

The influence of Public Opinion in the EU Trade Negotiations:

How did Civil Society Politicize the TTIP?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between 2013 and 2016, the European Union and the United States engaged in negotiations for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). The TTIP promised a massive boost to growth and jobs while enabling the Western “heavy-weights” to set the standards for the 21st century.

This would have been the largest bilateral trade agreement ever negotiated. However, negotiations quickly became politicized and generated an unprecedented contestation across Europe. A broad alliance of civil society organizations (CSOs) intensely rejected the agreement for its contents and for the conditions under which it was born.

Civil society organizations spread the message that the TTIP meant to sacrifice European values and standards. These actors feared an attack on democracy by curtailing governments’ policy space, a lowering of hard-won rules and standards that protect the environment, consumers, and workers—all by negotiating in total secrecy. They attempted to persuade citizens that the TTIP would have affected product safety, public policies, and democracy.

As a result, a large opposition emerged across Europe, though it was concentrated in the western half of the European continent and the UK.

Trade policy is commonly perceived and presented as a complex and a merely technical policy domain, far from public debate and interest. However, the TTIP negotiations aroused emotions and captured the attention of a large part of public opinion across Europe. What explains this outcome?

Building upon the growing literature of factors that influenced the public opinion, this thesis investigates the dynamics of the “politicization” of the TTIP and examines how civil society organizations succeeded in leading a public mobilization campaign. This shifted the public opinion and in turn affected policy decisions.

Mobilization for the defense of European rules and standards led to the gradual framing of an opposition that had decisive influence on the European institutions’ actions. The well-organized campaign conducted by European CSOs succeeded in raising the salience of the TTIP selecting specific issues (democracy, food standards, and so on) to simplify and emphasize. Once salience was raised and public opinion mobilized, other groups joined the mobilization, creating a snowball effect.

This research contributes to an overall better understanding of the public opinion toward the TTIP, trade policy attitudes, and public opinion in general.

Keywords: trade policy; TTIP; civil society organizations; lobbying; EU; politicization

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Choice of the TTIP

Negotiations for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the European Union (EU) and the United States began in 2013 and aimed to create the world's most ambitious trade agreement between the world's two largest economies (Young A. R., 2017).

When the negotiations were launched, expectations were high for achieving a swift and ambitious agreement by the end of 2014 “on one tank of gas” (United States Trade Representative (USTR), 2013).

The TTIP was initially welcomed by European national parliaments and supported by transnational business interests. Firms on both sides of the Atlantic were not only in favor of an agreement but also in many cases adopted, except for agriculture, joint proposals on the terms they sought to see (Young A. R., 2016). Furthermore, labor unions were not particularly opposed to the agreement.

Negotiations, however, ran into political headwinds. The TTIP captured an unprecedented level of engagement by non-traditional trade actors—consumers and environmental groups and citizens.

The StopTTIP Coalition, a movement of more than 500 European civil society organizations, emerged as one of the main opponents of the agreement. They succeeded in putting advocates of the TTIP on the defensive and moving the issue up the political and public agendas. Civil society organizations politicized the TTIP as they mounted their opposition campaign, focusing on the selected issues and framing their arguments in ways to influence public opposition and, indirectly, policy-makers and public officials.

At the same time, the European Union was conducting many bilateral and multilateral negotiations, including with India and ASEAN, and signed the EU-South Korea Free Trade Agreement in 2009. They had largely gone unnoticed or discussed by business associations and transnational corporations; however, the TTIP appeared to be different.

Throughout the different rounds of negotiations, the agreement faced fierce opposition from tens of thousands of citizens and civil society organizations. As a result, the TTIP has become one of the most controversial projects discussed at the EU level in recent years (Oleart, 2018).

As of the 15th round of negotiations in October 2016, the talks had been stalled. Finally, in November 2016, after more than three years of discussions, European Trade Commissioner Malmström declared the negotiations to be frozen (Euractiv, Malmström: EU-US trade deal ‘frozen’ after Trump vote, 11 November, 2016): “For quite some time TTIP will probably be in the freezer [...] I think we should be realistic. I don’t see the resumption of any TTIP negotiation for quite a long time” (Blenkinsop, 2016).

Negotiations between the two largest economies in the world would certainly be difficult, but according to many commentators, the large civil society contestation has played a central role in bringing the TTIP to a standstill.

