

The US-EU Transatlantic Free Trade Agreement (TAFTA): Big Business Corporate Power Grab

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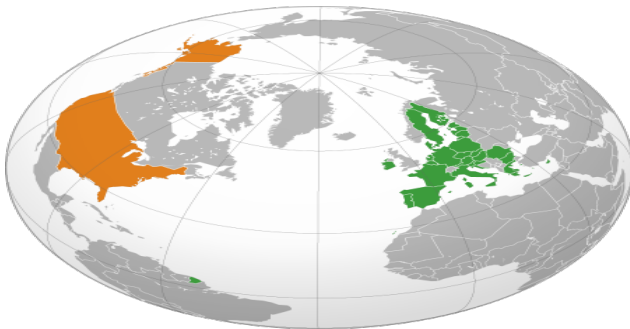
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Region: [Europe](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#)

The Transatlantic Free Trade Agreement (TAFTA) between the US and EU intends to create the world's largest free trade area, 'protect' investment and remove 'unnecessary regulatory barriers'. Corporate interests are driving the agenda, with the public having been sidelined. Unaccountable, pro-free-trade bureaucrats from both sides of the Atlantic are facilitating the strategy (1)

In addition to the biotech sector and Big Pharma, groups lobbying for the deal have included Toyota, General Motors, IBM and the powerful lobby group the Chamber of Commerce of the US. Business Europe, the main organisation representing employers in Europe, launched its own strategy on an EU-US economic and trade partnership in early 2012. Its suggestions were widely included in the draft EU mandate.



An increasing number of politicians and citizens groups have criticised the secretive negotiations and are demanding that they be conducted in an open way. This is growing concern that the negotiations could result in the opening of the floodgates for GMOs and shale gas (fracking) in Europe, the threatening of digital and labour rights or the empowering of corporations to legally challenge a wide range of regulations which they dislike.

One of the key aspects of the negotiations is that both the EU and US should recognise their respective rules and regulations, which in practice could reduce regulation to the lowest common denominator. The official language talks of 'mutual recognition' of standards or so-called reduction of non-tariff barriers. For the EU, that could mean accepting US standards in many areas, including food and agriculture, which are lower than the EU's.

The US wants all so-called barriers to trade, including controversial regulations such as those protecting agriculture, food or data privacy, to be removed. Even the leaders of the Senate Finance Committee, in a letter to U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk, made it clear that any agreement must reduce EU restrictions on genetically modified crops, chlorinated

chickens and hormone-treated beef.

The public in Europe does not want such things. People want powerful corporations to be held to account and their practices regulated by elected representatives who they trust to protect their interests, the public good. However, the TAFTA seems an ideal opportunity for corporations to force wholly unpopular and dangerous policies through via secretive, undemocratic means. They have been unable to do this in a democratic and transparent manner, so secret back room deals represent a different option.

Corporate demands include an “ambitious liberalisation of agricultural trade barriers with as few exceptions as possible.” Food lobby group Food and Drink Europe, representing the largest food companies (Unilever, Kraft, Nestlé, etc.), has welcomed the negotiations, with one of their key demands being the facilitation of the low level presence of unapproved genetically modified crops. This is a long-standing industry agenda also supported by feed and grain trading giants, including Cargill, Bunge, ADM and the big farmers’ lobby COPA-COGECA. Meanwhile, the biotech industry on both sides of the Atlantic is offering [its](#) “support and assistance as the EU and the US government look to enhance their trade relationship.”

New Report

If the pro-free-market bureaucrats and corporations get their way and successfully bar the public from any kind of meaningful information input into the world’s biggest trade deal ever to be negotiated, Europeans could end up becoming the victims of one of the biggest corporate stitch ups ever. Left unchallenged, it will allow huge private interests to dig their profiteering snouts into the trough of corporate greed at the expense of ordinary people.

And that’s not hyperbole. Such a view is confirmed by the release of a new report on the eve of the second round of negotiations that are due to begin in Brussels next week.

