



# ▶ 2021 All DAG meeting

Summary report

DAG Secretariat ▶ 10/5/2021

[#AllDAGs](#)

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## Summary report

The growing number of Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs) had unveiled sustainability issues and emphasised the need for a strengthening of their role, as shown in the latest study on DAGs<sup>1</sup>.

On 5 July 2021, the EESC, with the Commission's support, facilitated the first ever all EU DAGs meeting. They had invited key stakeholders in DG Trade, notably the Chief Trade Enforcement Officer (CTEO), in the EESC, the President and President of the External Relations Section, as well as the Chair of the EP INTA Committee, to take part in the debates.

This meeting was an opportunity for EU DAG members to engage as a group and discuss horizontal and cross-cutting issues, seeking sustainable solutions. To give space for genuine engagement, the event comprised also four breakout sessions:



This meeting was set to coincide with the Commission's Trade and Sustainable Development action plan review (TSD review).

## Opening statements

EESC President  
**Ms Christa Schweng**

Ms Schweng stressed the EESC's commitment to strengthening the EU's Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) policy and acknowledged DAGs' key role in raising awareness and flagging concerns over implementation shortcomings. Conscious of the frustrations, she assured DAG members that the EESC would reflect on how to improve its contribution, both at members and secretariat level. The EESC would also continue to provide a platform to boost DAGs visibility, and connect DAG Presidencies and members with institutional channels and networks.

DG Trade Chief Trade Enforcement Officer  
**Mr Denis Redonnet**

Mr Redonnet thanked the EESC and its secretariat for enabling this first meeting of all DAGs. It was **timely** as DG Trade was reflecting on how to improve engagement with civil society, taking the first steps towards implementing and enforcing the new trade policy; and was about to launch the review of the 15-point action plan on TSD. There was also value in more frequent interaction between (all the) EU DAGs.

### **DG Trade particularly valued the DAGs' role in the implementation and enforcement of TSD chapters.**

Their engagement with partner countries contributed to the promotion of long-term engagement and capacity building, as well as informed enforcement action when needed. The CTEO thus stressed that TSD country priorities should continue to underpin DAGs' work.

Mr Redonnet explained how DG Trade used its leverage and institutional tools to ensure implementation and enforcement. When necessary, they resorted to dispute settlement mechanisms, like in the case of South Korea. DG Trade hoped that the new Single Entry Point whereby civil society could raise concerns about possible violations on TSD would be useful and encouraged the EU civil society to use it.

The Commission saw DAGs as in a unique position to inject life into TSD provisions. DAGs had been very active on labour issues and Mr Redonnet suggested that DAGs might want to **pay greater attention to environment issues** going forward. Clarifying the Commission's

<sup>1</sup> [Forging their path in the Brussels bubble? Civil society resistance within the domestic advisory groups created under the EU trade agreements](#), by Diana Potjomkina, Jan Orbie, Jamal Shahin, Cambridge Review of International Affairs, 21 December 2020.

horizontal expectations on EU DAGs, Mr Redonnet flagged three main areas.

1) DAGs impact would always be strongest when they **contributed tangible evidence**. They played an important role in helping DG Trade identify the issues to discuss with respective partners under the TSD chapters. They also alerted the Commission to specific cases on non-compliance and then contributed to the monitoring of follow-up to disputes. The Commission recognised the **capacity problems**: ever growing number of DAGs but limited resources of the secretariat and of organisations themselves to carry on these tasks effectively.

2) It was important to **strengthen the EU DAGs' interactions with their counterparts**. DG Trade expected DAGs to advocate relevant EU policies and broader trade developments vis-à-vis partner countries and their civil society and to assist them wherever possible. DAGs' links to partner civil societies was indeed critical for DG Trade.

3) There was scope for EU DAGs to **support EU delegations**, verifying implementation of projects on the ground for instance.

Progressing on the DAG's organisation of work and flow of information between the DAGs and the Commission would be key to unlocking this potential. Mr Redonnet concluded by saying that this all DAG meeting should become a regular feature going forward.

*"Better organisation of work and flow of information between the DAGs and the Commission is key to unlocking DAG potential"*

#### EU DAG Chair on South Korea **Mr Tom Jenkins**

Mr Jenkins concurred on the timeliness of the event, with the recent 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the EU-South Korea FTA. Referring to a draft [non-paper compiled by some DAG organisations](#), he did flag some of the points that his EU DAG had experienced like the need for rules of procedures, and for independence and representativeness of DAG members. The resource issue was long standing and only got worse with the proliferation of agreements.

