

Letter**Let's be constructive on trade and not just vent**

From John Denton, Secretary-general, International Chamber of Commerce, Paris, France

11 HOURS AGO

President Donald Trump's latest broadside against the World Trade Organization ("[Donald Trump threatens to pull US out of the WTO](#)", FT.com, August 30) immediately brought to mind Andrew Edgecliffe-Johnson's recent critique on these pages of the muted response from US chief executives to the ongoing escalation in global trade tensions ("[Business leaders need to speak up against Trump trade policy](#)", August 23).

It is certainly true that there is an imperative for business to stand behind the multilateral trading system — now more so than ever. But I would suggest that the private sector has much more to offer than simply voicing its (well-founded) concerns.

Rather than adding fuel to the fire of an already polarised debate, business leaders must instead focus on helping governments chart a new course for trade policymaking that deals meaningfully with the pressures now building in the global economy. If tariffs are not the answer, then what are the alternatives? And how can the WTO, to use Mr Trump's vernacular, best "shape up" to avoid the US shipping out?

This means offering ideas and solutions — based on real-world experience — for how the global trading system can be reformed to deal with contentious issues, from the conduct of state-owned enterprises to protecting intellectual property. Critical thought from business is also needed on how trade agreements can better support workers and consumers in the US and across the globe.

Such "second-track" dialogue on enabling multilateral institutions to meet the challenges and disruptions of the 21st century may not hit the headlines — nor sate the demands of commentators — but offers the best hope of safeguarding the rules-based global economic order. If we are really serious about making the case for open trade and the WTO system, it's time to shout a little less and talk much more.

John Denton

Secretary-general, International Chamber of Commerce, Paris, France

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