The report, published by the Seattle to Brussels Network (S2B) (2), reveals the true human and environmental costs of the proposed TAFTA. ‘A Brave New Transatlantic Partnership’ highlights how the European Commission’s promises of up to 1% GDP growth and massive job creation through the EU-US trade deal are not supported even by its own studies, which predict a growth rate of just 0.01% GDP over the next ten years and the potential loss of jobs in several economic sectors, including agriculture.

The report also explains how corporations are lobbying EU-US trade negotiators to use the deal to weaken food safety, labour, health and environmental standards as well as undermine digital rights. Attempts to strengthen banking regulation in the face of the financial crisis could also be jeopardised as the financial lobby uses the secretive trade negotiations to undo financial reforms, such as restrictions on the total value of financial transactions or the legal form of its operations.

Kim Bizzarri, the author of the report:

“Big business lobbies on both sides of the Atlantic view the secretive trade negotiations as a weapon for getting rid of policies aimed at protecting European and US consumers, workers and our planet. If their corporate wish-list is implemented, it will concentrate even more economic and political power within the hands of a small elite, leaving all of us without protection from corporate wrongdoings.”

The report also warns that the agreement could open the floodgate to multi-million Euro lawsuits from corporations who can challenge democratic policies at international tribunals if they interfere with their profits.

Pia Eberhardt, trade campaigner with Corporate Europe Observatory and author of 'A transatlantic corporate bill of rights':

"The proposed investor rights in the transatlantic trade deal show what it is really about: It's a power grab from corporations to rein in democracy and handcuff governments that seek to regulate in the public interest. It's only a matter of time before European citizens start paying the price in higher taxes and diminished social protection."

Consumer watchdogs, digital rights and trade activists, environmentalists and trade unions are preparing to fight the corporate dystopia put forward in the EU-US trade deal.

Luis Rico of Ecologistas en Acción, a member of the Seattle to Brussels network:

"We hope that the disturbing evidence we provide will show why all concerned citizens and parliamentarians on both sides of the Atlantic need to urgently mobilise against the proposed EU-US trade deal. We have to derail this corporate power grab that threatens to worsen the livelihood of the millions of people already seriously affected by the financial crisis and by the crippling consequences of Europe's austerity reforms."

Do we want increasingly bad and unhealthy food, our rights at work being further eroded, the environment being damaged in the chase for profit, ever greater reckless gambling in the financial sector or our elected representatives being by-passed via international tribunals? Of course we don't.

Where is the democracy surrounding this proposed TAFTA? Where is ordinary people's protection from the 'free' market corporate-financial cabals that ultimately drive global economic policy and geo-political strategies? By translating corporate power into political influence at the G8, G20, WTO, NATO or elsewhere, whether it is by war, threats, debts or coercion, secretive and undemocratic free trade agreements are but one tool that very powerful corporations use in an attempt to cast the world in their own image (3,4).

The TAFTA is little more than an attempt at a corporate power grab masquerading as something that promotes growth, freedom, harmony and job creation. Those claims are bogus. It must be stopped

Please note: More concerns from environmental and consumer groups will be raised in a press conference on Monday, 7 October, 11am in the International Press Center, Résidence Palace, in Brussels. On Tuesday, 8 November, 9am, a protest stunt will take place in front of the Berlaymont building, 200 Rue de la Loi, Brussels.

Contact francesca.gater@foeeurope.org for further information.

Notes

- 1) <http://www.globalresearch.ca/us-eu-free-trade-agreement-a-corporate-stitch-up-by-any-other-name/5339789>
- 2) The [Seattle to Brussels Network](#) (S2B) includes development, environmental, human rights, women and farmers organisations, trade unions and social movements working together for a truly sustainable, just and democratic trade policy in Europe. Corporate Europe Observatory is one of its members.
- 3) <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-great-eu-india-corporate-heist-uncovering-the-free-trade-agenda/5342267>
- 4) <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-eu-india-free-trade-agreement-corporate-driven-neocolonial-plunder/5338049>

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