

Influencing EU policy on international trade agreements

LSE's International Trade Policy Unit provided expert analysis on trade agreements for the European Parliament's International Trade Committee

What was the problem?

Preferential trade and investment agreements have proliferated over the last twenty years.

The European Parliament (EP) has enhanced powers in the field of trade and investment since the application of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. This means more attention and lobbying is focused on the MEPs.

It is therefore important that MEPs are provided with balanced, objective and expert information of the costs and benefits of trade and investment decisions they take.

Businesses have also needed such research to be able to make fully-informed decisions on trade issues, including how to deal with, and reconcile, the demands of complex and frequently conflicting trade agreements.

What did we do?

LSE established the International Trade Policy Unit (ITPU) in 1999 to provide a link between academic research and policy in the field of international trade.

Led by Dr Stephen Woolcock and funded by, amongst others, the UK Department of Trade and Industry and the European Union, LSE academics and visiting fellows with many years experience in trade policy published a range of contributions in the field of trade, including a comparative analysis of the differing approaches to preferential trade agreements by the EU and the United States in particular. Woolcock also produced the first in-depth study of EU economic diplomacy.

As a result, ITPU won the contract to provide expert analysis for the European Parliament's International Trade Policy Committee. It coordinated a consortium of research institutions across the EU, which has produced 32 research studies and workshops in 14 different policy areas between 2010 and 2014 for the previous European Parliament, and which has won a further

- The need to agree the best way to manage the transition from individual member state treaties to EU-wide agreements.

Through this study ITPU was able to play a significant role in framing the parameters of the debate on the scope of European investment policy.

The ITPU-led consortium was also able to influence the content of debate in the European Parliament. For example, after the Doha Development Agenda negotiations on multilateral trade within the World Trade Organisation (WTO) were suspended, the ITPU proposed a workshop at the European Parliament, held in May 2012, that brought together key policy-makers to discuss a unified European position on the future of plurilateral agreements as a means of overcoming difficulties at the multilateral level of negotiations.

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