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WTO MC14: the Global Services Coalition (GSC) urges adoption of a permanent WTO Moratorium on customs duties for e-transmissions and calls on participants in the WTO E-Commerce Agreement (ECA) to chart a course forward providing for immediate interim implementation steps

For services and digital businesses of all sizes, large and small, the most watched item on the formal decision-making agenda for the 14th WTO Ministerial Council (MC14) in Cameroon in late March is the **WTO Moratorium on Customs Duties on E-Transmissions**.

GSC members are looking for an outcome that delivers greater long run digital trade and investment certainty. **A permanent WTO E-Commerce Moratorium is the preferred business outcome**. This is especially important for small and medium-sized businesses and born digital micro-enterprises and start-ups, increasingly dependent on cloud-based business models.

Despite the very high relative rates of growth in global digital services trade, the Moratorium is the sole digital trade-related topic on the formal agenda for Ministerial decision. In the margins, however, there are informal and formal opportunities for Trade Ministers to engage, including with WTO Secretariat support. GSC members will be watching, in that context, for long-awaited outcomes on implementation of the commercially important **WTO E-Commerce Agreement (ECA)**.

We call on all Trade Ministers of all WTO Members who support the ECA to settle on a solution and adopt formal, if interim, steps enabling early implementation of the ECA to commence. Industry expects the WTO Secretariat can play a support role in this process.

MC14 is the time to move ahead. Implementation of this agreement is fundamental to WTO credibility as a relevant player in the modern digital economy, where digital trade is *the* driving force for global growth, innovation, productivity and new opportunities for development.

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Background

In July 2024, many of the undersigned business organisations jointly applauded the outcome of negotiations launched in 2019 by 92 WTO Members under the Joint Statement Initiative (JSI) on E-Commerce. Following domestic consultations, 71 participants, both developed and developing, announced in December 2024 that the text of the WTO E-Commerce Agreement (ECA) was finalised and initiated a process towards formal incorporation into the WTO framework.

The ECA is commercially important for businesses, large and small, and immediately beneficial for consumers and government agencies in economies worldwide at all stages of development, that rely increasingly on cross-border digital trade for both goods and services. The agreement takes into consideration developing countries' interests and remains open to all WTO members who wish to join the agreement. GSC members urge all WTO Members to join in, in particular those who participated in the ECA talks.

Critically, the ECA lays the foundation for further growth of global digital trade by including a built-in phase 2 of JSI negotiations on outstanding issues such as core cross-border data flow, data localisation and source code issues. For the second phase to be triggered, there is a prior requirement for the ECA to be brought formally into force.

All attempts to integrate the ECA, now with 72 WTO Members, as an Annex 4 agreement of the WTO have been blocked at WTO General Council meetings in Geneva. The ECA was concluded in its present form over 20 months ago. There has been no progress on implementation. Services and digital business frustration is mounting.

From a business perspective, priority should be given to full incorporation of the agreement into the WTO framework. The GSC meanwhile urges participants to chart a course at MC14 that will provide for immediate interim implementation of the ECA commitments by all signatories.

The business community can claim a legitimate expectation that this crucial agreement, now finalised, will be implemented. Governments are urged to move to secure implementation of the ECA and pave the way for phase 2 negotiations, without further loss of negotiating momentum.

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