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Controversies around the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

Abstract: Negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership between the European Union and the United States have been in progress since 2013. The European Commission published the first document on the status of negotiations one year later. The main aim of this paper is to present TTIP as a very controversial agreement, both in the view of scholars and the international public. Negotiations behind closed doors, the growing democratic deficit, the investor-state dispute resolution mechanism (ISDS), and the European Citizens' Initiative "Stop TTIP" are the most important issues in the public debate on the transatlantic agreement.

Key words: TTIP, controversies, ISDS, European Union, mysterious trade agreement

Introduction

In 2013, the European Union and the United States embarked on a new stage of cooperation embodied by an ambitious project to enter into a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). At present, after fifteen negotiation rounds, it can be said that arriving at the final agreement is clearly going to be extremely difficult. The scale of this endeavor can be envisaged when looking at the two regions which are the greatest global economic powers.¹ Given that the United States and the European Union are each other's major trade partners, it seems justified to enter into TTIP.

The fundamental research questions posed in this paper are as follows. Is TTIP really a mysterious trade agreement we don't know much about? Should this agreement arouse international controversies, and does it pose a threat to the EU? These questions seem justified, inasmuch as the scope of the agreement includes access to goods and services markets, among

¹ The three largest global economic powers are the United States, China and the European Union. The economies of the US and EU combined account for half of global GDP, and the number of consumers amounts to ca. 800 million.

other things, which will have a direct impact on us – consumers. In 2014, EU exports to the US amounted to EUR 311 billion, accounting for 18% of total EU exports. The US supplied goods worth EUR 205 billion, which accounted for 12% of EU imports (Szejnfeld, 2016). It should be noted that even today customs duties between the EU and the US are at a very low level (under 2% on average), therefore the main purpose of TTIP is to reduce non-tariff barriers.

The aim of this paper is to present TTIP as a trade agreement which arouses numerous controversies among scholars and the international public. The main reason for discussions on the agreement is its mysterious character. The controversial nature of the agreement will additionally be presented by referring to such activities as the European Citizens' Initiative "Stop TTIP," the investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) mechanism and democracy deficit.

What is TTIP?

The initiative to commence negotiations in the field of trade and investment between the US and the EU was first announced in 2013 by the then US President Barack Obama in the *State of the Union address*. Prior to this, the EU and the US established a special working group (High Level Working Group on Jobs and Growth, HLWG) composed of government experts who were to determine a political strategy and measures to increase EU–US trade exchange and investment so as to ensure job creation in both the EU and the US. A joint agreement was reached by the working group that such a comprehensive agreement would bring enormous benefits to both regions (triggering economic growth, first and foremost). Such agreements are theoretically justified by the theory of trade creation,² which envisages that trade turnover between participants of an integrated group increases owing to liberalization of trade exchange between them. Adam Budnikowski writes in his book *Międzynarodowe sto-*

² Additionally, it also produces a diversion effect in international trade whereby low-cost commodities imported from third countries are replaced by duty-free commodities imported from parties to the agreement. In his publication *Tradycyjne i nowe kierunki rozwoju handlu międzynarodowego* [Traditional and new directions in the development of international trade] K. Starzyk emphasizes that while trade creation will produce considerable benefits in EU-US relations, the trade-diversion effect will have an actual impact on third countries. In the long run, TTIP might cause reduced exports of third countries, such as China.

sunki gospodarcze [International business relations] that “the outcomes of trade creation to some extent oppose the mechanism of customs duty” (Budnikowski, 2006, p. 267). Yet TTIP refers to lifting not only tariff barriers, but also non-tariff barriers.

The main premise of the agreement is to create a free trade zone between the EU and the US. The scope of the agreement encompasses three areas:

- 1) market access (public procurement, goods, services and investments);
- 2) non-tariff barriers and regulatory issues;
- 3) international trade rules (possible amenities, raw materials and energy, competition policy, SMEs, intellectual property rights, and so on) (Ministerstwo Rozwoju, 2016).

