

Closing Ceremony, WTI Academic Year 2022-2023

Bern, 28 July 2023

Peter Van den Bossche

Excellencies, distinguished guests, colleagues, students, family and friends of students, ladies and gentlemen, on site or online, welcome to the closing ceremony of the 2022-2023 academic year at the World Trade Institute.

Today, we celebrate the fact that the students of this year's advanced master's programmes at the WTI – the students of the MILE 23 and the TRAIL+6 promotions – have completed the course work of their respective programmes. Both the MILE and TRAIL+ programmes are very demanding programmes, requiring 90 ECTS to graduate, which is 50% more than most other master's programmes. However, the fact that many of you, my dear students, have secured an internship in Geneva or elsewhere, is the best proof that international organizations, national administrations, law firms and consultancy firms appreciate, and acknowledge, the quality of these demanding and uniquely interdisciplinary master's programmes.

For all of you, these past 10 months and 2 weeks have been challenging, but that is what my colleagues and I warned you for in September last year when you started your programme. The lawyers among you have dreaded, and suffered in, the economics courses; while the economists among you have gradually, and not without effort, come to appreciate how the legal mind works. Yet, to be successful in the field of international trade and investment, a good grounding in both law and economics is indispensable. You will benefit from the mental pain and suffering we inflicted on you for the rest of your professional life.

Apart from the interdisciplinarity of the programmes, you also benefited from the international composition of the student body. You come from all five continents and 13 different countries. You have learned to appreciate the small and bigger differences that divide you, but also the many, often much more important, values, interests, worries and concerns that you all have in common. I hope that it is this appreciation and understanding of shared values and interests, that – above anything else - you will take with you from your studies at the WTI in Bern.

Two weeks ago, in Bogota, Colombia, at the 2023 Global Conference of the Society of International Economic Law, a conference at which the WTI was well represented (with the WTI's founder, Prof. em. Thomas Cottier; and Dr. Rodrigo Polanco, who serves on the

Executive Council of the Society, as well as many alumni), I asked in my opening address my colleagues - scholars and practitioners of international economic law – how, in 100 years from now, historians – or our great-great-grandchildren – will look back at the 2020s and our generation. Will they portray us as the generation which drifted, helplessly, into the abyss or the generation which boldly turned the tide? While – collectively – we have never been more prosperous and lived longer, the problems and challenges facing us today are wide-ranging and daunting. Most prominent among these problems and challenges are of course:

- the geo-political confrontation between the current and the aspirant hegemon and strategies of economic containment and decoupling;
- the uncertainty of global supply chains and re-, near-, and friend-shoring of production (especially of critical minerals and food);
- the climate crisis and the green transition; and
- the digitalization of production and trade and its impact on comparative advantage of countries.

My dear students, these are the problems and challenges that will be yours to confront and, for this, I do not envy you. I dare say, however, that your year at the WTI has prepared and equipped you well to contribute to the efforts to address these problems and challenges.

Well prepared and well-equipped, yes, but there is always more to learn, and this is why I am particularly happy, as well as honoured, to present to you the keynote lecturer at this closing ceremony, Ambassador Simon Manley.

Amb. Manley is the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the WTO, UN and Other International Organisations in Geneva, and in that capacity he is – among many other things – closely involved in the WTO’s efforts to stop us from drifting into the abyss. Amb. Manley took up his post as Permanent Representative of the UK in Geneva in April 2021 and, as the UK’s Permanent Representative, oversees the work of the UK in more than 35 Geneva-based international organisations, agencies and offices, including – in addition to the WTO – the UN Human Rights Council, the World Health Organization, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Red Cross, CERN, and the World Economic Forum. Amb. Manley has been a member of the UK Diplomatic Service since 1990 and served as the British Ambassador to Spain from 2013 to 2019. He has held a number of senior roles in the UK Foreign Office, in London, including, in 2020, Director-General of the Foreign Office efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic, and from 2006 and 2008, Head of Counter-Terrorism. Earlier in his career, he worked at the UK’s Mission to the United Nations in New York, and was twice seconded to the European Union. Amb. Manley

studied Modern History at the University of Oxford, and International Relations at Yale University. Amb. Manley will speak today on “Why Rules Matter: the Importance of Free and Open Trade in a Contested World”. Amb. Manley, it is with great pleasure, and much anticipation, that I invite you to take the floor.