



SUMMARY

The 2026 All Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs) meeting took place at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) on 2 July 2026, bringing together chairs, vice-chairs and members of all EU DAGs, representatives of the European Commission, Members of the European Parliament and EESC as well as other civil society representatives. Held against the backdrop of an increasingly challenging geopolitical and economic environment, the meeting provided a unique opportunity for the growing network of EU DAGs to reflect collectively on its role in advising on the implementation of EU trade agreements and to identify practical solutions for strengthening the network's effectiveness.

The meeting came at a time when the EU's trade policy is undergoing significant transformation. The EU is negotiating and implementing an unprecedented number of free trade agreements, while increasingly concluding broader economic partnerships and sector-specific arrangements. At the same time, the scope of newly established DAGs is being extended beyond the monitoring of trade and sustainable

development (TSD) chapters to encompass the implementation of entire agreements. These developments have substantially increased both the responsibilities and the visibility of the EU DAGs, putting into sharper focus the need to adapt working methods and to secure continued institutional support.

Against this background, the meeting focused on one overarching question:

How can the DAG network continue to deliver meaningful, evidence-based advice while managing a rapidly expanding workload and an increasingly complex policy environment?

Following the success of previous All DAGs meetings, this year's fifth edition placed particular emphasis on interactive exchanges between DAG members themselves. Four parallel breakout sessions were organised to encourage the sharing of practical experiences across agreements and regions, allowing participants to move beyond agreement-specific discussions and

identify cross-cutting challenges affecting the entire DAG network.

The four breakout sessions addressed:

- **#1 – Making use of the Single-Entry Point (SEP) for complaints:** lessons learned from the implementation of the mechanism and filed complaints regarding TSD compliance;
- **#2 – Civil society participation in new trade governance frameworks:** exploring how to ensure meaningful stakeholder involvement in emerging forms of cooperation, including critical raw materials partnerships and other "mini deals";
- **#3 – Re-thinking the organisation of the DAGs:** examining how the network can remain effective as the number of agreements and responsibilities continues to increase;
- **#4 – Partnering with the European Parliament:** identifying topics and pathways for a strengthened institutional cooperation between the DAGs, the European Parliament, the European Commission, EU Delegations and other institutional actors.

Beyond the specific themes discussed in each breakout session, several common questions emerged throughout the meeting. Participants reflected on how to preserve regular dialogue with their DAG counterparts in partner countries while making more efficient use of available

resources; how to improve cooperation between different DAGs as well as between the DAGs and other stakeholder platforms; how to ensure that evidence collected by civil society informs the implementation of trade agreements more effectively; and how the growing role of the DAGs should be supported through stronger institutional cooperation.

The discussions demonstrated a high degree of convergence between the European Commission, the European Parliament, the EESC and civil society representatives. Rather than questioning the relevance of the DAGs, participants largely agreed that the challenge now lies in adapting the DAG network to the evolving architecture of EU trade policy. Exchanges therefore focused less on institutional reform and more on practical measures capable of strengthening coordination, improving communication, creating synergies across agreements and ensuring that the growing responsibilities entrusted to the DAGs are matched by appropriate organisational support.

The meeting determined a common recognition that DAGs have become an integral component of the implementation and monitoring of EU trade agreements. As the EU network of trade agreements continues to expand, the effectiveness of the DAG system will increasingly depend on its ability to prioritise its work, cooperate across agreements and maintain close partnerships with the European Commission, the European Parliament, EU Delegations and civil society organisations in partner countries.

REPORT

Opening statements

Trade policy in a changing global landscape: reaffirming the role of Domestic Advisory Groups

The 2026 All DAGs meeting opened with a shared recognition that the international trading environment has changed profoundly in recent years. Growing geopolitical tensions, increasing economic fragmentation, renewed protectionist measures and the rapid expansion of the European Union's trade network are transforming not only the content of EU trade policy but also the way trade agreements are implemented and monitored. Against this backdrop, speakers consistently highlighted the increasingly strategic role played by DAGs in ensuring that civil society remains actively involved throughout the implementation of EU trade agreements.

The EESC: backing civil society's contribution to trade policy



Opening the meeting, **Stefano Palmieri**, president of the EESC Section for External Relations (REX), welcomed the many participants and underlined the significance of bringing together the entire network of the EU DAGs at a time when the EU is facing unprecedented challenges in international trade.