The case of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership is particularly interesting for two reasons. First is the strong public resistance to the agreement, particularly in those countries that would have seemingly benefitted most from the agreement (e.g., the United Kingdom and Germany). This is in marked contrast to past bilateral trade agreements, which mostly received only limited media coverage and were hardly contested in public.

Second, I consider the TTIP to be an important case study for analyzing the capacity of CSOs to mobilize and influence public opinion on European issues. The transnational campaign against the TTIP succeeded in mobilizing significant public opposition against the agreement over time, from the announcement of the negotiations (February 2013) until the negotiations were frozen (November 2016).

1.2 Research question and rationale

This research aims to investigate how CSOs succeeded in making the TTIP a topic of public interest. Mobilization against the TTIP can not only be explained by looking at the content of this agreement, but it is also important to analyze the rhetorical underpinning of the TTIP discourse and the strategies used by civil society organizations to influence public opinion.

This research seeks to address the following specific question:

RQ: How did civil society organizations bring the TTIP into the public domain?

To answer this question I use primary sources, semi-structured interviews with key representatives of the anti-TTIP movement, direct observation,¹ and secondary sources.

I analyze how an initially small group of CSOs raised the saliency of TTIP negotiations, successfully convinced the public in some European countries to oppose the agreement, and ultimately impacted decisions made by the EU's legislative and executive institutions. How did they succeed?

Interest groups often attempt to shape the public salience of issues and the stance that people adopt. They can employ a variety of methods to convince the public to identify with a specific position.

I argue that CSOs had a real impact on how TTIP negotiations were perceived by the public. This research focuses specifically on the frames constructed and advanced by

¹ During the TTIP negotiations, I worked as policy advisor for a Belgium political party. In my role of policy advisor I was in charge of European affairs and in particular EU trade policy. The personal observation is linked to the participation to several meetings with key stakeholders at national and European levels, monitoring of media coverage and the parliamentary works, and coordination of a working group on this topic.

CSOs and, in particular, Stop TTIP campaign organizers and the strategy they used to bring the TTIP into the public domain and generate an attention cascade.

I explain the success of the anti-TTIP campaign by demonstrating how CSOs managed to increase the public salience of the issue in the public's mind, how the increasing public salience motivated a growing number of CSOs to mobilize, and how the resulting dynamic made decision-makers opt to freeze the negotiations.

Moreover, I reveal that the public salience of the TTIP sharply increased at the peak of the TTIP campaign, in the autumn of 2015, when the anti-TTIP campaign engaged in a considerable amount of outside lobbying, and that the increasing salience of the issue thereby caused a large number of interest groups to mobilize against the agreement.

The theoretical starting point of the analysis is the literature on interest groups' influence and politicization. Politicization is a process that entails a public, visible, and discursive expansion of the scope of conflict, leading to the opening of a realm of legitimacy contestation.

Scholars refer to politicization in which the views of an expanding number of actors become publicly salient and polarized (De Bruycker, 2017). The more salient the issue, the more actors and people participate in the debate, the more the positions are polarized, and the more politicized a decision or institution is.

Trade is increasingly perceived as important for our daily lives, which increasingly causes political parties, civil society organizations, and citizens alike to question the legitimacy of this far-reaching policy domain. The anti-TTIP mobilization demonstrates that trade is no longer the exclusive domain of economic experts and practitioners in the field but is politicized by a broader public.

Research on TTIP contestation identifies the new trade agreements, with their emphasis on rules and regulations, as a key explanatory factor. However, the EU had begun a modern trade agreement before the TTIP. I argue that the well-organized pan-European anti-TTIP campaign contributed to politicization. Civil society organizations mobilized indignation by making deliberate strategic choices and focusing on issues amenable to rising fear; they therefore acted as instigators of politicization.

This thesis contributes to understanding how interest groups can mobilize and influence public opinion by revealing correlations between campaigns, public opinion, and developments in the TTIP. Furthermore, it offers insights into the expanding research on the politicization of trade agreements.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This study contains five chapters. The second chapter introduces the theoretical framework, which draws upon theories on interest group strategies, trade policy, and public opinion. The approach used draws upon Dür and Mateo (2014), whose study on

ACTA, Anti-Counterfeiting Agreement,² is deemed a good template for assessing interest groups' impact on the TTIP.

