The Next Generation's Eyes on Europe: What Young Professionals Expect from EU Trade Policy

The Trade Policy Day Madrid 2026 became much more than a partner event of the European Commission. It evolved into **a living forum where the next generation**—students, young professionals, and emerging leaders—could directly observe **how Europe shapes its commercial future**. Their reactions were immediate, sincere, and deeply revealing of how **EU trade policy is perceived** by those who will soon inherit the responsibility of implementing it.

For many of them, this was the first time they saw the European Union not as a distant institution, but as a real actor influencing their future careers, the competitiveness of their companies, and the opportunities available in global markets. Their voices reflected optimism, ambition, and curiosity—but also concerns, demands, and a clear expectation: they want to be informed, involved, and heard.

A Generation Ready to Engage with Europe's Global Role

Young attendees consistently expressed that international trade is not just an economic mechanism—it is a gateway to innovation, entrepreneurship, and global mobility. They see trade agreements as tools that can either accelerate or hinder their professional development.

Key reflections from young participants:

• "International trade will open more doors for new generations, helping entrepreneurs innovate and use technology to advance their careers." For them, trade is intertwined with digitalisation, AI, and new business models. They see Europe's trade strategy as a catalyst for technological adoption and cross-border innovation.

• "Exporting is not the same as internationalising. Exporting is logistics; internationalising is understanding treaties, rules, markets, and risks." This distinction shows maturity: they understand that true internationalisation requires strategic thinking, regulatory knowledge, and cultural intelligence.

• "The EU–LATAM bridge is something we can leverage, having lived (or travelled) in LATAM, Spain, and even in the US. We may understand three blocs that shape global business." Many attendees have multicultural backgrounds. They see Spain's role as a connector between Europe and Latin America not as a political concept, but as a personal and professional advantage.

• “Trade agreements like Mercosur affect how we design contracts, how we sell, and how we buy. The first step is to rely on official EU sources.” They are aware that trade agreements shape operational realities: contract clauses, compliance requirements, pricing strategies, and market access.

• “Young people need clarity on how AI can help us implement agreements safely and effectively.” They want guidance from the EU on how to use AI responsibly to interpret regulations, verify standards, and support international operations.

Concerns: A Call for Transparency, Strength, and Strategic Vision

Beyond enthusiasm, young participants also expressed concerns about Europe’s internal dynamics and Spain’s position within the Union.

Concerns raised by participants:

- Spain’s ability to defend its interests within the EU. Some fear that Spain does not always project its full economic weight or influence in Brussels.
- The need for stronger EU emergency protocols. They highlighted gaps in coordinated responses to health crises, migration pressures, and border challenges that directly affect to trading.
- The importance of reinforcing competitive sectors to reduce debt. They see trade policy as a tool to strengthen Spain’s economic resilience.
- Spain not fully exploiting the advantages of the single market. They noted that Spain could better leverage EU embassies abroad, regulatory harmonisation, and collective negotiation power.

A Clear Message: They Want to Be Part of Europe’s Trade Future

Across all perspectives, one message was unmistakable:

Young professionals do not see EU trade policy as a distant institutional process.

They see it as a framework that will shape their careers, the companies they will lead, and the opportunities they will have to innovate and compete globally.

They want:

- Access to official, reliable EU information
- Opportunities to engage directly with EU decision-makers
- Spaces where their questions and concerns are addressed

- Clear guidance on how trade agreements affect real business operations
- A stronger, more confident Spain within the EU

Their expectations are not abstract—they are practical, grounded, and aligned with Europe's need to remain competitive in a world shaped by the US, China, and emerging global blocs.

An Innovative Academic Contribution: Bringing the Commission Closer to the University

This essay has been enriched by the reflections of students from the 3rd and 4th year of the International Business Management degree and the double degree in Law and IBM at Universidad Francisco de Vitoria (UFV). Their participation in the Trade Policy Day Madrid was part of an innovative initiative to open EU trade policy to young professionals who are already close to entering the labour market.

By giving them access to a high-level institutional forum, the event allowed them to:

- Understand how EU decisions directly affect companies and sectors
- Engage with real exporters, policymakers, and industry representatives
- Connect academic learning with the practical realities of global trade
- Develop a more informed and critical perspective on Europe's commercial strategy

Their contributions demonstrate the value of bringing the Commission closer to universities, fostering a new generation that is not only prepared but eager to participate in Europe's global positioning.

A Generation Ready to Contribute

The Trade Policy Day Madrid 2026 demonstrated that the next generation is not passive. They are ready to contribute, question, and participate in shaping Europe's commercial future.

They want Europe to be:

- More transparent
- More strategic
- More united
- More connected to its citizens

- More ambitious in defending its global position

And they want Spain to be:

- More assertive
- More present
- More influential
- More confident in its role as a European power

This essay, enriched by the contributions of UFV's students, reflects a new generation ready to engage, to question, and to help shape Europe's commercial future—reminding us that the strength of the EU's trade policy will depend not only on the decisions made today, but on the voices we empower for tomorrow.