He observed that the rapid multiplication of free trade agreements is creating new opportunities for European businesses and citizens while simultaneously increasing the demands placed on implementation, monitoring and stakeholder engagement. In this context, DAGs have become an essential component of the EU's trade governance architecture. Rather than being an ancillary feature of trade agreements, they constitute a key mechanism through which organised civil society contributes to making trade agreements more transparent, accountable and sustainable in practice.

Mr Palmieri reaffirmed the EESC's commitment to supporting this work through both its participation in the EU DAGs and its role as secretariat for all EU DAGs. Referring to the EESC's 2026 work programme, he stressed that EU trade policy should not only strengthen the EU's competitiveness and economic security but also contribute to more resilient supply chains, diversified partnerships and, above all, the respect for international labour rights and environmental standards. This also means fully implementing the 2022 TSD

Review—a process in which the EESC, and many participants in this room, played an instrumental role. He further insisted that the EU's economic security must not be developed behind closed doors: social partners, civil society organisations and other stakeholders must be meaningfully involved in shaping, monitoring and implementing these policies. This is why civil society monitoring of the negotiation, implementation and enforcement of trade agreements remains a key focus of the EESC 2026 work, and why the work of DAGs is so central to the EESC's trade agenda.

A growing and evolving DAG network

Setting the objectives of the meeting, **Tanja Buzek**, EESC REX Section vice-president, EESC DAG coordinator and chair of the EU DAG for Canada, emphasised that the event was designed primarily as the platform for the DAGs to exchange experiences with one another and develop their own solutions.

Ms Buzek pointed out that all EU DAGs had recently entered a new 2,5-year mandate and welcomed both the establishment of new advisory groups - notably for Kenya and New Zealand - and the elections of new chairs and vice-chairs. While acknowledging the diversity of geographical contexts and agreements covered by the various DAGs, she stressed that all share a “common DNA” and often face many similar challenges.

Ms Buzek observed that the context in which the EU DAGs now operate differs significantly from that of only a few years ago. Trade policy has become increasingly strategic and geopolitical, requiring closer

cooperation between civil society and the European institutions. She therefore welcomed the particularly strong participation of Commission representatives across geographical desks and units at the meeting, viewing it as evidence of the strengthened partnership that has developed between the Commission's DG Trade and the DAG network.

More broadly, she emphasised that the meeting should not be viewed merely as a technical exercise but as an opportunity for the DAG network itself to reflect on how it wishes to evolve as its responsibilities continue to expand.

From monitoring TSD chapters to supporting the implementation of trade agreements

Representing the European Parliament, **Bernd Lange**, chair of the Committee on International Trade (INTA), underlined that the changing global trade environment has further increased the importance of the DAGs.

He noted that sustainable development has become an integral component of EU trade policy, reflecting both political priorities and citizens' expectations. The strengthening of the TSD chapters by the European Commission in recent years has significantly reinforced their legal and political importance. However, implementation remains the decisive challenge, making the contribution of civil society indispensable.

Mr Lange described the DAGs as an important source of information for policymakers, capable of identifying implementation challenges at an early stage

and providing first-hand evidence from the ground. He welcomed the increasingly prominent role granted to civil society in recent and ongoing trade negotiations, including those with Indonesia and Kenya, while expressing concern that certain institutional mechanisms - notably dispute settlement provisions - remain absent from some negotiations.

Looking towards the future, he raised a broader strategic question: whether the DAGs should progressively move beyond monitoring TSD chapters and instead contribute to monitoring the implementation of trade agreements as a whole. While recognising the implications such an evolution would have in terms of workload and resources, he expressed his personal support for this broader approach, arguing that sustainability issues are inseparable from the wider functioning of modern trade agreements.

Responding to these reflections, Ms Buzek agreed that monitoring entire agreements better reflects the interconnected nature and impact of trade policy, also on sustainable development, while cautioning that such an extension requires significantly greater institutional support if it is to remain effective.