If EU DAGs dealt with a wide range of issues, there were clear **opportunities for greater synergies and exchange of best practices**. There could for instance be studies on issues of common interest.

As Chair of the South Korea EU DAG, Mr Jenkins reflected on **two main achievements**: 1) The South Korean government accepting independent DAGs to get involved in the work of the TSD Sub-Committee, and 2) The dispute mechanism that ultimately led to a Panel of Experts' report whose implementation was currently on the agenda. South Korea signing up to ILO Conventions was certainly newsworthy.

**Transparency and enforcement** were key issues to resolve and DAG were counting on progress in the context of the new EU Trade policy.

There was a clear margin for improvement in DAGs' **institutional links**. DG Employment and the External Action Service had worked closely with the EU DAG on South Korea, but there was scope for more and better. EU DAGs expected the support of EU delegations in partner countries to build links with civil society, and they would benefit from having a social attaché on the ground. Engagement with the European Parliament was essential and on good tracks.

DAGs needed greater visibility, notably on the EESC and Commission websites.

Finally, he called on all organisations taking part in EU DAGs to get involved and play their part in the development of trade policy and trade practice.

## #1 - DAGs Composition

The session covered current challenges linked to DAG composition that should be addressed to improve the functioning of DAGs.

### Key findings

- To improve representativeness and diversity of EU DAG membership by redressing imbalances among subgroups and organisations, as well as boosting members' competence, expertise levels and understanding of DAGs' missions.
- To address lack of (or difficulty to identify the right) counterparts, notably on the business side, especially when DAGs are set up using existing structures.
- Business organisations and trade unions often constitute stable DAG components.
- To remedy the issue of some partner DAG members' independence.
- To assess the conditions in partner countries in order to identify potential member organisations.
- To address concerns over compromising EU organisations' independence to select within their organisation who best to represent their interest in a DAG, including EESC members or UK nationals within their staff.
- To mitigate problems linked with EU DAG and Partner DAG having different focusses, mostly due to their difference in composition and expertise.
- To strengthen the DAGs, their visibility and impact could increase NGOs participation and diversity of membership.
- To support long-time, institutionalised framework, in order to build confidence and ensure cooperation.
- To ensure DAG engagement thanks to adequate financial and human resources sometimes, notably for small EU organisations and partner country organisations.

### DAGs' expectations from stakeholders

#### Commission:

- To reflect on options to make DAGs more appealing to NGOs and increase representativeness, balance and independence of DAG members.
- To consider ad hoc support for organisations in partner countries to be active in DAGs
- To reconsider the possible exclusion of EESC members from becoming DAG members under other hats than EESC. EESC members contributed valuable expertise and networks.
- To reconsider the exclusion of UK nationals representing EU organisations in EU DAGs.
- To reflect on how the agreement wording and set-up of DAGs impacts their composition, and thus their output.

#### EESC:

- To help DAGs build capacity in certain areas by boosting messages and plugging DAGs to EESC relevant networks (i.e. on environment)

## #2 – Organising DAG work

This session aimed at identifying the challenges in the DAG working methods and how to maximise human and financial resources while setting the frame with agreed rules of procedure.

### Key findings

#### Organisation of DAG meetings

- To set the dates of meetings well in advance in order to allow adequate member preparation.
- To address concerns over the limited number of meetings allowed under the current resources.
- To ensure the continuation of in-person meetings to build relationship and trust, complemented with online meetings for specific and ad hoc activities.
- Rules of Procedures to enable the DAGs in their work and address known issues (composition, organisation...).

#### DAG tools

- To improve the quality of work programmes.
- DAGs to tap into and complement, rather than duplicate, work of international organisations like ILO.
- To enhance DAGs' use of studies paying attention to the need for clearly defined topics.

#### Financial and human resources

- To ensure proper financial, administrative and logistical support for DAG members (notably non-EESC and non-EU DAG members), to enable them to fulfil their mission.
- To address the challenges posed by the great number of files.

#### Handling of horizontal DAG issues

- To create synergies between EU DAGs.

### DAGs' next steps

#### DAGs:

- To adopt concrete and realistic work programmes based on agreed priorities among the three sub-groups.

- To share with other DAGs, any issues that might have a crosscutting angle or that might be of interest to other EU DAGs.
- To make use of online meetings for thematic/sub-group meetings and to increase interactions with partner DAGs (i.e. joint webinars on relevant topics).
- To explore crosscutting topics for studies which are relevant for several DAGs.
- To set-up a more regular co-operation with ILO, and exchange with ILO national offices in partner countries.
- To draw from experts to help find consensus.

