



## Building bridges, smashing glass ceilings

Washington, DC, 24 April 2017

**EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmström**

*Annual Women in International Trade Awards*

Ladies and gentlemen,

It's a great honour to be here and accept this award today.

I'd like to talk to you today about how I see trade and women's issues fitting together. In 1957, the Treaty of Rome founded the European Economic Community. We often talk about the founding fathers of the European project – Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman and so on.

They were of course very important, but there were also several women, the “founding mothers” of the EU, who played an important role in the creation and development of what was to become the European Union.

Women like Louise Weiss, Ursula Hirschmann and Marga Klompé were activists and politicians active in the resistance in World War Two and they had lived the horrors of the war. They helped to form the ideas and the structures of the political and economic integration to support peace, democracy and human rights.

Right from the start, that project aimed to ensure women's empowerment and equality. Alongside a commitment to remove trade barriers between members, and across the world... ... came one to ensure to equal pay for equal work.

Sadly, we're not there yet. We have a long way to go. But it is still an important goal. Sixty years on, this remains a central part of our values. One we pursue not just in Europe, but across the world.

The EU and its members are not just the world's biggest donor of development aid. We are also its biggest trading bloc. And in recent years there has been increasing focus on the role trade and development can play in promoting gender equality.

Chile just signed a trade deal with Uruguay: it includes a chapter specifically on trade and gender. We will soon, later, this fall, be launching our own talks with Santiago and we will make sure gender and trade has a strong presence in that agreement.

The World Trade Organization is looking at women's empowerment as part of inclusive trade, and of their technical assistance work. And there is also much work at the grassroots. Networks, awareness and recognition are really important to ensure women play their full role in the opportunities of international trade.

You are doing great work as an organisation. I congratulate and thank you.

So are initiatives like the International Trade Centre's SheTrades initiative, to connect one million women entrepreneurs to markets by 2020. This train is going somewhere; the EU is already on board. We look at gender equality as we predict and evaluate the impact of trade agreements.

Our bilateral free trade agreements include provisions on sustainable development...  
... committing parties to labour protections like equal pay and anti-discrimination.

Meanwhile, developing countries that want the most favourable access to the EU must sign up to human rights conventions: including to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, as enshrined in the UN convention. Trade is the backbone of the world economy, supporting growth, mobilising jobs.

For me, trade is about bringing down barriers, opening up to new ideas, and expanding horizons and opportunities. It should come as no surprise that this fits with an attitude to gender equality. The two most trade-enabling countries in the world, according to the World Economic Forum - The Netherlands and Singapore - are also highly gender equal.

In an age when there is increasing - and justified - attention on those who seem "left behind" by globalisation...  
... we shouldn't forget those who have been - or continue to be - left behind in other ways.

The case for action is about economics as much as equality. As Christine Lagarde, another very strong fighter for gender equality, put it in Brussels the other week, "when the benefits of growth are shared more broadly, growth is stronger, more durable, and more resilient."

Indeed, according to other sources, advancing women's equality could add 28 trillion dollars to global GDP by 2025. So gender equality is not only a human right, it is also economically beneficial. (And that's probably the only way to get the men involved).

Yet, in spite of the increasing interest, it's an area too little studied; with too little data on how trade can impact on women's opportunities. There are a lot of examples and anecdotes. But we need more facts.

Until you have that data you can't see the scale of the problem, nor the solution. So last month I wrote to WTO Director General Roberto Azevêdo suggesting we get, and use, better data.

And - to get further into understanding this topic - I will, alongside the International Trade Centre, be organising an international forum on women in trade, in June in Brussels. I hope many of you will be there.

Small and medium sized businesses represent 80% of EU exporters. According to the ITC, 40% of SMEs around the world are owned by women. So our work to support the smallest, most entrepreneurial businesses may also help women.

Or look at the opportunities of digital trade - a huge area of entrepreneurial growth, which not only creates many new opportunities; but also the chance of more flexible working. This is an area where I hope we can make progress in the next world trade organisation ministerial in Buenos Aires.

My commitment, as set out in the EU's trade for all strategy, is for trade that is transparent, efficient, and fair. I am very excited to go tomorrow to the National Museum of African American History and Culture. It is - among other things - a moving reminder of what happens when trade ignores our most fundamental principles.

Of the human costs that come from an obscene trade in people's lives, in which Europe was also sadly complicit.

Today, still, in the world, we see parts of central Africa where mines use forced labour, or child labour; where the profits of the minerals trade supports not development, but brutality and conflict.

We see people working in dangerous conditions in clothes factories. In one tragic case, four years ago today, over a thousand women and girls died at the Rana Plaza complex in Bangladesh.

These events touch us, not as men or women, but as humans. But we don't just have to accept this. And we don't. We can make trade policy a vehicle for our values. Consumers across the world put pressure on us policy makers to be transparent about labour conditions and ecological footprint. As traders we have a responsibility.

In the EU, new laws now mean companies have to do their homework and source their minerals responsibly. And we are working with Bangladesh, and companies, and the International Labour Organisation to ensure working conditions that are safe and sustainable. Much work needs to be done, but there has been progress.

But it is because I care about fair, free trade based on values, that we are pursuing an ambitious programme of trade agreements. Our agreement with Canada is now ratified at EU level; it could provisionally apply within a few weeks. It's a template for progressive trade policy we can take to the world.

Our talks continue with partners like Mexico, Mercosur, Japan and Indonesia. We will soon start negotiations with Australia, New Zealand, and Chile. As for the US, I was very happy to have a first meeting with some players while here in DC, including Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross.

For my part, there is still a case for an ambitious trade agreement between the EU and the US, the two largest economies in the world. Such an agreement has the potential to create jobs on both sides of the Atlantic. We both need a bit more time to see where we are.

From the EU's side, we would also need to clarify that both sides share an ambition to find solutions to difficult issues. And even apart from TTIP, it's very important that we now create a constructive and ambitious transatlantic trade agenda going forward.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and an honour to accept this award. I accept it because I know that trade can benefit everyone. Men and women. Businesses and consumers. People in developed countries; and those hoping to develop.

I know that, out there, are many women ready to capture these opportunities. And to help other women do likewise. Because the trade world is still very much a male world. I take this reward in the name of all those who realise the answer isn't to build walls, but build bridges. And maybe at the same time smash some glass ceilings on the way.

Those are the people I'd like to dedicate this award to. Thank you.