

Running man

Ahead of this weekend's WTO meeting in Qatar, **Leo Cendrowicz** joined the EU Trade Commissioner on his daily run and found that the "smartest man in Europe" is just as fast on his feet. Question is, is he human?

Pascal Lamy is panting, sweating, gasping. It's an unusual sight; the European Union's Trade Commissioner is renowned for his intellectual rigour, forensic approach to problems and vice-like control of events. Yet even as his body struggles to cope with a brisk hour-long run and workout around the Cinquantenaire Park, his mind stays sharp and he responds to questions ranging from September 11 to globalisation to *Amélie Poulain*.

Even by the Frenchman's own workaholic standards, Lamy is exceptionally busy these days, so an interview while out running was the only option. This weekend will see him in Doha, capital of the Gulf state of Qatar, trying to persuade the rest of the world to sign up to an ambitious plan for global trade negotiations. He'll be applying all the talents that – as chief of staff to former Commission President Jacques Delors – earned him the reputation as brutal enforcer of his master's will. Outwardly the stress doesn't show, but then it would be extraordinary if it did. He was once dubbed "Delors' Exocet".

Running, Lamy says, allows him to regain his perspective and composure. "It's either a meditation or a review of what's to come and how I should handle it," he says, between carefully modulated breaths. "Lots of people say that running is boring, and that's basically true – if you have nothing on your mind."

I ask if doing an interview is messing up his routine. He laughs, a rare and welcome sound. "I can share some time," he says. "I'm not a complete machine." Whatever he says, his prodigious ability to process data suggests there may be some wiring beneath the flesh.

Unlike many runners, Lamy says he doesn't play a song in his head to main-

tain his rhythm. "I've been running long enough. I've got my rhythm, I keep my pace very precisely. I can tell whether it's 4.45 or 5.15 minutes kilometre – I don't need a watch or more." A human metronome, too.

Lamy is dedicated and driven. He approaches problems with impeccable methodology and skewers them in Cartesian logic. "I'm in the 'to do' box," he says. "I'm not in university or an academic."

He has been described as an auto and a bully: during his decade at Delors, he inspired equal measure of fear and respect. Yet none doubt

He may still be a Rottweiler, but he's our Rottweiler, says Commission official

intelligence and industry. Now his hairs are trained on targets outside Brussels, and officials are happy to hail as one of the Commission's bright stars. He may still be a Rottweiler, they say. The last criticism comes from officials unable to decipher the instructions contained in his tiny scrawl. Some describe him as a smartest man in Europe.

He needs to be. The Doha meeting of the World Trade Organisation is likely to be a chance to halt the global economic downturn by opening markets and improving export prospects. Lamy and a new set of trade talks could provide momentum needed to revive the world economy, but it's uncertain whether the prescription will be accepted by WTO's 142-nation membership.



PETER DE BRUYNE

What is the WTO?

The World Trade Organisation is the Geneva-based international body that sets trade rules for its 142 members. It is also a court, ruling on commercial disputes between countries.

Although only launched in 1995, it replaced the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the pact signed in 1948 that was one of the pillars of the so-called Bretton Woods institutions that include the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Many of the WTO's basic rules are over 50 years old, and trade officials say they urgently need updating. Until now, reforms to the global trading system have been conducted in a set of "rounds", the most recent being the 1986-1994 Uruguay Round which created the WTO and cut tariffs on a wide range of products.

Officials hope that the November 9-13 WTO ministerial in Doha, Qatar, will see another round launched, covering a broad agenda. The agenda is still under discussion, but if confirmed, it would take the WTO into areas that go far beyond just cutting tariffs. The new round could cover issues like trade in services, government procurement, intellectual property, competition policy, global investment rules and the link between trade and the environment. LC

Limbering up for Doha: Pascal Lamy after his morning run around the park

Since then, he's addressed two of the issues which bedeviled the Seattle meeting. First, the support of developing nations, essential for WTO decisions taken by consensus as these countries make up two-thirds of the membership. To this end, he has travelled the globe telling the poorer nations how trade can become their friend, and how opening up to foreign products can generate wealth and boost living standards. He put his money where his mouth was earlier this year, persuading the EU to agree a programme unilaterally offering duty-free access to imports from the world's 48 poorest states.