#### DAG Secretariat:

- To set the dates of meetings and draft agendas, in agreement with the DAG presidency, well in advance.
- To reflect with DAGs and the Commission on means to create synergies between the EU DAGs and between EU DAGs and partner DAGs.

### DAGs' expectations from stakeholders

#### Commission:

- To provide financial, administrative and logistical support to allow non-EESC and non-EU DAG members to take part in DAG activities
- To harmonise the sequencing of meetings to ensure the Civil Society Forum (CSF) takes place before the TSD Sub-Committee meeting, where DAGs could then engage with parties on follow-up.
- To maintain in-person meetings and resume fully-fledged CSFs as soon as possible.
- To consult the DAGs on any idea to restructure the EU DAGs, potentially at the next all DAG meeting.

## #3 - Scope and enforcement

The focus of this session was to identify the most pressing challenges linked to DAGs' scope and the enforcement of TSD chapters, and to brainstorm on possible solutions going forward.

### Key findings

#### Scope

- To seek ways to overcome TSD Sub-Committees' limitations to address sustainable development issues linked to chapters other than TSD chapters, despite DAG repeated calls.
- To enlarge the scope of DAGs to the whole agreement to break the silo approach faced under TSD, while addressing concerns over the risk of overload.
- To prioritise DAGs' work.
- To recognise that DAGs' scope had a lot to do with the expertise of their members.
- To clearly spell out the role of DAGs and their place in the institutional framework.

#### Enforcement

- To secure greater clarity on TSD chapters' enforceability and the DAGs' role in enforcement mechanisms.
- DAGs to have the ability to initiate government consultations.
- DAGs to have an active role in Panel of Experts' discussions.

### DAGs' next steps

#### DAGs:

- To reflect on how best to identify and address issues of a horizontal nature.
- To mitigate the risks posed to those having to advise on the implementation of the whole agreement.

### DAGs' expectations from stakeholders

#### Commission:

- To reflect on how to plug DAGs with relevant FTA Committees on issues impacting sustainable development.

- To inform the respective DAG when a relevant issue is raised under SEP and to seek the relevant DAG's opinion.
- To produce guidelines on how to use the SEP in the context of specific agreements.

## #4 – Institutional channels

The session aimed at debating how DAGs could channel their input towards institutions and stakeholders, and the efficiency of communication channels.

### Key findings

- To break down the silos between all stakeholders involved in Trade and Sustainable Development: improving communication channels and cooperation with the Commission, the EP, the Member States, the EEAS and its delegations, for DAGs to register as key actors on sustainable trade.
- To create a feedback loop between the DAGs and parties to ensure adequate implementation of TSD chapters.
- Greater visibility of DAGs and their work on EU institutions' websites, reports and statements.
- To give DAGs enough notice and information to allow them to contribute meaningfully, especially ahead of CSFs.
- To involve DAGs in TSD Sub-committee meetings
- Importance for DAGs to grasp the trading partners' views on implementation of TSD obligations.
- Importance for DAGs to build on international organisations' expertise and resources where possible: ILO, OECD, Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs)...

### DAGs' next steps

#### DAGs:

- To mandate their Presidencies to address the TSD Sub-committee at their annual meeting.
- To adopt joint statement by consensus, striking the right balance to represent the whole DAG.
- To strengthen engagement with relevant actors in other institutions: EP rapporteurs, EESC Trade Committee (in progress), EESC rapporteurs...
- To strengthen engagement with other relevant stakeholders:
  - To possibly present views at National parliamentary hearings during EU ratification processes.
  - To invite ILO, OECD, MEA Secretariats and experts to share expertise.

- To better connect Member States government (i.e. permanent representations) with DAG members.
- To liaise with EU delegations and Member States' embassies in the partner countries.
- To strengthen their relations with partner countries' missions to the EU (i.e. good example of Canada).

#### DAG Secretariat:

- To increase DAGs visibility on the EESC website.
- To inform EU delegations regularly about DAG events and important information.
- To coordinate horizontal DAG questions to address to the Commission.

### DAGs' expectations from stakeholders

#### Commission:

- To invite DAGs' presidencies to exchange views at the TSD Sub-Committee meetings.
- To commit to answer DAGs joint recommendations and statements formally and in a reasonable timeframe.
- To increase DAGs visibility on the DG Trade website.
- To continue to take part in DAG meetings and to inform members on TSD implementation progress.
- To grant DAG presidencies time to consult with respective DAG members before submitting final DAG views in response to TSD Sub-Committee decisions.
- EU delegations to inform DAGs of events and relevant developments.

