

## The Consumer Voice in Europe

Ambassador Lighthizer  
United States Trade Representative (USTR)  
600 17th Street, N.W.  
USA - Washington, DC 20508

Commissioner Phil Hogan  
European Commission  
Rue de la Loi 200,  
B - 1049 Brussels

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25 February 2020

Dear Ambassador Lighthizer, dear Commissioner Hogan,

Leading consumer organizations, in the United States and Europe, who are members of the Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue, urge **you to proceed with caution in this period of increased trade tensions**.

Over the past several years, the United States has repeatedly used the threat of tariffs on European products to seek concessions, including demands focussed on undermining key consumer protections. We are very concerned about possible reductions of EU health and safety standards. We also **urge more transparency** with respect to these transatlantic trade discussions.

Greater transparency is essential to ensure that discussions about commercial issues do not bleed into backdoor rollbacks of essential consumer health and safety and environmental safeguards. This is not a hypothetical concern. When the U.S. government negotiated with South Korea on the Section 232 tariffs in 2018, it demanded and obtained a roll back of Korean environmental and safety standards that would apply to U.S. automobile imports, in addition to an agreement for Korea to manage the import levels of steel into the United States. U.S. negotiations with Japan on "trade" matters resulted in a 2019 agreement that includes digital trade and e-commerce provisions that could undermine consumer privacy and other safeguards.

Historically, U.S. demands in trade negotiations, including in the context of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), have focused on weakening or eliminating European consumer health and safety protections, food safety and labelling standards and data privacy guarantees that are superior to U.S. law and that set a level of consumer protection to which U.S. civil society groups aspire to improve U.S. policy. The visit of U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to the EU in January 2020 further confirmed our concerns: Secretary Perdue repeatedly called on the EU to weaken its food safety laws. This also is not without precedent. In 2013, the European Union made the mistake of lowering a food safety law<sup>1</sup> as an incentive for the United States to agree to launch the TTIP negotiations. **We call on the EU to resist the U.S. pressure and uphold its strong consumer protection standards.**

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<sup>1</sup> Commission Regulation (EU) No 101/2013 of 4 February 2013 concerning the use of lactic acid to reduce microbiological surface contamination on bovine carcasses <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32013R0101>

U.S. civil society organizations have urged previous administrations and the current administration to increase transparency, including to adopt procedures similar to the EU's with respect to the public posting of U.S. trade negotiation proposals. The lack of transparency in recent past negotiations, including of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), mean that many interests and indeed most legislators were unable to help shape a deal that represented a broad consensus. The result was a final deal that so favoured corporate interests over consumer and public interests that it could not achieve majority support in the U.S. Congress.

With so much at stake for consumers on both sides of the Atlantic, we urge you make public the contours of the current trade discussions between the U.S. and EU governments and the U.S. and UK governments' proposed free trade agreement, as well as any specific texts of potential agreements.

We further **urge you to refrain from bringing into tariff discussions any non-tariff issues that could undermine consumer health and safety and environmental safeguards.**

Yours sincerely,

Monique Goyens  
Director General  
BEUC

Robert Weissman  
President  
Public Citizen