The Commission's perspective: adapting the DAG system to a rapidly expanding trade agenda

Speaking on behalf of the European Commission, **Sofia Muñoz Albarrán**, Director for Interinstitutional Relations and Policy Coordination at DG Trade and Economic Security, reaffirmed the



Commission's strong commitment to meaningful engagement with the DAGs.

She observed that the meeting was taking place at a particularly challenging moment for the European Union, characterised by geopolitical tensions, increased economic competition and a rapidly expanding network of trade agreements. In this context, ensuring the effective implementation of existing agreements has become just as important as negotiating new ones.

Ms Muñoz Albarrán highlighted the scale of this expansion, noting that the European Union is now implementing 45 free trade agreements covering approximately 80 partner countries, while simultaneously developing new forms of cooperation, including sustainable investment facilitation agreements (SIFAs) and sector-specific partnerships, for example on digital or raw materials. The EU also has a Clean Trade and Investment Partnership with South Africa. She stressed that civil society participation should go hand-in-hand with these new instruments just as it has become an integral feature of traditional free trade agreements.

Reflecting on the evolution of the DAG system since its creation in 2012 with the EU-

South Korea Free Trade Agreement, she welcomed the relationship of trust that has developed between the Commission and the DAGs. The recommendations and evidence provided by civil society increasingly contribute to the Commission's discussions with partner countries and support its implementation and enforcement activities. She also confirmed the Commission's intention to continue the technical assistance facility for the DAGs and invited members to contribute ideas for its future development.

Looking ahead, Ms Muñoz Albarrán acknowledged that the continued expansion of both EU trade agreements and the DAG network require a collective reflection on how the current system should evolve. She noted that newer agreements increasingly establish DAGs responsible for monitoring the implementation of entire agreements rather than TSD chapters only. While this creates valuable opportunities to strengthen civil society oversight, it also raises significant organisational challenges that cannot be addressed simply by maintaining existing working methods.

Common themes emerging from the opening session

Although approaching the issue from different institutional perspectives, the

opening speakers converged on several common messages that framed the discussions throughout the remainder of the meeting.

First, all agreed that the DAGs' role has evolved considerably over recent years and continues to grow alongside the EU's expanding trade agenda.

Second, there was broad recognition that civil society has become an indispensable partner in the implementation and monitoring of trade agreements, providing practical expertise, evidence from the ground and early warning of implementation challenges.

Third, participants recognised that the expansion of the DAG network brings significant organisational challenges. Ensuring that the quality and impact of the DAGs' work can be maintained will require stronger cooperation between institutions, improved coordination across agreements and a reflection on how the existing support structures should evolve.

Finally, the opening session established the central theme that would underpin all subsequent discussions: **how to preserve the effectiveness, independence and added value of the DAGs while adapting the network to a rapidly changing and increasingly ambitious EU trade policy.**

Breakout sessions

1. Making Better Use of the Single-Entry Point



The first breakout session examined the experience gained since the establishment of the Commission's DG Trade's Single-Entry Point (SEP) mechanism and explored how it can better support the implementation and enforcement of market access and TSD commitments.

While participants acknowledged that the mechanism has now reached a greater level of maturity, discussions highlighted that TSD complaints remain fundamentally different from traditional market access complaints. Their complexity requires extensive cooperation between complainants and the Commission, multidisciplinary expertise and sustained engagement with partner countries throughout both the assessment and implementation phases.

The European Commission presented the experience accumulated during the first five years of the Single-Entry Point, noting that although more than 200 complaints have been submitted overall, only a handful concern TSD chapters. Participants

recognised that this does not necessarily reflect a lack of labour or environmental concerns but rather the considerable effort required to prepare well-substantiated complaints.

One of the main developments welcomed during the discussion was the introduction of an informal pre-notification dialogue between the Commission and potential complainants. This early engagement allows complainants to clarify the legal basis of their submissions, strengthen the evidence provided and improve the overall quality of complaints before their formal registration. Participants agreed that this has contributed to making the assessment process more efficient while facilitating constructive exchanges between civil society organisations and the Commission.

Civil society representatives nevertheless underlined the significant practical challenges involved in preparing TSD complaints. Collecting evidence of labour rights violations, environmental breaches or systemic governance failures often requires extensive cooperation with local trade unions, NGOs and academic institutions. In many partner countries, reliable public data remain limited or inaccessible, placing a disproportionate burden on complainants.