#### European Parliament:

- EP monitoring groups to extend a standing invitation to their respective DAGs.
- EP rapporteurs to increase their contacts with respective DAGs.
- To increase DAGs visibility on the EP website.

Chair of the European Parliament  
Committee on international trade (INTA)  
**Mr Bernd Lange**

Guest to this all DAG event, Mr Lange congratulated the organisers for a "great DAG day" that should be the first of many. He then shared his views on how to strengthen the DAGs:

**Composition and organisation of work:**

- Setting clear rules of composition of DAGs, notably on balance
- Securing greater cooperation with ILO
- Ensuring the DAGs meet the parties before the TSD Sub-committee meetings
- Allowing the DAGs to meet more often and addressing the challenges this poses for partners and organisations with limited resources

**Scope, enforcement and institutional channels:**

- DAGs having a wider scope than TSD, mixed with concerns over possible overload
- DAGs playing a stronger role in enforcement along the lines of the [Model labour chapter for EU trade agreements](#), which suggested that with a 2/3 majority, a DAG could prompt a consultation process between the parties or that a DAG could hold an active role in a panel of experts
- Giving DAGs the visibility they deserve on EP website and with EP rapporteurs and monitoring groups

*"Trade policy should ultimately benefit people and therefore, people should be engaged in the implementation process."*

## Concluding remarks

President of the EESC External Relations  
Section (REX)  
**Mr Dimitris Dimitriadis**

Mr Dimitriadis praised the DAG members and the secretariat for a very successful and extremely useful event. DAGs and international trade were a top priority for the REX section and the EESC as a whole. The EESC would continue to work for the DAGs and support the DAGs.

He mentioned two relevant EESC opinions in the making:

1) [REX 535](#) - Next Generation TSD – Reviewing the 15-point action plan (Rapporteur Tanja Buzek, expected in October 2021), and

2) REX536 - A new framework for FTAs, economic partnership agreements and investment agreements that guarantees the real involvement of civil society organisations and the social partners and ensures public awareness (Rapporteur Stefano Palmieri and expected early 2022).

On the DAGs' expectations towards the EESC members and secretariat, the EESC took good note and would reflect on possible improvements within the limited resources.

Having been appointed by the EESC as one of the TCA EU DAG members, Mr Dimitriadis stressed how useful this meeting had been to someone totally new to the DAGs.

DG Trade Chief Trade Enforcement Officer  
**Mr Denis Redonnet**

Mr Redonnet thanked DAG members for clarifying their expectations towards the Commission and other stakeholders. This demonstrated the value of regular exchanges and exchanges of best practices between the EU DAGs.

The Commission had listened in on each of the breakout sessions and would reflect on the wide variety of issues raised. Some of these issues will find their way to the debate on the upcoming review of the 15-point action plan on TSD (i.e. the evolution of treaty provisions).



He highlighted the institutional, legal and political realities that DG Trade was confronted with when implementing TSD provisions. None of the Treaties prescribed how civil society engagement should work (i.e. DAG-to-DAG). The Commission always has to negotiate and find a compromise with the respective trade partners, who have their own ways of doing things.

On enforcement activities, DG Trade was looking forward to DAGs' feedback on the SEP. It was however clear that the SEP in itself would not change the institutional role of DAGs, nor create new rights or standing. It was more a means to improve access. He hoped the answers provided in writing on how the SEP worked were useful to the DAGs. The Commission would learn from feedback to adapt SEP processes for maximum concrete efficiency (guidelines had already been revised once).

**In terms of what the Commission could do to support the DAGs:**

- Reflecting on how to engage more systematically with the DAGs and ensuring efficient flow of information and documents;
- Being as transparent as possible in the conduct of enforcement activities, from the diplomatic engagement with the Partner Country to legal dispute settlement (i.e. on South Korea case);
- Discussing TSD Country priorities with the DAGs as critical moments in the relationships to inform the DAGs on the type of evidence DG Trade might be seeking;
- Responding more systematically to DAG statements and recommendations;
- Reflecting on the evolution of EU funding instruments in support of DAGs;
- Supporting the development of greater civil society forum initiatives and more interaction between DAGs;
- Ensuring EU delegation support to the work of DAGs, building on best practices already established.