On behalf of the EU, the agreement is negotiated by the European Commission in the EU’s Trade Policy Committee of the EU Council, which has received a negotiating mandate from member states.³ The parties are represented by the EU Commissioner for Trade and United States Trade Representative (USTR), respectively.

The first negotiation round was held in Washington, in July 2013. The negotiations were initially assumed to last one year and be concluded by the end of 2014.⁴ After the first round, both parties were quite enthusiastic about the negotiations. Chief US negotiator, Daniel Mullaney said that they were talking about a win-win agreement both the US and the EU would benefit from. The common goal was greater economic growth on both sides of the Atlantic, supporting new jobs and international competition (Czerna, 2013). The EU negotiator described the talks as productive (Czerna, 2013). Yet it is worth bearing in mind that this was mainly an

³ The negotiating mandate is an instruction given by member states to the European Commission specifying what issues may or should be raised during the negotiations, as well as identifying areas that should not be negotiated. The negotiating mandate for TTIP provides for the following: mutual liberalization of trade in goods and services (increased level of trade and investment between the EU and US) through lifting customs duties, mutual recognition of professional standards, investment liberalization and protection, increasing mutual access and public procurement on all administrative levels and in the field of public utilities, removing current non-tariff barriers and ensuring protection and recognition of geographical indications. Additionally, EU principles and values have to be maintained and sustainable development has to be an overarching objective. TTIP must not breach the linguistic and cultural diversity of the EU, or legislation of the EU, or member states.

⁴ This expectation was not fulfilled. The last negotiation round took place in October 2016 and it was not the final meeting where the partnership agreement would be signed.

organizational round. Every successive round of negotiations posed new questions that were not answered in an unambiguous manner. New areas were negotiated that aroused increasing controversies and emotions. As many as 15 rounds of negotiations have been held since July 2013, bringing no progress at all.⁵ Enthusiasm has dropped and many new fears and hopes have been aroused.

So far, the US and the EU have exchanged thirty negotiation drafts. Joint work has started on the content of chapters on SMEs, technical barriers to trade, dispute settlement, customs cooperation and facilitating trade, state companies, services and sanitary and phytosanitary measures, among other things. A joint standpoint is still being negotiated in other areas (Ministerstwo Rozwoju, 2016).

Negotiations behind closed doors

TTIP is commonly described as a project which is as enormous as it is mysterious. The negotiations have been running for four years now and very little is known about the state of affairs. Such limited available information may be an outcome of keeping the whole negotiation process secret, but it may also result from a lack of interest from the media in this relatively difficult topic. When a successive round of negotiations ends, for a short time the media talk about nothing else but the outcomes of TTIP when it eventually enters into force, but the media do not consistently endeavor to obtain more information. Trade agreements are not interesting to the media, unfortunately.

The most frequent accusation made of TTIP negotiations is their lack of transparency. The negotiating mandate member states gave to the European Commission was for a long time unavailable to public opinion, raising many concerns. Therefore, in October 2014, member states agreed to make the mandate public to mitigate emotions. This has turned out not to be sufficient. EU citizens want to be kept informed about the course of negotiations of such a crucial agreement that will eventually have an impact on their everyday lives, and to be able to respond as need arises.

The European Commission dismisses the accusations of the lack of transparency and points to weekly meetings held with representatives of

⁵ This round is believed not to have been very productive because the US was waiting for the results of presidential elections while the EU was preoccupied with the comprehensive economic and trade agreement with Canada (CETA).

EU member states and the European Parliament for the purpose of consulting its negotiation positions and concrete proposals of provisions in the agreement. Additionally, a Twitter account has been set up dedicated to TTIP, meetings are organized with representatives of labor unions and other social groups active in the EU, and an advisory group has been established to ensure direct contact with the chief negotiator. The final agreement is to be signed following a similar procedure as in the case of the EU-Canadian agreement (CETA), when the European Commission published the text of the agreement before it was subjected to analysis by European and Canadian lawyers and translated into the 24 official EU languages. After lawyers reviewed the text, the Commission forwarded it to the Council and the European Parliament for ratification. This allowed public opinion to see for itself the details of the agreement to be signed (European Commission, 2016).

