Five decades ago, the first meeting of European Trade Promotion Organizations (ETPO) was organized by The Netherlands and held in the village of Wassenaar, near The Hague.

Time has flown and this year the ETPO members will convene for the 50th time. A true cause for celebration. At an early stage it was suggested that The Netherlands should be host of this anniversary meeting. It was agreed that the 50th meeting will take place in The Netherlands on the 15th and 16th of October, immediately following this WTPO conference.

At the previous ETPO conference in December last year, which was very well organised by the French TPO Ubifrance, some members sat together and concluded that ETPO-50 should be special, both in terms of its topics and the level of its attendance. In recent years, ETPO seemed to develop more and more towards an information exchange at experts level, and however useful these exchanges were, Chief Executive Officers of the organizations did not always participate. The 50th ETPO conference is meant to make a change, and by inviting organizations to be represented at the highest level and providing a programme to match, we hope that this ambition can be fulfilled.

I will limit myself to presenting a brief outline of the conference’s focus.

The business environment becomes more and more global, technology changes everything in a way we could not have imagined 50 years ago, global power and influence moves east. It is crucial that European firms remain successful in doing business abroad. The goal of the conference is to explore how TPOs can create value to European firms on the long term and best position themselves in light of the political and economic developments. In addition, ways in which the cooperation within ETPO can continue to create sustainable benefits to its members in the coming years will be examined.

We hope to explore changes in the social, economic and business environment in which European companies find themselves. The conference will focus on how governments should translate these developments and their understanding of them into policy responses. We will compare views on how the public and private actors should work together to implement these government policies, with a particular emphasis on trade promotion.

In that context, the mission, structure and role of European TPOs will be explored.
In the final part of the conference, the future cooperation within ETPO itself, as an informal arrangement, will be debated. If we want ETPO to be successful for another 50 years, it is important to establish how it can continue to provide value to its current and future members.

There will be a number of keynote speakers, including the former minister of Economic Affairs, the present director of the Rabo Bank, Mr. Joop Wijn, and a representative from the World Bank, Mr. Daniel Lederman.

By organizing the WTPO and ETPO conferences "back-to-back", EVD has made it possible for representatives of European TPOs to attend two high level sessions on trade promotion where trends and developments are discussed from different angles. Obviously, this creates fantastic network opportunities. Therefore, we are pleased to see that a number of European TPOs who will participate at ETPO's meeting are also present at this WTPO conference.

Traditionally, ITC is represented at the ETPO meetings as an observer. We are very pleased that this year, ITC's Executive Director, Mrs. Patricia Francis, has accepted the invitation to attend the ETPO conference herself.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.