Department for International Trade

Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy

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The Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith QC
Chairman
International Agreements Committee
House of Lords
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28 June 2021

Dear Lord Goldsmith QC,

United Kingdom-Singapore Digital Economy Agreement:
Launch of negotiations

I am writing to inform you and your committee that I will be making a Written Ministerial Statement today, to update Parliament on the Government's plan to launch negotiations with Singapore on a bilateral digital trade agreement, the UK-Singapore Digital Economy Agreement (DEA). The Secretary of State will meet with Singapore's Minister Iswaran by video call to mark the launch and kick start negotiations.

The UK is the first European country to start negotiations on a digital trade agreement. This is an opportunity for the UK to take the lead in shaping these agreements and grow our influence on global rules in areas of UK strength such as digital and services. It reflects how the UK is becoming more flexible, more nimble, and less defensive in our approach to trade.

The UK is already one of the world's biggest exporters of services, with remotely delivered services exports worth £207 billion in 2019 alone. The DEA will open further opportunities for British businesses to deliver their services through digital trade. Singapore and the UK are both global leaders in the digital economy and 70% of UK services exports were digitally delivered to Singapore in 2019, worth £3.2 billion.

Negotiations will focus on:

- Securing open digital markets for exporters, allowing them to expand into new markets and sell traditional products in new ways.
- Ensuring free and trusted cross-border data flows, while upholding high standards of personal data protection.
- Cutting red tape for UK businesses by promoting digital trading systems such as digital customs and border procedures that will save time and money when exporting.
- Upholding online consumer rights and protecting businesses' valuable intellectual property, like source code and cryptography.
- Deepening our cooperation on future growth sectors such as fintech and lawtech, while working with Singapore to strengthen our collective cybersecurity capabilities and keep our countries safe.

The DEA will create new opportunities as a gateway to the Asia-Pacific region for tech, high-end services, and digital trade, ultimately supporting and creating high-value jobs across the United Kingdom and helping the country build back better from Covid.
This deal will also strengthen our bid to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which has modern rules for digital trade. That would mean access to a £9 trillion free trade area with some of the biggest and fastest-growing markets in the world, where the richest opportunities lie for Global Britain.

The Secretary of State and I look forward to working with you and your committee as we progress our work on this cutting-edge digital trade agreement.

Best wishes,

Lord Grimstone of Boscobel, Kt
Minister of State for Investment
Department for International Trade