The greatest problem with the transparency of the agreement pertains to US demands to ease or abandon a number of regulations. Neither the governments of member states nor public opinion have access to these documents. This is also the case in the US, where members of the US Congress cannot become familiar with the demands the EU makes of the US. It is also highly controversial that corporate advisors of the US government have access to negotiation positions and they will be able to present them to their European counterparts.

The fact that negotiations of one of the biggest trade agreements are held behind closed doors and they lack transparency clearly justifies naming TTIP a ‘mysterious trade agreement.’ Never before have negotiations of any trade agreement been kept so secret. This is mainly explained by the need to observe trade secrecy, and fears for information leaks that could be taken advantage of by China, among others. Nevertheless, this conduct raises concerns. Both social activists and the European Parliament oppose this mode of operation. MEPs have voiced concerns that they cannot have any influence on the content of the agreement because they are not sufficiently informed about the progress of negotiations.

Democracy deficit

The EU democracy deficit is defined as the difference between how power is exercised in a member state and the institutional system of the European

Union. The latter does not follow the classic model of tripartite separation of powers (implemented in nation-states) into legislative (parliament), executive (head of state) and judicial (courts of justice) power, which is a distinctive feature of democratic systems (Wojtaszczyk, Szymańska, 2012, p. 15).

The issue of the democracy deficit in the European Union did not emerge in relation to TTIP negotiations. The EU has been struggling with it for many years. The first symptoms appeared in the 1990s (Klaus, 2004) when European integration was gaining momentum. We are faced by a democracy deficit on the one hand and a constant need to enhance democracy on the other, which is the outcome of different competences of nation-states being transferred to the supra-national level, further enlargement of integration structures and the feeling that citizens have no influence over EU institutions.

It has to be clearly stated that democracy in the European Union is poorly consolidated, which results from the absence of a single vision of EU development. The democracy deficit follows from the lack of control over EU structures and authorities, and also from the lack of accountability for decisions they make. The crucial question that needs to be asked, however, is whether it is possible to forge EU democracy despite the tensions between national identities and the identity of the community (EU) (Czachór, 2012).

Being a trade agreement, TTIP is negotiated by the European Commission, which has been empowered by the Treaty of Lisbon, where competences to run trade policy are deemed to be communitarian. This, however, deprives citizens of the possibility to check and influence the negotiation process. Negotiations are conducted by representatives of private companies, banks and corporations, instead of citizens. According to Global.LAB (a think-tank dealing with international affairs), for every meeting the European Commission held on TTIP with representatives of public interest, there were twenty sessions with business lobbyists, and as many as 600 of them were appointed as official advisors to the US government's delegation (Stierle, Traczyk, 2015, p. 3).

The lack of transparency of TTIP negotiations certainly contributes to the growing democracy deficit in the EU. Insufficient information for the public and involving representatives of the biggest corporations in the negotiations may ultimately result in an agreement which is beneficial only to the latter and considerably deteriorates social sentiments in the EU.

The European Citizens' Initiative "Stop TTIP"

One year after the first TTIP negotiation round, in 2014, an international coalition against the transatlantic agreement was established. On July 15, 2014, a request was submitted to the European Commission to register the 47th European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) "Stop TTIP." The initiative brought together 148 organizations from 18 EU countries. It was adamantly rejected by the European Commission on the grounds of doubtful legal foundations. The case was further submitted to the European Court of Justice where it is pending. The authors of the initiative did not surrender and, despite rejection by the EC, resolved to follow the ECI procedure independently, while observing all the official requirements. It took them one year to collect 3,284,289 signatures, reaching the country quorum⁶ in 23 member states (European Initiative against TTIP and CETA, <https://stop-ttip.org/>). Had the European Commission accepted the initiative, it would have succeeded.

Supporters of the "Stop TTIP" initiative demand that the EC's negotiating mandate be repealed. They also urged the authorities not to enter into a comprehensive economic agreement with Canada (CETA). Their main reason for rejecting the agreement with the US is the mystery surrounding the entire venture, and the fact that the agreement will influence EU citizens, who have no say about its shape. They also vehemently criticize the state-investor dispute settlement system⁷ that the agreement will provide for.