Secondly, the anti-globalisation movement. Lamy listened to concerns of many

of the groups involved in the demonstrations, whose campaigns are many, varied and sometimes contradictory. They raise good questions, he said, but they have the wrong answers.

Doubters of globalisation, he says, should engage in the process: globalisation is not beneficial by definition, but if we work together we can enjoy what he calls "globalisation maîtrisée".

"I am very interested in this," he says, about the growing impact of non-governmental organisations. "If I had a six-month sabbatical, I would write a book about NGOs. About how deeply coherent [the growth of NGOs] is with our economic and social system. And the so-called 'guilt business' where our societies are getting richer, older and have a lot of free time. It's natural – in our Judeo-Christian civilisation, at least – that there is a lot of guilt to be tapped. NGOs are doing this more effectively than political parties, unions and churches. The race for a market share in the guilt business is very interesting."

Lamy's antennae are finely attuned to global political trends, a fact which distinguishes him from many of his colleagues in the French Socialist Party. Although a fierce debater, Lamy has always been cosmopolitan in outlook and receptive to new ideas. Twenty years ago, at the start of his political career, when much of the French Left defined itself in terms of its antipathy for the United States, Lamy argued for market solutions inspired by American models. I put to him that his position now is close to that of British Prime Minister Tony Blair. He warns that political labels travel badly but does concede: "If the French had had a Thatcher, I probably would be not very far from Tony Blair."

His political odyssey took him through France's top schools. He is, *bien sûr*, an *énarque*, emerging second in his class from the Ecole Nationale d'Administration, the finishing school for France's top civil servants. He is also a graduate of France's leading business school, the Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales (HEC) and the Paris Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po).

After serving in the finance ministry, he joined the cabinet of then finance minister Delors in 1983, before being poached by Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy, and then rejoining Jacques Delors for the 10 years in Brussels. In 1994, he was hired by ailing French bank Crédit Lyonnais, and helped forge the strategy

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that would revive its fortunes and pave its way to privatisation.

His appointment as Trade Commissioner in 1999 astonished many onlookers. France is seen as the most protectionist member of the EU, and they expected someone with a proven track record for advocating open markets. Others saw it as a shrewd move: a Frenchman would be ideally placed to convince Paris of the need to accept such initiatives.

Euro-MP Nick Clegg, who grilled Lamy at his European Parliament confirmation hearing two years ago, says Lamy has proved his critics wrong. "He doesn't press the flesh or kiss babies, but he is highly accomplished and has a shrewd sense of the Commission's role," said Clegg. "I have a genuine sense that if a new round of trade talks is launched, he should be credited as hero."

The workout grinds on and the Commissioner is getting wistful, noting the colours of autumn creeping through the park. He recalls his first stint in Brussels, when he lived in Sint-Genesius-Rode, just one and a half minutes from his

beloved Forêt de Soignes. "It's much nicer there," he says. "The trees are gorgeous."

His passion for running started at business school when he joined the long distance relay team, occasionally winning local races. He's honest enough to admit that his best time for a marathon is an unremarkable three hours 20, some 50 minutes slower than the personal best of his opposite number – and friend – in Washington, US trade representative Robert Zoellick.

And he confesses to crankiness if he breaks the daily routine. "The problem is that if you are trained to do this, it becomes a must. And if you don't do it, it becomes a problem. It's an addiction," he says. "I like to run wherever I am. Sometimes it's the only chance I have to see where I am. It makes a huge difference if you can look at the streets instead of staying locked in a hotel."

His Spartan values resurface in a surreal moment when he spontaneously announces: "I'm a big bread fan." By now it's clear that Lamy has a unique con-

ception of life's luxuries. He continues unprompted. "I never skip a meal. If I don't have time I eat brown bread. And you can find bread, or its equivalent, anywhere in the world. Yesterday, for instance, I had this meeting in Luxembourg and I came back at lunchtime and had some bread in the car – five or six slices."

In the past, Lamy found it hard to juggle work and family, but now his three sons have left home. His wife is in Brussels when he's in town, in Paris when he's not. He rarely gets out. One of the last movies he saw was the whimsical fairy tale *Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain*, which he says was too kitsch for his liking.

As for formal dinners, he says they're a turn-off: "Getting bored at a dinner party or a meeting with people you haven't chosen," he says with a trace of anguish, as if recalling a recent, painful experience. He then leans forward and offers a conspiratorial piece of advice: "You just have to escape. Don't start screaming, just escape."