

Mrs Catherine Bearder MEP

1. What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of EU action on the free movement of goods? How might the national interest be served by action being taken in this field at a different level (for example, at the WTO), either in addition to or as an alternative to EU action?

The WTO has 159 members. Given that part of the purpose of this review is to address the perceived lack of influence which the UK has in the EU, I certainly do not feel that trying to reach agreement and harmonised implementation of decisions regarding the Free movement of goods at WTO or any other level would benefit UK interests. Trying to find agreement among 159 differing views is a slow and painful process - as evidenced by the DOHA trade talks. The idea that any kind of meaningful harmonisation could take place with regards to the many issues thrown up by the free movement of goods - recycling standards, safety standards, 'made in' labels quality of ingredients, sustainability criteria etc is highly unrealistic. Likewise, to devolve power and decision making responsibility from and EU level to a national level would not make sense as it is the scale of the production and trade which takes places within the EU which makes harmonising these standards worthwhile and beneficial to UK manufacturers and UK customers.

2. To what extent do you think EU action on the free movement of goods helps UK businesses?

Without a doubt the free movement of goods within the internal market has benefited the UK enormously. It has created a huge market into which UK manufacturers can sell their products and source raw materials for the manufacturing process with having to pay customs duties. This makes UK goods more competitive both within the internal market, and on a world stage due to lower production costs. Were the UK to leave the EU, UK business would undoubtedly suffer immensely.

3. To what extent has EU action on the free movement of goods brought additional costs and /or benefits to you when trading with countries inside and outside the EU? To what extent has EU action on the free movement of goods brought additional costs and /or benefits to you as a consumer of goods?

As a consumer of goods I have a wider range of choice of goods, as a result of EU-wide competition within the internal market, the prices I pay for these goods are often cheaper than if there was no freedom of movement of goods. In addition, when buying from other countries I am reassured of the products safety and quality due to the harmonisation of standards across the EU e.g. standardisation of safety requirements on children's toys.

While meeting these requirements has resulted in an increase in costs for some UK producers, these costs are also being borne by their competitors in other countries throughout the internal market and therefore does not put them at a disadvantage vis a vis their competitors. I believe the cost-benefit analysis clearly shows that EU consumers would rather be assured of the safety and quality of the foods and goods which they purchase within the internal market than run risks with only marginally cheaper, unverified goods.

5. To what extent do you think the harmonisation of national laws through EU legislation (as opposed to international treaties) is helpful or unhelpful to your activities as a business and/or as a consumer in the Internal Market? In your experience do Member States take a consistent approach to implementing and enforcing EU rules?

I believe it is enormously helpful to UK business that national laws are harmonised throughout the EU, as it creates a level playing field between our manufacturers and those in the other 27 member states. It puts pressure on our neighbouring countries to comply with basic minimum standards and it also 'raises up' standards of production across the globe - because the EU as a whole is such a large market that even non-EU producers are beginning to comply with our safety and quality standards in order to gain access to our markets.

If there is a problem with this it is the erratic enforcement of the legislation. However, under the current set up with the Union member states are unwilling to give more powers or funding to the Commission to tighten up this process, which ultimately brings some legislation into disrepute and frustrates businesses. It is a tough issue that the Council must confront before too long, and the actions now being taken on tax avoidance may be seen as the start of this process.

6. Do you think that the EU strikes the right balance between regulating imports and exports and facilitating international trade?

Yes, I believe the EU's bilateral trade negotiations and the many new trade deals which are coming on stream show clearly that being a member of the EU facilitates and promotes access to international markets for UK producers. I believe that a good balance is struck by the EU in terms of the amount of regulation it has in place to govern imports/exports, but that work still needs to be done on enforcing these regulations. A delay in, or failure to, enforce EU regulations on export/import at its various borders opens the opportunity for abuse and distorts the level playing field which I referred to previously, but I believe enforcement of

7. Do you think the UK's ability to effectively regulate cross-border movements of goods would be better, worse or broadly the same as the result of more or less EU action?

I believe that cross border movement of goods would be severely hampered by less EU action. In fact I believe that the UK's decision not to join Schengen is a good illustration of how, through dragging its feet on a positive European initiative the UK has hindered the ease with which UK manufacturers can do business- creating delays at borders, and on the channel tunnel.