

TTIP will strengthen the EU's voice in the world

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Opinion

TTIP would help the EU reclaim growth and competitiveness, while maintaining its core values and protecting its businesses, argues Jean-Luc Demarty.



At a time when Europe faces several major challenges, it is good to know that there are also opportunities. One such opportunity is the EU's current negotiation for a new trade agreement with the US - the transatlantic trade and investment partnership (TTIP). Securing a fair and balanced result is one of commission president Jean-Claude Juncker's top priorities.

These negotiations are rightfully attracting considerable attention both from parliament and the general public. An informed public debate about trade is indeed welcome, as it would underline the enormous benefits that trade has brought to Europe and its citizens. Unfortunately, the debate about TTIP includes misunderstandings and misperceptions which often have nothing to do with reality.

So, let's establish some facts, so we can continue to have a serious conversation about trade and the talks between the EU and the US. An EU-US agreement would strengthen the EU's voice in the world. In Europe, we understand the advantages of working together to develop clear and predictable rules.

Decades of working together has embedded this spirit in the EU's DNA.

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On the global stage, Europe remains one of the biggest economic powers. But the world is changing and in the future, 90 per cent of economic growth will take place outside the EU. As our economy becomes relatively smaller, our influence in world affairs is likely to be relatively smaller, too.

Yet, the growing interdependency between economies around the world requires strengthened global rules. If the EU doesn't want to play an active role in writing those rules, we can be sure others will. The EU and the US share core values such as democracy, human rights, rule of law, regulations to protect their citizens and the environment. So, if we still want to promote our common values in the future, a transatlantic partnership will be essential.

I fully understand those who demand that we protect our European model and our values. This is also our goal.

That's why we would never negotiate a deal that would, for example, lower our strict standards on food safety, health or environmental protection. Nor will we limit the freedom of governments or local authorities to run public services, such as healthcare or education, exactly as they wish.

And we will not allow products onto the European market that don't conform to EU standards. We have never done so in the past, and we don't intend to start now - neither with TTIP nor any of the other trade agreements we are negotiating.

Furthermore, any agreement will uphold the way we pass laws in Europe. The most debated issue in this agreement is investment protection and the so-called investor-to-state dispute settlement (ISDS).

Europe is the world's largest foreign investor and recipient of foreign investment. Millions of European jobs depend on such investments. An international system that creates confidence and legal certainty is in our interest - that is why EU governments have more than 1400 such agreements in place today, including more than 100 between themselves.

Yet, the existing system is not without its flaws, and it needs to be reformed. We want to modernise investment protection and strike the right balance between the state's right to regulate and the legitimate protection of investors. That's why we have conducted a public consultation on this issue and are currently discussing the way forward with MEPs and EU governments.

The EU-US negotiations are much more transparent than any comparable trade talks. The Juncker commission and European trade commissioner Cecilia Malmström have made transparency one of their political priorities.

That's why at the end of November, the commission launched a new transparency initiative, including new measures for the TTIP negotiations. One important and unprecedented measure was to publish

EU negotiating proposals and make these accessible to everyone.

These are the negotiating texts we gave to our US counterparts. They clearly show what we do and don't want to achieve with this agreement.

We have also set up a dedicated group of independent experts who represent the interests of different stakeholders to advise our negotiating team.

Additionally, we hold regular meetings with a broad range of stakeholders, including consumer and environmental groups, trade unions and business. And, we are in constant contact with all parts of civil society so we can understand their needs, wishes and concerns.

Trade's contribution to the EU economy has never been more important than it is today. Exports outside the EU support more than 31 million jobs (which tend to be higher paid), contribute to economic growth, and help make EU firms more competitive. In 2013, the EU exported a record €2.4 trillion in goods and services.

The more we export, the more jobs we create. On average, every €1bn of extra trade means an extra 15,000 jobs in the EU. The EU suffers from slow growth and 28 million of its citizens are unemployed - clearly this is an opportunity we cannot ignore.

The challenges facing Europe today are serious, and TTIP is part of a serious response to those challenges. A successful outcome of the talks will send a powerful signal that the EU and the US are ready to uphold and promote the values that have shaped our success and that we are committed to ensuring our economies remain competitive in a rapidly changing world. Let's make sure that we seize that opportunity.

About the author

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