The discussion also highlighted differences between market access disputes and complaints concerning fundamental labour rights. Several participants argued that systemic violations of freedom of association or collective bargaining cannot always be demonstrated through the same evidentiary

standards applied to commercial disputes. They therefore encouraged the Commission to continue reflecting on approaches that better recognise the structural nature of such violations.

While acknowledging that diplomatic engagement can appear slow from the perspective of the workers affected, participants recognised that sustained dialogue with partner governments remains the most effective means of securing durable improvements. The discussion therefore reaffirmed that the objective of the Single-Entry Point is not punitive action, but progressive implementation of commitments undertaken under EU trade agreements.

"SEP remains an underused but valuable tool that enables civil society and DAGs to raise evidence-based concerns and strengthen the enforcement of trade and sustainability commitments."

– **Ben Vanpeperstraete**, Facilitator, Chair of the EU DAG for the Andean countries

Key findings

- The Single-Entry Point has become an increasingly effective instrument for supporting the implementation of trade and sustainable development commitments.
- The introduction of the pre-notification dialogue has significantly improved the quality of complaints while facilitating more efficient legal assessments.
- Trade and sustainable development complaints differ fundamentally

from market access complaints and require sustained cooperation between complainants, the Commission and partner countries.

- Preparing complaints remains particularly resource-intensive for civil society organisations, especially where evidence relating to labour rights and environmental issues is difficult to obtain.
- Dialogue remains the preferred means of achieving compliance, with dispute settlement mechanisms supporting rather than replacing diplomatic engagement.

Recommendations

➤ European Commission

- Continue strengthening the pre-notification dialogue as a means of supporting complainants before formal submission.
- Further improve practical guidance on preparing trade and sustainable development complaints and gathering appropriate evidence.
- Continue promoting constructive dialogue with partner countries while ensuring regular communication with complainants throughout implementation.
- Reflect on whether complaints concerning systemic labour rights violations require a differentiated evidentiary approach.

➤ *Domestic Advisory Groups*

- Promote greater awareness of the Single-Entry Point among civil society organisations.
- Encourage early engagement with the Commission when preparing potential complaints.
- Continue providing practical evidence from the ground to support implementation and enforcement activities.
- Share lessons learned between different DAGs to strengthen future use of the mechanism.
- Get a dedicated training for DAGs from DG Trade on how to submit a complaint.

2. Strengthening Civil Society Participation in Emerging Trade Partnerships



The second breakout session explored how meaningful civil society engagement can be maintained as the EU increasingly complements traditional free trade agreements with more targeted forms of

cooperation, such as critical raw materials partnerships and other sector-specific arrangements.

Participants noted that these new instruments respond to the EU's evolving geopolitical and economic priorities but often lack the institutional architecture that has gradually been developed under broad and comprehensive free trade agreements. Many of these arrangements do not provide structured consultation mechanisms for civil society comparable to those available under all TSD chapters or fully fledged free trade agreements, creating uncertainty regarding the role that civil society should play throughout their implementation and monitoring.

The discussion focused on how the experience accumulated by the DAGs could help bridge this governance gap and how civil society is currently involved in these new forms of trade partnerships. Participants stressed that, irrespective of the legal form of an agreement, civil society should remain involved wherever trade or investment decisions have significant environmental, social or economic implications.

Particular attention was given to the strategic importance of critical raw materials partnerships. Participants recognised that securing reliable supply chains is becoming an essential objective of EU trade policy but emphasised that competitiveness should continue to be accompanied by high labour, environmental and human rights standards. The DAGs were considered well placed to contribute expertise on the labour and sustainability dimension and other aspects of these emerging partnerships.

The discussion also highlighted the increasingly important role of EU Delegations in partner countries. Participants considered EU Delegations to be uniquely positioned to facilitate contacts with local civil society organisations, improve the flow of information between stakeholders and support the establishment of meaningful dialogue, in particular where formal consultation mechanisms remain limited.

Participants suggested complementing existing structures through ad hoc thematic working groups bringing together experts from different DAGs. Such flexible arrangements could provide rapid expertise on cross-cutting issues - including critical raw materials, digital trade or sustainable food systems - without requiring major institutional changes.

