

# Foreword

We are pleased to deliver preliminary remarks to this compilation of research work on digital trade prepared by the WTO Chairholders, Advisory Board members and the WTO Chairs Programme (WCP) team of the WTO Secretariat.

The measures of lockdown and social distancing that governments around the world have adopted to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have led to increased online shopping and teleworking, making this book even more relevant and timely. The book adds significant value to the debate on digital trade by combining academic perspectives with policy relevance and recommendations.

The digital trade and information technologies that characterize today's society provide countries around the globe with access to markets that were previously considered unreachable. The barrier of geographical distance

is no more: consumer choices are no longer restricted by and limited to the goods found in local stores or in nearby towns. E-commerce platforms provide consumers with access to world markets in real time. Likewise, producers can reach consumers for the supply of goods and services almost instantly and in ways that were previously unimaginable, all thanks to new technologies.

The world economy has changed significantly since the World Trade Organization (WTO) was founded, amongst other due to digitalization. We need to ensure that our trade system is up to date so that we can exploit new opportunities and address challenges of the present world. There is a need to reform the rules that govern trade, and this should be done in an inclusive manner. Hence the relevance of the central question addressed in the book – how can members ensure that the

changes brought by digital technologies benefit all and support inclusive growth?

This book presents a sample of the work achieved so far within the framework of the Chairs programme, which finances Chairs in universities located in developing countries. While not necessarily endorsing all views expressed<sup>1</sup>, France and the Netherlands encourage enhanced and operational

comprehension of the stakes of digital trade through academic research. We thank the WCP team for their hard work and commitment to making the programme what it is today. We equally thank the Chairholders for their continuous support and dedication to the programme and the Advisory Board members for having used their knowledge and skills in service to the community and in support of the WTO multilateral trading system.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sigrid Kaag".A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Franck Riester".

### Sigrid Kaag

Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

### Franck Riester

Minister Delegate for Foreign Trade and Economic Attractiveness, attached to the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France

<sup>1</sup> For instance regarding the status of EU Privacy Protection in the digital era.