

Mandelson presses China to be more ambitious in trade talks

Alan Wheatley



Peter Mandelson, the European trade commissioner, said emerging economies must do more if global trade talks are to succeed. (Sergei Karpukhin/Reuters)

China and other developing countries must show more negotiating ambition if long-running global trade talks are to succeed, the European Union's trade commissioner, Peter Mandelson, said Monday.

During an interview, Mandelson also deflected criticism over the weekend by President Nicolas Sarkozy of France, who said that the European Union was making too many concessions on farm trade, saying that he did not feel his hands were tied in the talks.

"The constraint on me is what others amongst the emerging economies are prepared to do in industrial goods - in nonagricultural market access," Mandelson said. "If their apparently low level of ambition continues, it's going to make my position as Europe's negotiator quite hard."

He said he would do his best to prepare for a possible meeting of World Trade Organization ministers in April.

The putative gathering is being billed as yet another last chance to push forward the Doha round of market-opening talks, which started in the Qatari capital in 2001.

"But Europe needs greater engagement amongst its negotiating partners," said Mandelson, who was wrapping up three days of talks in Beijing.

He said that he had been encouraged by the position China had taken on lowering barriers to trade in industrial goods and services as well as on trading rules. It remained defensive, however, on agriculture.

"But unreasonable demands are not being made on them in that area, so I hope they will be more forthcoming in the other parts of the negotiation," he said. "I wish they were showing a stronger lead and a clearer engagement over the world trade talks."

Sarkozy said Saturday that he would oppose any WTO deal that went against the interests of France and the European Union, especially in agriculture.

Mandelson said Sarkozy was right to sound a note of caution about the need for a balanced outcome of the Doha round.

"I hope he will judge the talks in wider terms than agriculture alone," he said. "But I welcome France's commitment to a successful outcome."

Mandelson, who negotiates on behalf of the European Union, said he had no complaint about the room for maneuver he had been given by member states.

The trade chief was in Beijing to meet China's new commerce minister, Chen Deming, and to prepare for the first meeting in April of a new EU-China "high-level economic and trade mechanism" to address bilateral issues of strategic importance.

Mandelson said he hoped the new forum, which he billed as an opportunity to restart the trade relationship between China and Europe, would help to cut the EU's billowing trade deficit with China and tear down barriers that he said were impeding trade and investment.

Brussels said Monday that the EU's trade deficit with China had swollen to €159 billion, or \$235 billion, in 2007, the large majority of an overall deficit of €185.7 billion.

"Having likened the Chinese economy last autumn to a juggernaut that was speeding out of control, I feel now, after my weekend discussions, that China will pay more attention to others on the road," Mandelson said.

Disponível em: <http://www.iht.com>. Acesso em 26/2/2008.

A utilização deste artigo é exclusivo para fins educacionais.