More broadly, participants agreed that the evolution of EU trade policy should be accompanied by a corresponding evolution in civil society engagement. Rather than limiting consultation to traditional free trade agreements, mechanisms should progressively be developed to ensure that organised civil society can contribute to the implementation of the EU's broader external economic partnerships.

"As the EU develops new forms of economic cooperation, civil society engagement should remain a central component of governance, ensuring that sustainability, labour and social considerations are effectively reflected in practice."

– **Aurora Rossi**, Facilitator, Vice-chair of the EU DAG for Korea

Key findings

- The increasing use of strategic partnerships and "mini deals" creates new challenges for civil society participation.
- Existing consultation mechanisms remain largely designed for traditional free trade agreements and do not always extend to newer forms of trade cooperation.
- DAGs possess valuable expertise that could contribute to the implementation of sector-specific partnerships, particularly in areas such as critical raw materials.
- EU Delegations have an important role to play in strengthening contacts with local civil society and facilitating information exchange.
- Greater thematic cooperation between the DAGs could improve responsiveness to emerging policy priorities.

Recommendations

➤ *European Commission*

- Ensure that the development and implementation of new trade and investment instruments is based on meaningful civil society consultation.
- Clarify the role of the DAGs in relation to sector-specific partnerships and other non-traditional agreements.

- Strengthen cooperation with EU Delegations to facilitate exchanges with local stakeholders and improve information flows.
- Explore flexible consultation mechanisms capable of adapting to different types of agreements.

➤ *Domestic Advisory Groups*

- Develop thematic cooperation across agreements on issues of common interest.
- Share expertise between DAGs working on similar policy areas or geographical regions.
- Continue providing practical recommendations on the sustainability implications of emerging trade partnerships.
- Engage proactively with the Commission and EU Delegations to identify opportunities for structured dialogue.

3. Re-thinking the Organisation of the Domestic Advisory Groups



The third breakout session focused on one of the most pressing challenges facing the DAG network: how to preserve its effectiveness as both the number of EU trade agreements and the responsibilities entrusted to the DAGs do expand.

Participants acknowledged that the rapid growth of the EU's trade network has fundamentally changed the operating environment of the DAGs. With additional agreements expected in the near future and several latest-generation agreements extending the scope of DAGs beyond TSD chapters, existing organisational arrangements are coming under increasing pressure.

Representatives of the European Commission noted that the principal constraint is no longer financial resources but institutional and human capacity. The pure multiplication of meetings, implementation processes and stakeholder consultations places growing demands on the Commission, the EESC Secretariat and DAG members alike, many of whom participate in several advisory groups while carrying out their regular professional responsibilities. At the same time, multiple DAG engagements offer greater opportunities for work synergies.

The discussion therefore focused on identifying practical solutions rather than questioning the value of the current system. Participants strongly supported maintaining annual engagement with partner DAGs and governments and considered regular dialogue indispensable for building trust, ensuring continuity and accountability and supporting effective implementation of trade agreements.

Several examples of innovative cooperation were presented. The reorganisation of the previous Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia DAGs into one Eastern Europe DAG demonstrated how agreements covering neighbouring EU accession countries can successfully address common issues while respecting national specificities. Likewise, joint EU-side meetings of the Japan, South Korea and Singapore DAGs illustrated how regional approaches can generate both efficiencies and synergies and facilitate the exchange of expertise.

Participants nevertheless agreed that no single organisational model could be applied across all agreements. While regional cooperation may be appropriate in certain contexts, the diversity of trade agreements and level of challenges with partner countries requires sufficient flexibility to adapt working methods to individual circumstances.

Considerable attention was devoted to balancing quality and quantity. Although greater use of online and hybrid meetings was widely supported as an additional tool of improving efficiency, participants stressed that virtual exchanges cannot fully replace face-to-face dialogue with partner DAGs and governments. Maintaining regular institutional joint meetings and Civil Society Forums therefore remains essential.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of strengthening cooperation between the DAGs themselves. Closer coordination, thematic exchanges and better sharing of experiences were seen as practical ways of reducing duplication, improving consistency and making more effective use of limited resources.

Overall, participants agreed that the future sustainability of the DAG network will depend less on reducing its activities and more on improving coordination, prioritisation and institutional support.