In this chapter, I review the various strategies used by interest groups to influence public opinion. The dynamics of outside lobbying and politicization provide the necessary theoretical explanation for analyzing TTIP contestation. I identify framing and outside lobbying as crucial "conflict expansion" determinants and therefore might be linked to the politicization of the negotiations.

The third chapter provides a brief background of the TTIP and describes the anti-TTIP campaign and the main actors involved. Then, the chapter continues by analyzing the main criticisms raised by civil society organizations.

The fourth chapter applies the theoretical framework to provide a concrete response to the research question concerning the politicization of the TTIP and explain how concretely civil society organizations brought this issue into the public domain. I analyze how their framing dominated the public debate and resulted in a politicization dynamic.

Finally, I conclude this research by summarizing the main findings and outlining the added values.

² ACTA is a multilateral treaty aimed at establishing international standards for the transnational enforcement of intellectual property rights (IPRs) between nine countries and the EU.

2. INTEREST GROUPS' INFLUENCE IN THE EU: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The research topic of this thesis is the strategy employed by CSOs to raise salience and influence public opinion regarding the TTIP. The main objective of this chapter is to present a theoretical framework to analyze how CSOs influenced public opinion in the context of TTIP negotiations.

The first part of this chapter focuses on explaining the differences between the lobbying actions used to exert influence on the policy-makers, media, or public opinion. A distinction is made between the actions that are based on access and those based on voice. In addition, the literature distinguishes between “inside” and “outside” lobbying.

Inside lobbying privatizes conflict, while on the other hand, outside lobbying aims at socializing conflict by involving a broader audience. To understand the vigorous contestation against the TTIP and its subsequent standstill, we must examine the “expansion of the scope of the conflict” and the outside lobbying strategy.

The second part of this chapter focuses on how interest groups influence public opinion. I review the literature on interest groups' influence to understand the mechanism through which interest groups shape public opinion on concrete policies. Finally, I conclude linking outside lobbying, public opinion mobilization, and politicization.

2.1 Interest groups' influence

Interest groups serve as key intermediary actors between civil society and decision-makers. According to Beyers, Eising, and Maloney (2008, pp. 1106-1109), three features must be present to define an actor as an interest group: organization, political interests, and informality. Organization relates to the nature of the group and excludes unorganized broad movements and waves of public opinion. Meanwhile, regarding public interest, actors must pursue the objective to influence political decision-making and policy outcomes. The last characteristic that must be present to define actors as interest groups is private status, which refers to the fact that interest groups are not public institutions and do not seek public office. They attempt to shape public policies but do not compete in elections.

Following this definition, interest groups aim to influence the outcome of a policy. Influence can be defined as “the ability to change the position, or behavior, of another individual or group of individuals” (Hardacre & Akse, p. 336).

Dür (2008, p. 561) refers to the ability of interest groups to shape a political decision in line with their preferences. Hence, a necessary condition for influence is the convergence between the policy preferences of an actor with the output of the political decision-making process. However, convergence is not a sufficient condition for influence (Klüver, 2013, p. 7).

In other words, the existence of “a causal relation between the preferences of an actor regarding an outcome and the outcome itself” (Nagel, 1975, p. 29) is the condition for influence.³

Different factors explain interest group influence, including the institutional context, issue-specific factors, and interest group properties (Klüver, 2013, p. 10).

Considering the institutional context is particularly important when comparing interest group influence in different political systems. Moreover, political institutions might allow some interests to exert more influence than others (Dür, 2008, pp. 1215-17). In the European context, institutions demand certain goods from interest groups, and their ability to influence political decisions varies with the ability to provide these goods (Klüver, 2013).

Additionally, influence is likely to depend on issue characteristics (Mahoney, 2007). Mahoney argues that the salience and the degree of the conflict negatively affect the likelihood of interest groups to influence policy-making. The more salient an issue, the more actors that are active and the more difficult it is for interest groups to influence, since policy-makers cannot listen to only a single advocate. Similarly, the degree of conflict negatively affects the ability of interest groups to influence policy-makers.

The size of the lobbying coalition is considered to be another issue-related variable that affects the interest groups' influence. Lobbying coalitions can be defined as actors that share the same policy goal (Klüver, 2013, p. 12).

