

75 countries launch WTO talks on e-commerce

Commissioner for Trade Cecilia **Malmström** said: *"It is encouraging to see so many partners joining this important trade initiative. Electronic commerce is a reality in most corners of the world, so we owe it to our citizens and companies to provide a predictable, effective and safe online environment for trade. We look forward to working with all interested WTO members, flexibly and pragmatically, to create a truly comprehensive and ambitious set of rules."*

The last two decades have seen the exponential growth of domestic and cross-border electronic commerce. Despite this fast increase in electronic transactions, there are no specific multilateral rules in the WTO regulating this type of trade. Business and consumers instead have to rely on a patchwork of rules agreed by some countries in their bilateral or regional trade agreements.

WTO rules on e-commerce will aim to enhance opportunities and address challenges of e-commerce in both developed and developing countries. The negotiations should result in a multilateral legal framework that consumers and businesses, especially smaller ones, could rely on to make it easier and safer to buy, sell and do business online. The new rules would for instance:

- improve consumers' **trust** in the on-line environment and combat **spam**
- tackle **barriers** that prevent cross-border sales
- guarantee validity of **e-contracts** and **e-signatures**
- permanently ban customs duties on **electronic transmissions**
- address forced **data localisation requirements** and forced **disclosure of source code**

The launch of these negotiations shows the WTO stays in the centre of international rule making and continues to be a platform where groups of interested countries agree to work together to develop new rules in an open and inclusive manner. The negotiating process planned to start in March 2019 is open to other WTO members who may still be interested to join.