"There's no one-size-fits-all approach; prioritisation needs to go along with DAGs being able to fulfil their mandated tasks"

– **Tanja Buzek**, Facilitator, Chair of the EU DAG for Canada

Key findings

- The continued expansion of the EU's trade agenda requires the DAG network to adapt its organisation and working methods.
- Annual dialogue with partner DAGs and governments remains essential and should be preserved.
- Regional DAG cooperation offers useful opportunities for creating synergies without reducing the quality of engagement.
- Online and hybrid meetings can improve efficiency but should complement rather than replace physical meetings.
- Prioritisation and stronger cooperation between the DAGs will become increasingly important as the network continues to grow.

Recommendations

- *European Commission and EESC*
 - Continue supporting innovative regional approaches where these

add value and are developed together with the DAGs.

- Level up institutional support and reporting channels for the expanding DAG network.
- Make greater use of hybrid meeting formats where these add value while maintaining regular in-person engagement.
- Improve long-term planning while preserving flexibility to respond to emerging developments.
- Explore synergies with other platforms outside the DAGs.

➤ *Domestic Advisory Groups*

- Develop stronger cooperation across agreements and regions.
- Identify common priorities and share best practices more systematically.
- Coordinate work programmes where issues overlap.
- Continue prioritising high-impact activities while preserving the quality of the advice provided.
- Maximise the impact of DAGs' contributions through stronger preparation and coordination.

4. Partnering with the European Parliament

The fourth breakout session examined how cooperation between the DAGs and the European Parliament (EP) could be

strengthened to maximise the impact of civil society contributions throughout the implementation of EU trade agreements.



Participants agreed that the effectiveness of the DAG system depends not only on the quality of its recommendations but also on the existence of the right and efficient communication channels with the institutions responsible for implementing and monitoring trade agreements.

Particular attention was devoted to strengthening cooperation with the European Parliament. Participants welcomed the support expressed by Members of the European Parliament for closer engagement with the DAGs and identified parliamentary monitoring groups as a particularly valuable avenue for future cooperation.

Participants pointed to practical working arrangements that could be developed without necessarily requiring formal codification, such as more direct information-sharing with the DAGs ahead of European Parliament missions to partner countries, regular contacts between DAG chairs and EP standing rapporteurs, and the use of EP shadow rapporteurs as additional

channels for raising relevant civil society input.

The role of EU Delegations also featured in the discussion. Participants considered delegations to be indispensable partners in facilitating contacts with local civil society, supporting the establishment of partner DAGs and providing regular information on political and economic developments. They called for their role to have a more structured definition within the overall governance framework of EU trade agreements.

Complementing from the wider debate, participants highlighted the growing need to strengthen cooperation beyond DG Trade with other Commission Directorates responsible for policy areas directly linked to sustainable development, including employment, climate, agriculture, fisheries and human rights. As the scope of trade agreements continues to broaden, closer cross-sectoral cooperation will become increasingly important.

The discussion also highlighted opportunities to strengthen communication between the various institutional actors involved in trade policy. Participants agreed that greater visibility of the DAGs would reinforce both transparency and accountability.

Overall, the session demonstrated broad consensus that stronger institutional cooperation and dedicated institutional reporting channels is one of the most effective ways of increasing the influence of the DAG network without substantially increasing its workload.

"DAGs have unique practical expertise that the European Parliament could use more systematically, including through contributions to Monitoring Groups, mission briefings and DAGs' regular contacts with MEPs"

– **Stuart Newman**, Facilitator, Chair of the EU DAG for Japan

Key findings

- Cooperation between the DAGs, the European Parliament and the European Commission should become more systematic.
- Parliamentary monitoring groups offer important opportunities to strengthen civil society input into trade policy.
- EU Delegations should play a more proactive role in supporting the work of the DAGs.
- Improving communication and visibility would enhance the overall impact of the DAG network.
- Cooperation should extend beyond DG Trade to other Commission Directorates involved in implementing sustainable development objectives.

Recommendations

- *European Commission and EESC*
 - Provide clearer guidance to EU Delegations regarding their support for the DAGs.

- Encourage stronger cooperation across relevant Commission Directorates.
- Continue providing systematic feedback on DAG recommendations and reporting structures to the agreements' relevant Committees.
- Improve the communication and visibility of DAG activities within the broader implementation framework.