Klüver (2013) defines lobbying as an

exchange relationship between interdependent actors in which the European institutions trade influence for information, citizen support, and economic power. The ability of interest groups to influence policy-making is therefore hypothesized to vary with the capacity to provide these goods to the European institutions. (p.15)

The ability of interest groups to influence policy-making in the European Union thus depends on their capacity to supply the respective goods to European institutions. She argues that lobbying is not “an individual endeavor, but a complex collective process of multiple interests groups simultaneously trying to shift the policy outcome towards their ideal point. Hence, interest groups are not lobbying individually, they are lobbying together” (Klüver, 2013, p. 53). Explaining interest group influence is crucial to consider how interest groups come together in lobbying coalitions.

Finally, interest group characteristics have also been identified as an important factor that can influence policy outcomes. The literature distinguishes between permanent and

³ It is important to causally link interest groups' policy preferences with the policy output in order to distinguish influence from pure luck. Klüver H.; 2013. Lobbying in the European Union: Interest Groups, Lobbying Coalitions, and Policy Change. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

non-permanent characteristics. Permanent features include actor types and resources; these are interest group characteristics that are constant across different issues.

Conversely, non-permanent features vary from issue to issue. Lobbying strategies and information supply have been emphasized in the literature as key non-permanent features of interest groups (Klüver, 2013, p. 13).

2.2 Lobbying strategies and influence

According to Hardacre and Akse (2015), lobbying aims

to spread the right message, in the most appropriate form and with the required content, to the right person at the right time. Thus, influence requires a carrier, a vehicle that can be defined as a set of channels that can be mobilized to send a message. (p. 337)

Accordingly, when lobbying on a policy issue, interest groups face the option of contacting policy elites directly and exchanging information or doing so indirectly, which refers to initiating demonstrations or protests to pressure decision-makers by increasing the awareness of the general public.

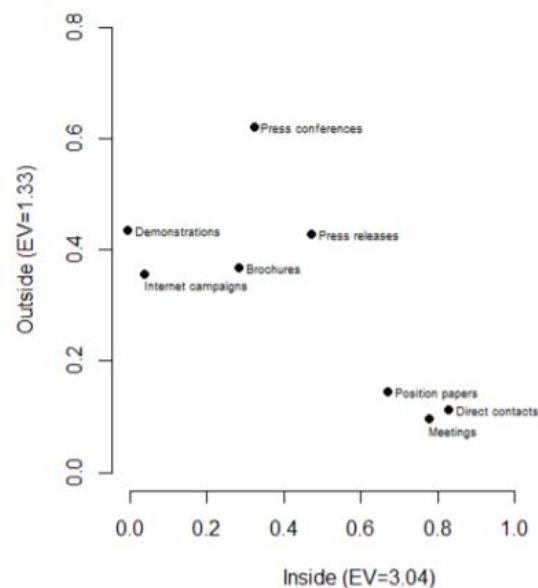
In the first strategy, interest groups seek direct access to venues where decisions are made. On the other hand, in the second strategy, interest groups focus on communication channels to make their voice heard even outside the political arenas. Moreover, the literature labels these strategies as inside vs. outside lobbying or direct vs. indirect lobbying (Dür & Mateo, *Gaining Access or Going Public? Interest Group Strategies in Five European Countries*, 2013).

Inside lobbying comprises tactics that aim to direct exchanges with policy-makers within their institutional arena. These tactics can take many forms, including face-to-face meetings, calls, mail exchanges, and participation in expert committees. These communication channels do not generate public exposure and are not typically visible to a broader audience (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2018).

Figure 1 presents how different tactics can be assessed on an inside/outside scale.

FIGURE 1

Outside and inside tactics



Source: Dür and Mateo, 2013

Inside lobbying can be understood as an information-based exchange (Bouwen, 2002). Here, lobbyists exchange knowledge and information with policy-makers to gain access and thereby influence policy outcomes. It can be expected that the more critical and specific the information, the more likely that access and influence will be granted.

If an interest group does not obtain access or if it does not wish to for strategic reasons, it can rely on a voice strategy to perform what Ken Kollman (1998) refers to as outside lobbying. He defines this as “attempts by interest group leaders to mobilize citizens outside the policymaking community to contact or pressure public officials inside the policymaking community” (p. 3). The key element of this definition lies in that such public political strategies occur in different public spheres with the purpose of being more visible to the eyes of the general public, policy-makers, and the media.