Despite having fulfilled the official requirements, the ECI does not enjoy sufficient political support to exert any impact on the negotiators' decisions. Rejection of the ECI is doubtlessly a reason for citizens to be concerned, as it shows that the European Commission is increasingly abandoning democratic principles in the negotiations on the transatlantic partnership. The ECI inspired hopes that participatory democracy still existed and citizens would have an influence on decisions made. The collection of one million signatures under an initiative enables EU citizens to request that the Commission make a legislative proposal and to have the

⁶ The country quorum is the minimum number of signatures which have to be gathered in at least seven EU member states for a successful ECI. The minimum number of signatures required for an ECI is determined by the EU in correspondence with the number of MEPs delegated by a given country.

⁷ The Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) is discussed in the following section of this paper.

European Parliament examine such an initiative. In this case, the European Commission finds participatory democracy irrelevant, thereby undermining its declaration that the distance between the Commission and the EU and citizens should be reduced. The EU is striving to win EU citizens' trust in its institutions, but such conduct clearly defies such attempts.

Investor-state dispute settlement mechanism – ISDS

Another controversy related to TTIP concerns greater powers granted to investors. Certain provisions in the agreement provide for an investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) mechanism. Its original assumption was to ensure that investors from developed countries are not ousted from economically weaker countries where they do business and where judicial systems are not credible enough. At present, however, corporations use this mechanism to claim damages from states that introduce new regulations which may reduce the profits of those corporations or when they are not treated fairly or favorably.⁸ In practice, corporations have obtained a powerful instrument allowing them to discipline states, especially economically weaker ones, to enforce an economic or social policy that is in line with corporate interests.

Disputes are settled by arbitration courts⁹ appointed *ad hoc*, when a case needs to be settled. The most popular arbitration courts include the World Bank's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) and United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL). The investor chooses the arbitration court. The arbiters come from big legal offices whose main focus is profit (it is often emphasized that arbitration courts are far from independent, because they strongly support investor interests). Such lawyers do not have to act as

⁸ E.g., Egypt was sued for introducing a minimum wage, Australia – for health warnings it introduced on cigarette packs, Greece – for debt restructuring during the crisis in the eurozone, Ecuador – for withdrawing a concession for extraction of oil in the Amazon from a law-breaking company, Germany – for abandoning nuclear energy, and Canada – for a moratorium on fracking (extracting gas from shale deposits by a mixture of water, sand and chemicals under high pressure) introduced for fear of causing environmental damage.

⁹ Arbitration courts are independent from ordinary courts and their judgments have the same legal force. Arbitration proceedings are conducted in one instance only, thereby being much simpler and less formalized. Arbiters (judges) are jointly appointed by the parties.

judges and may defend one of the parties to the dispute (Oręziak, 2015). Practice shows that states stand little chance of winning against corporations, therefore they withdraw changes to legislation in order to avoid penalties amounting to billions of dollars. Both the initiation of the procedure and its entire course are kept secret if any of the parties requests so. In practice, proceedings before an arbitration court are always secret and public opinion is never able to learn what amounts a corporation has 'sucked' out of the state budget.

The United States urges for the ISDS mechanism to be introduced within TTIP. There are even opinions that it is so crucial for the US that it will not sign an agreement that does not include the mechanism. The US hosts the biggest global corporations. Their pressure to acquire the ISDS mechanism raises concerns about possible actions which US enterprises may take in relation to EU states. Judiciaries in the EU are relatively efficient which makes investors want the ISDS mechanism included in the agreement even more. EU states introduce new regulations conforming to democratic principles and in accordance with their constitutions. Claims made by foreign corporations would most likely be dismissed. Having arbitration courts settle disputes gives corporations much greater chances of winning.