➤ *European Parliament*

- Strengthen exchanges between parliamentary monitoring groups and relevant DAGs.

- Encourage greater dialogue before and after parliamentary missions to partner countries.

➤ *Domestic Advisory Groups*

- Develop closer contacts with Members of the European Parliament and other institutional actors.
- Continue providing practical evidence of implementation to support institutional decision-making.
- Strengthen coordination across the DAGs under different agreements where common issues arise.

Concluding Panel: Looking Ahead – Building a Stronger and More Sustainable DAG Network

The concluding panel brought together the facilitators of the four breakout sessions to present the main outcomes of their discussions and identify the principal priorities for the future development of the DAG network. While the breakout sessions covered different aspects of the DAGs' work, a strong convergence emerged around several strategic themes concerning the future organisation of the network, its relationship with the European institutions and its contribution to the implementation of EU trade agreements.



Introducing the final session, **Tanja Buzek** observed that the richness of the discussions had demonstrated the growing maturity of the DAG network. However, she also acknowledged the need for more discussion time to exchange experiences and develop practical recommendations. The breadth of the issues discussed reflected the increasing complexity of the DAGs' mandate and confirmed the value of the annual All DAGs meeting as a forum for identifying common challenges and sharing good practices and solutions.

Common priorities emerging from the breakout sessions

Reporting on the discussions, the facilitators identified several common conclusions.

Participants agreed that the Single-Entry Point has become an increasingly valuable instrument for supporting the implementation of TSD commitments. The development of the pre-notification dialogue was widely recognised as an important improvement, enabling complainants and the Commission to engage at an earlier stage and improving both the quality of complaints and the efficiency of the assessment process. At the same time, participants recognised that TSD complaints require sustained dialogue with partner countries and that tangible improvements often take time to materialise, reflecting the nature of diplomatic engagement.

The discussions also underlined the need to develop a stronger role of EU Delegations in partner countries in supporting the DAGs. Participants considered Delegations to be well placed to facilitate exchanges with partner civil society organisations, provide information from the ground and contribute to the establishment of stronger institutional links between the EU and partner countries.

A further common message concerned the organisation of the expanding DAG network. Participants broadly agreed that preserving regular exchanges with partner DAGs and governments remains essential, despite

increasing resource constraints. Experiences gained through the Eastern Europe and Asian regional initiatives demonstrated that greater cooperation between agreements can generate useful synergies while maintaining the quality of dialogue. Rather than reducing engagement, participants favoured developing more efficient working methods, improving coordination and strengthening the institutional support available to the DAGs.

Finally, discussions highlighted the importance of strengthening cooperation between the DAGs and the European Parliament. Participants welcomed existing examples of collaboration and encouraged more systematic exchanges with parliamentary monitoring groups, including opportunities for DAG members to contribute expertise ahead of parliamentary missions to partner countries.

Reflecting on the discussions, several cross-cutting priorities emerged across all four breakout sessions.

Strategic focus and prioritisation

Participants recognised that the continued expansion of the EU's trade network makes it increasingly difficult for both institutions and civil society to cover issues with the same level of attention. To address this challenge, the DAG network should increasingly focus its efforts on areas where it should provide the greatest added value and practical impact, prioritising where they monitor non-compliance with commitments.

Building synergies across agreements

The meeting demonstrated broad support for strengthening cooperation between the DAGs. Regional approaches, thematic exchanges and greater sharing of expertise were all identified as practical ways of improving efficiency without reducing the quality of monitoring activities. While recognising that no single organisational model can apply to every agreement, participants agreed that greater cooperation across the network will become increasingly important as the number of agreements continues to grow.

The CETA experience was highlighted as a best practice for the implementation structures of TSD chapters with joint work programmes agreed by both parties providing a structured and concrete framework for monitoring progress, identifying priorities and thematic leadership from the Domestic Advisory Groups. The strong cooperation developed between the EU and Canadian DAGs demonstrates the added value of such an approach, while also illustrating the importance of annual institutional joint meetings to sustain dialogue and implementation over time.

