

**WTI Advanced Master Programmes 2019-2020**

**Closing Ceremony -**

*Welcome and introduction by Peter Van den Bossche*

24 July 2020

Dear students, colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen, welcome, be it on site or online, to the closing ceremony of the 2019-2020 WTI advanced master programmes.

Today, Friday, 24 July 2020, we mark the end of extra-ordinary academic year. This was an academic year as none of us ever experienced before. A virus nobody had heard of before December last year forced us in mid-March to abandon the real world and to seek refuge in a virtual world without much, if any, social contact and no classroom teaching.

Dear students, this was not what you had signed up for when decided to come to Bern to study at the WTI. Both the MILE and TRAIL+ programme are very demanding in normal times and under normal conditions; they became even more so under the difficult conditions under which you had to study since March. Your resilience, your patience, your willingness to adapt and make the best of a bad situation made me very proud of you. Your survival, academic and otherwise, is an experience that you will never forget and will be with you for the rest of your life. You definitely now have an amazing story to tell your children and grandchildren. You completed your advanced master studies in far-away Switzerland during the great 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

After completing work on your thesis – the one hurdle still to take – you will enter or re-enter professional life and this will be extra-challenging in these COVID times. Not so long ago, there was an article in the *Financial Times* under

the title 'Five Skills to Achieve Success in the 2020s'. According to the *Financial Times*, in order to achieve professional success one has: (1) to be able to adapt to ever-changing circumstances; (2) to be creative in overcoming challenges; (3) to develop emotional intelligence; (4) to become technologically savvy; and (5) to build your personal brand. I dare say that the past year has allowed you – forced you – to significantly build up each of these five skills. I dare say that you are well prepared to achieve professional success. Most of you aspire to achieve that success in the field of international trade ... at a time that the multilateral trading system seems to be falling apart and economic nationalism and trade protectionism are clearly on the rise. But, as I and others have been telling you time and again, this dismal state of affairs makes your specialized knowledge of international trade law and economics more valuable than ever. More than ever is there a need for young people who passionately believe in a rules-based international economic system that can bring sustainable development and prosperity to all.

As most of you know, this academic year – for a reason that is not COVID-related – is a very special year for the WTI. This academic year the WTI celebrates its 20th anniversary. To mark this anniversary, we are very happy that Prof. em. Thomas Cottier, the Founder of the WTI and its Director of many years, has agreed to give the keynote speech at this closing ceremony. In his lecture, Thomas Cottier – on the basis of his many years as a Swiss government official and negotiator, as a WTO dispute settlement panelist in some of the most important and difficult cases, and as one of the leading scholars in our field, will reflect on the future of the multilateral trading system in a multipolar world. Thomas, may I invite you to address the WTI master class of 2020?