Merci Monsieur le Président,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me here today. I am pleased to discuss with you our trade policy and where the regional and local levels come in. This is of critical importance. Regional and local governance is the cradle of subsidiarity.

You listen and engage, and understand people’s concerns, issues, and perspectives. And if we want trade to work for everyone, we need to address local and regional perspectives as well.

TRADE FOR ALL

Indeed, in the past few years we have transformed EU trade policy and laid out our plan in the “Trade for All” strategy adopted in October 2015. This strategy contains a vision for how trade should work, both at home in our Europe and abroad.

And this strategy has been delivering. Our trade agreements now better reflect our values. We have chapters that protect the environment, labour rights and human rights. We have reached a political agreement with Mexico over this past weekend, including on a chapter on fighting corruption. And our agreement with Chile will include provisions on trade and gender. We are delivering on our values.

TRANSPARENCY

A centrepiece of this strategy has been transparency. In the country I come from, Sweden, we value openness and transparency. We consider them to be the lifeblood of real democracy and freedom. I am proud of what the Commission has done to open up our negotiations.

I am proud that our Europe is leading the way on transparent trade negotiations. We now publish all new trade and investment negotiation texts proposals and negotiation round reports. We also make reader-friendly materials to explain our deals to the public. And other countries are following our example.

We have concrete examples of trade-related benefits by countries and regions on our website. They do so because our approach builds trust. And in the 21st century, building trust is as important as building profits, if not more!

This is why we proposed to reimagine the dispute settlement system in our trade agreements. The old Investor-State Dispute Settlement system is out of date. We have introduced a new, more predictable and open court-like system.
It has been included in our respective agreements with Canada, Singapore, Vietnam and Mexico. And now we want to introduce a Multilateral Investment Court that would get the balance right for states and investors, while ensuring independence and democratic accountability.

Transparency also makes our trade policy more inclusive. This is critical, not just to gather the views of national, local and regional governments, but also civil society and other interest groups.

When our recommended negotiating directives are adopted, we send them not only to the European, but also to national, parliaments. This way we have a much wider and more inclusive debate from the very start, even before we get the final mandate from the Council. And we encourage all EU Member States to approach their local and regional authorities as early as possible to foster dialogue and trust as well.

The Commission wants to know about all concerns. The more reliable information we have, the better we can address them in our negotiations. This is particularly important for regions. This is the message I carried when I visited national parliaments, and sometimes also regional parliaments. And it is an approach I hope they have taken on board.

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS AND CONSULTATIONS

We try to be more inclusive in other ways too. All impact assessments of trade deals include at least three months of public consultation. Local and regional authorities' views are encouraged as part of these assessments. We cannot, however, analyse every region. But, we encourage all EU Member States to conduct national impact assessments with adequate regional and local perspective.

And, when Member States rely to us their local and regional authorities’ expectations and possible concerns, we can address them with our partner when we negotiate.

We are also trying to bring civil society into the way we make trade policy. Our Expert Group on EU Trade Agreements is just one additional channel to do that. And, we are grateful for the civil society's advice on various aspects of trade negotiations.

I therefore welcome the Committee of the Region's interest in the work of the Expert Group and I am happy to announce already today that we will be inviting the Committee to become an observer to the group, in the same way as the European Economic and Social Committee. A written invitation is coming to you very shortly.

Our focus on openness and inclusivity also benefits from greater clarity as regards the respective roles of Member States and the Commission. This is why we welcomed the European Court of Justice’s opinion on the Singapore agreement. Greater clarity and accountability enable us to be more reliable trading partner to all. This is why we will continue in this trend of openness.

CALL TO ACTION

To do so really well, we need your help. The more engagement between local authorities and Member States, the better. This is how we can gather evidence on the positive and negative effects of EU trade policy on the ground.

Globalisation is happening. Information from all levels - national, regional and local - will be critical in how we respond to it. EU trade policy can make an impact on how globalisation affects us. It can help put up rules for a rules-based and transparent trade. But it cannot solve every problem alone. I wish it could, but it can’t.

The world is interconnected in an unprecedented way - and Europe in particular is at the global crossroad. A car can be built with a German design, in a Mexican factory, with an American chassis and a Japanese transmission, and be sold here in Belgium.
These links cannot be undone easily, and undoing them won’t solve anything. In fact it would create more harm.

Instead of hiding behind walls and borders, we need to make sure that globalisation happens the way we want it to. We want to shape globalisation, not be moulded by it. If we are to achieve this, we need cooperation at every level.

We need to:
- use initiatives such as the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, our EU structural and cohesion funds, to make sure that nobody is left behind,
- complement these with pro-growth and jobs-generating national policies that take into account regional and local demands,
- ensure the benefits that come with globalisation are spread equally,
- and make sure our trade policy supports these goals by representing our values.

So, this is in short our vision for EU trade policy. Thank you for inviting me. I am happy to take your questions. Thank you.