



Ashton backs Doha rescue in Q&A with MEPs

In a question and answer session to test her suitability to be Europe's Trade Commissioner, Catherine Ashton stressed the importance of "free and just" trade. If appointed she said she would continue to work towards a conclusion of the Doha trade round.

MEPs from the trade, development and foreign affairs committees questioned her Monday evening in Strasbourg prior to vote by the House on Wednesday. Below you can find a summary of the hearing. On Wednesday MEPs voted to support her candidacy - 538 for, 40 against with 63 abstentions.



On World Trade and the Doha round

"The WTO system might not be perfect, but it is easy to underestimate just how unpredictable the global economy would be without it," said Catherine Ashton. If nominated she would make a meeting with the head of the WTO Pascal Lamy a priority to reassure him of the EU's commitment to Doha.

Asked by British Conservative Robert Sturdy how she would have acted differently given her predecessor's "failure" over the Doha Round, Baroness Ashton said the Doha Round was "not over yet" after 7 years of discussions. She reminded MEPs that the Uruguay Round lasted 8 years.

German Socialist Erika Mann asked how, in the complexity of the trade talks, she would shape the agenda for "fair, just and sustainable trade." Baroness Ashton said she would recognize the value and importance to EU citizens of trade for prosperity but also the need to create sustainable economies world-wide.

Financial crisis

"I don't believe that the answers to any of our problems...lie in reversing the current openness of the global economy. I believe they lie in managing economic globalisation better" said Baroness Ashton

For the Development Committee, Dutch Socialist Thijs Berman asked about the triple crises of food, energy and financial markets. Catherine Ashton said she shared concerns about the impact on the world's poorest and was also worried that the economic downturn should not challenge our commitment to aid.

Trade and human rights

Polish Christian Democrat Jacek Saryusz-Wolski asked, "should questions of free trade and human rights be linked?" "Trade is just one piece of the jigsaw for finding solu-

tions." said Baroness Ashton. "I don't think there is any single model for trade liberalisation that works everywhere and at all times. There are only tailored solutions to the specific needs and the potential strengths of different countries."

Personal experience

Ms Mann also asked what in Baroness Ashton's personal and professional background had equipped her for the role of Trade Commissioner. The Commissioner-designate firstly stressed her personal commitment to Europe. She recalled her first visit to Strasbourg to seek support for UK SME exporters, saying she had succeeded through working closely with the Parliament, Commission and Council. She then pointed to her negotiating skills throughout her career and the breadth of her values.