European institutions very often stress that arbitration courts have operated for a long time. This should not be a reason to maintain this practice, though. Having been used for a long time, arbitration courts have provided corporations with considerable power, enabling them to expand at the expense of states and their citizens. Public pressure has led negotiators to rename ISDS the Investment Court System, or ICS, which will mean only highly qualified judges can adjudicate. This, however, will not eliminate the greatest threat of corporations suing a state before an arbitration court whenever they deem that their profits are smaller than assumed due to political reasons.

Having operated for a long time, the operation of the ISDS mechanism can be analyzed. Over a period of 20 years, 20 EU countries were sued by investors 127 times. Nine EU member states (including Poland) have signed agreements with the US including an ISDS clause. The organization "Friends of Europe" developed a report titled "The hidden costs of EU trade deals" according to which sued EU countries have paid EUR 3.5 billion to big corporations. This amount accounts for only 14 out of the 127 cases, because the remaining ones remain secret. The lowest compensation amounted to EUR 65,000 and concerned the Czech Repub-

lic, the biggest one, PLN 9 billion (ca. EUR 2 billion), was paid by Poland.¹⁰ Claims for damages are most often filed against new EU members. According to the report's findings, the Czech Republic has been sued 27 times. The claims most commonly concern environmental protection, extraction of raw materials, nuclear energy, mines, food production or waste management (Ratajczak, 2016).

Conclusions

Supporters of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership see it as an opportunity for the EU's economic development. A free trade zone to be established between the EU and the US may stimulate economic growth of both regions. Nevertheless, numerous provisions of the agreement and the method of its negotiation arouse considerable controversies. Keeping such an important agreement secret gives birth to many ungrounded beliefs about its content and triggers growing concerns about TTIP in society.

One of the threats Europe may face due to the agreement is greater disparities between the EU-28. Germany is the US's largest economic partner in the EU (accounting for 28% of EU exports to the US and 25% of EU imports from the US in 2011) and it is believed to benefit most from TTIP, alongside several other big states trading with the US (Ambroziak, 2013, p. 187). This is why Germany is a strong supporter of TTIP. Smaller EU states which do not collaborate with the US may find their domestic markets unable to cope with the influx of US goods, and their SMEs unable to stand up to the pressure from big corporations given a free hand in the territories of these countries.

A report published in 2014 by Jeronimo Capaldo identifies primarily negative outcomes of TTIP. Increased GDP and exports may result in the loss of at least 600,000 jobs in EU countries. Capaldo undermined models showing the benefits of entering into TTIP by referring to NAFTA. NAFTA was supposed to ensure rapid economic growth but brought a loss of 900,000 jobs in the US and the closure of 300,000 family businesses in Mexico.

The agreement is being negotiated by the two greatest economic and political powers which will certainly not allow the other party to impose

¹⁰ Eureko vs. Poland, 2003, a Dutch company, Eureko sued Poland after it refused to complete the privatization of PZU (a state-owned insurance company).

its own solutions. It seems highly unlikely that the agreement will not be signed, both for image-related (a terrible example for EU and US negotiations with other countries) and economic reasons (EU–US relations are mainly based on investment). The agreement has not been signed so far, which offers a wide range of opportunities to exert influence on the ultimate outcome of negotiations.

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Kontrowersje wokół umowy Transatlantyckiego Partnerstwa w dziedzinie Handlu i Inwestycji

Streszczenie

Transatlantyckie porozumienie w dziedzinie handlu i inwestycji pomiędzy Unią Europejską a USA jest negocjowane od 2013 roku. Komisja Europejska opublikowała pierwszy dokument dotyczący stanu negocjacji nad TTIP dopiero rok później. Celem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie TTIP jako umowy handlowej budzącej wiele kontrowersji wśród badaczy a także wśród członków społeczności międzynarodowej. Negocjacje za zamkniętymi drzwiami, narastający deficyt demokracji, mechanizm

rozstrzygania sporów pomiędzy inwestorami a państwem ISDS a także Europejska Inicjatywa Obywatelska „Stop TTIP” to najważniejsze zagadnienia, wokół których toczy się obecnie debata publiczna dotycząca porozumienia transatlantyckiego.

Słowa kluczowe: TTIP, kontrowersje, ISDS, Unia Europejska, tajemnicza umowa handlowa

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