EU DAG](#)
- 19 March 2024 **EU-Canada DAGs** [Joint statement](#)
- 8 April 2024 **EU-Japan Joint Dialogue with Civil society** [Unilateral statement by the EU DAG](#)



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🔔 Starting soon: 2024 All DAGs Meeting at the EESC with [@BerndLange](#), [@DRedonnet](#), [@martin\\_prat](#) and EU DAG Members discussing:

- 🔴 Putting TSD Review into action
- 🔴 EU autonomous measures: CBAM and Deforestation regulations
- 🔴 Environmental & labour rights

More: [europa.eu/IXCkMF9](https://europa.eu/IXCkMF9)



👤 Maria Martin-Prat and 7 others

8:28 AM · Apr 18, 2024 · 520 Views



EESC External Relations

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Round table discussions on:

- 🔴 Labour and [#HumanRights](#) issues in trade agreements
  - 🔴 Single-entry point, lessons learnt from first TSD case
  - 🔴 How to scale up DAGs to full advisory role
  - 🔴 Impact of TSD on the Ground
- ▶ Programme: [europa.eu/!dQbfXm](https://europa.eu/!dQbfXm)

8:28 AM · Apr 18, 2024 · 128 Views

DAGs operate on the ground & contribute to change. Essential priorities:

- ✦ Ratification of ILO conventions,
- ✦ Negotiations of new FTAs
- ✦ Monitoring & enforcement
- ✦ Continued engagement

Working together & with counterparts is paramount.

We rely on you to implement policy!



 Maria Martin-Prat and 7 others

10:00 AM · Apr 18, 2024 · 166 Views

🇪🇺 Autonomous instruments are tools for green transition w/clear interlinkages to #TSD agenda. Refocus on:  
 ○ implementation challenges  
 ○ capacity building & technical assistance

🔑 role for the DAGs ➡ awareness raising, similar measures exist in the partner countries.



EU Trade 🇪🇺 and 9 others

12:07 PM · Apr 18, 2024 · 195 Views

Round Table 1 w/ @HaydeeCastilloF

👉 Independent #civilsociety crucial to ensuring effective protection of #HumanRights everywhere.  
 📄 If human rights clauses are the basis of 🇪🇺 #FTAs & AAs, we must be able to make sure they're applied!  
 ⚙️ Trade is not an objective, it's a tool!



Haydee Castillo and 8 others

12:46 PM · Apr 18, 2024 · 1,134 Views

Conclusions:

➡ No need to hold back complaints – DAGs' role is essential.  
 ➡ Positive results from the #TSD Review already being harnessed.  
 Thanks to all for an open, franc & constructive discussion 🙌 We welcome your further engagements with @Trade\_EU, @EPTrade & @EUCouncil



EU Trade 🇪🇺 and 9 others

1:26 PM · Apr 18, 2024 · 386 Views