

Speaking points  
UNCTAD Aid for e-Trade Initiative – Open Consultations  
Geneva, Palais des Nations, 21 April 2016

Statement on Aid for eTrade, H.E. Mr. Bertrand de Crombrugge de Picquendaele, Ambassador Permanent Representative of Belgium

- Belgium takes the occasion to congratulate UNCTAD and its partners on this most welcome and most timely Aid for e-Trade Initiative.
- We agree that digitalization is profoundly transforming our societies. E-Commerce in particular plays a crucial role as it allows new production and consumption models providing clear advantages and benefits compared to traditional ones. More widely, I would like to claim, the digital era will facilitate democratic participation and engagement of citizens and this is bound to operate as a multiplier of economic development. It has the potential of bringing about this more inclusive and more friendly global village that we are all striving for.
- Indeed, digital technologies will allow developing countries to leapfrog some of the developmental steps that countries like mine had to follow in the analogue age :
  - farmers could receive personalized commercial or technical advice in their smartphones, based on the state of their crops,
  - governments could design their policies with the help of better and real time big data analytics,
  - citizens could denounce the breaches of their human rights via online applications,
  - local nurses could deliver reliable computer assisted diagnostics.

Unlocking the potential of e-commerce in developing countries will clearly be a key element in bring about these opportunities.

- Hence, UNCTAD's initiative is a very timely one as it will bring together developing countries, development partners and private sector actors around the common endeavour to act coherently and pool the capabilities and the resources in favour of digitalization.
- Belgium too is reflecting on how to include digital dividends into its cooperation development work. In this perspective, under the aegis of Viceprime Minister and Minister for Development Cooperation Alexander Decroo, who is also in charge of the Digital Agenda, of Telecommunications and of Postal Services, we are currently in the process of setting up a new policy which will be based on four pillars :
  - Build new partnerships with partners who can help "digitalize our approach".

- Involve the private sector since private companies are often more innovative in their use of digital opportunities and solutions than classic development actors. We want to tap into this reservoir by building private-public partnerships.
  - Focus on limited niches: possibly related to
    - the use of big data for policy making
    - e-Health
    - e-Government
    - the digital equivalent of analogue regulatory requirements
  - Include a systematic analysis of digital opportunities in the evaluation of possible development cooperation interventions.
- I am pleased to note that there is a clear convergence between the introductory exposés and Belgium's own views. The call for action by UNCTAD is therefore one that benefits of our full sympathy and one that we think we have already started to implement.
  - Finally, let me end by congratulating UNCTAD once again on this very promising initiative.
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