Balancing quality and quantity

Throughout the discussions, participants consistently stressed that the effectiveness of the DAG network depends more on the quality of engagement than on the number of meetings organised. Nevertheless, there was equally broad agreement that regular interaction with partner DAGs and governments should be preserved. Hybrid working methods and online exchanges were widely supported as complementary

tools capable of increasing efficiency while maintaining the continuity of dialogue.

Strengthening institutional partnerships and communication

Another recurring theme concerned the need to take more proactive ownership of the communication of the DAGs' work and to deepen cooperation between the DAGs and the European institutions. Participants encouraged stronger engagement not only with the Commission's DG Trade but also with other Commission Directorates responsible for employment, climate, agriculture and other policy areas closely linked to sustainable development. Greater cooperation with the European Parliament, particularly through monitoring groups, was also identified as an important avenue for increasing the impact of the DAGs' work. Joint Commission briefings of the parliamentary monitoring group and the respective DAG would add considerable value and impact.

The Commission's perspective

Responding to the discussions, **Sofia Muñoz Albarrán** welcomed the practical nature of the recommendations and recognised that additional discussion time will allow participants to develop them further.

Ms Muñoz Albarrán observed that several common messages had emerged across all breakout sessions. In particular, she welcomed the emphasis placed on prioritisation, recognising that both the Commission and the DAG network face increasing demands as the number of agreements continues to expand. She also noted the positive experiences reported

regarding regional cooperation between DAGs, considering these initiatives useful examples of how the network can evolve while respecting the specific characteristics of individual agreements.

Regarding the role of EU Delegations, Ms Muñoz Albarrán welcomed participants' suggestions and invited the DAGs to provide more detailed proposals on how Delegations could better support their work. Such practical recommendations would help the Commission develop clearer guidance for Delegations operating in partner countries.

Turning to civil society participation in trade negotiations, she reaffirmed the Commission's commitment to maintaining one of the world's most transparent trade negotiating processes while acknowledging that certain limitations inevitably apply during the final stages of negotiations. She nevertheless expressed openness to considering further improvements where feasible. Finally, she observed that the future of EU trade policy will increasingly involve a wider range of instruments, including sectoral partnerships and smaller agreements—which may require new forms of civil society engagement organised either geographically or thematically.

Looking forward

The concluding discussion demonstrated a strong degree of convergence between the European Commission, the European Parliament, the EESC and the DAGs regarding the future direction of the DAG network and saw the DAGs as a driving force in developing practical ways forward.

Participants agreed that the challenge is no longer to demonstrate the value of the DAGs, whose contribution to the implementation of EU trade agreements is now widely recognised. Instead, the priority is to ensure that the network can continue to fulfil its growing responsibilities through stronger coordination, better communication, enhanced institutional cooperation and working methods adapted to an increasingly complex trade policy landscape.

The meeting therefore concluded with a shared commitment to continue strengthening the partnership between European institutions and organised civil society, while ensuring that the DAG network remains an effective, credible and influential contributor to the implementation of the EU's trade agreements.

EU DAGs Action points for follow-up

Based on the recommendations for further strengthening the effectiveness of the Domestic Advisory Groups, a number of concrete action points emerged for follow-up:

Stronger role of EU Delegations: Assist in developing guidelines for involving them more systematically in supporting DAG activities, facilitating contacts with partner civil society and providing regular information from the ground.

Coordination and prioritisation across DAGs: Further explore thematic and regional cooperation, including complementing existing structures through ad hoc thematic working groups bringing together experts from different DAGs.

Institutional cooperation with the European Parliament and DG Trade: Aim for Joint Commission briefings of the parliamentary monitoring group and the respective DAG and facilitate contacts with other relevant Commission services to ensure more systematic exchanges and follow-up to DAG recommendations.

Effective use of the Single-Entry Point (SEP): Make use of DG Trade offered training sessions, specially dedicated to DAG members for increasing awareness, strengthening pre-notification support and facilitating the preparation of evidence-based complaints.

Closing civil society governance gap: Learning from the existing DAG model and exploring ways to ensure meaningful civil society participation in emerging partnerships (e.g. Critical Raw Materials Partnerships and other strategic agreements) through appropriate consultation mechanisms.

Taking better ownership of communicating DAG work: Support the DAGs in giving more visibility to their recommendations to increase their impact.