*"Let's make this a recurrent annual exchange"*

EESC DAG coordinator, Vice-chair of the CETA EU DAG

**Ms Tanja Buzek**

Ms Buzek concluded this afternoon of rich debates and high political buy-in with five key messages:

1. **Breaking down the silos:** DAGs had a wealth of information and expertise to share. They would work with institutional stakeholders and with each other to turn expectations and frustrations into positive outcomes and approach cross-cutting issues jointly.
2. **Putting DAGs on the map:** DAGs would claim the space and actively engage with institutional stakeholders to ensure effective communication of their work to increase its impact. DAGs should play a role already "in the thinking" and be part of all discussions on TSD.
3. **Keeping the ball rolling:** All players would now get to their "homework". For DAGs and DAG secretariats do what is within their remits. It would be crucial to help the new DAGs and new DAG members settle in with developed guidelines.
4. **Securing adequate resources:** Jointly with the Commission, DAGs would seek further resources to match the increase in their number and the increase in their scope. They would also look into ways to make most of these human and financial resources (i.e. identifying synergies and common work).
5. **Composition driving content:** More linked to the TSD Review and needed structural changes, DAGs had made clear how the FTA wording and DAG selection processes impacted on their working methods.

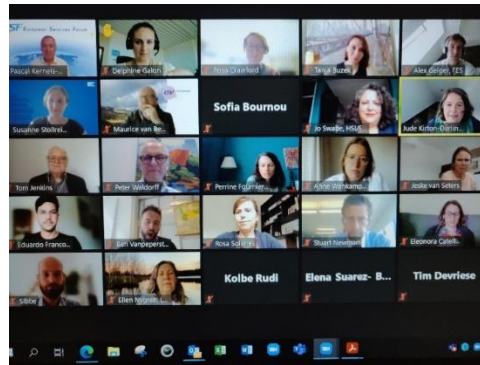
*"This is just the beginning of the conversation"*

## Follow-up

- The DAG secretariat was asked to organise a follow-up meeting with DAG Presidencies to identify next steps and operationalise the main recommendations.
- The DAG secretariat would produce a short summary report of main points addressed during the event.
- DAG member organisation CNV would use the outcome of discussions to update the [non-paper](#), which they would upload on their website. They would seek endorsement by all the DAGs.

## List of participating DAG member organisations

ACP Young Professional's network  
Amfori  
Both ends  
BusinessEurope  
CFDT (France) Le syndicat  
CGIL (Italy) Italian General Confederation of Labour  
ClientEarth  
CNV (NL) Dutch Trade union  
COCERAL  
COTANCE/Euroleather  
DGB (Germany) German Trade Union Confederation  
ECDPM  
EESC European Economic and Social Committee  
ETF European Transport Workers' Federation  
EPSU European Federation of Public Service Unions  
ESF European Services Forum  
ETUC European Trade Union Confederation  
ETUCE European Trade Union Committee for Education  
EUCOFEL (Fruit Veg Europe)  
EU-LAT network  
Eurochambres  
Eurocommerce  
Eurogroup for Animals  
Euromontana  
European Organisation of the Sawmill Industry (EOS)  
Fair Trade Advocacy Office  
Fairwatch  
Fediol  
FERN (forest)  
FH (Denmark) Danish Trade Union Confederation  
FIDH – International Federation for Human Rights  
FO (France) Workers' Force  
Fondation Nicolas Hulot  
France Nature Environnement  
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung  
Humane Society Int'l/Europe  
LO (Sweden) Swedish Trade Union Confederation  
OIDHACO  
Plataforma Europa Peru  
SMEunited  
Solidaridad  
TCO (Sweden) Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees  
UGT (Spain) General Union of Workers  
UIL (Italy) Italian Labour Union



Denis Redonnet  
@DRedonnet

Great first #AIDAGs meeting. An excellent opportunity to get (and give!) feedback on how to improve the meetings with civil society. They have an ear to the ground in partner countries and can help support local projects.

EU Trade @Trade\_EU · Jul 5  
Replying to @yenty\_lw @EESC\_President and 15 others  
Great and important discussions indeed! We regularly update our followers on DAG-meetings. Help us spread the word and join in on the conversation?  
[twitter.com/Trade\\_EU/statu...](https://twitter.com/Trade_EU/status...)

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EESC President Christa Schweng  
@EESC\_President

In today's #AIDAGs - Domestic advisory groups - meeting I emphasized that future of trade cannot be thought without #Trade and #SustainableDevelopment chapters.

#DAGs bridge policy with real life.



EU Trade and 9 others

5:19 PM · Jul 5, 2021 · Twitter Web App

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