According to Kollman, outside lobbying accomplishes two tasks simultaneously: signaling and expanding the conflict. On one hand, outside lobbying can be used to draw attention to an issue and bring it to the agenda. On the other hand, outside lobbying aims for conflict expansion—that is, raising the salience of the issue involving the wider public to change the balance of the power (p.8). Here, Kollman refers to the theoretical explanation of Schattschneider (Schattschneider, 1960), who considers that

the most important strategy of politics is concerned with the scope of the conflict. Conflicts are frequently won or lost by the success that the contestants have in getting the audience involved in the fight or in excluding it, as the case may be. (pp. 3-4)

In gaining broader public support and drawing many stakeholders into a policy debate, lobbyists aim to exert pressure on policy-makers in the form of popular participation and influence their policy decisions. Interest groups can employ various channels to “go

public,” including press releases, conferences, street mobilizations, and public and social media campaigning.

A classic distinction is that between media strategies and mobilization strategies. Media strategies have “media” and journalists as a direct target and aim to obtain direct media coverage, thereby raising public awareness. Meanwhile, mobilization strategies predominantly target citizens, such as by collecting signatures for a petition or organizing public protests. Public protest in particular is “designed to unleash a public debate, to draw the attention of the public to the grievances of the actors in question, to create controversy where there was none, and to obtain the support of the public for the actors’ concerns” (Kriesi, 2014, p. 371).

Outside lobbying is primarily a strategy used by citizen groups; given their broad base of members or supporters, these groups have an advantage in relying on tactics that are aimed at mobilizing people. Conversely, business groups focus more on inside lobbying. They generally enjoy privileged access to executive institutions. Table 1 summarizes the main aspects of the two logics of lobbying.

TABLE 1

Lobbying strategies

	LOBBYING INSIDERS/DIRECT	LOBBYING OUTSIDERS/INDIRECT
PROTOTYPE	Resource-rich business associations	Citizen groups
STRATEGY	Access	Voice
MAIN PURPOSE	Knowledge and information exchange with policy-makers	Conflict expansion
COMMUNICATION CHANNELS	Meetings, calls and mail exchanges, and participation in expert committees.	Press releases, street mobilization, and social media campaigning
FAVORITE ARENA	Institutions	Public spheres
INSTITUTIONAL TARGET	Executive institutions	Legislative institutions

The two logics of lobbying—inside and outside—matter in terms of the access that groups gain to decision-makers and the influence that they can exert on policy outcomes.

Group type—that is, the distinction between business associations, citizen groups, professional associations, and labor unions—is considered a key factor in explaining which strategies interest groups select, how much access they gain, and under which circumstances they are most likely to exert influence on policy outcomes.

Regarding this issue, a key debate concerns whether business interests are more influential than other interests.

Dür and Mateo (2016) demonstrate that the group type is not sufficient for explaining variation regarding their strategy choice, access, and influence. In addition, resources play a key role; resources include money, legitimacy, political support, and knowledge. The information that groups have is likely to play a large role. Accordingly, resource-rich groups favor inside tactics, as such groups typically possess in-depth information that is valuable in granting them access.

Moreover, an interest group defines its lobbying strategy based on the institution it seeks to influence. In other words, the institutional context matters in the choice of lobbying strategy.

Finally, influence varies across issues. On issues that are amenable to an outside campaign, lobbying outsiders can be expected to win (Dür & Mateo, 2016, p. 35). Moreover, outsiders can be successful if an issue reaches greater public salience, including if the public debate increases for exogenous reasons.

Conversely, on issues that are not amenable to an outside campaign,

outsider groups find it difficult to mobilize; are pushed to use tactics that are relatively inefficient on those issues; cannot make good use of the resources for which they have a comparative advantage; and will benefit little from their access to legislative decisions-makers. (Dür & Mateo, 2016, p. 36)

2.3 How interest groups influence public opinion

Public opinion matters for interest group influence (Dür, Bernhagen, & Marshall, 2015). According to Kollman, “the public” is the primary target of interest groups’ campaigns (Kollman, 1998). Many studies on interest group strategies arrive at similar conclusions (Dür & Mateo, 2013).

As the literature identifies (Dür & Mateo, 2016), interest groups engage with the public to achieve different goals, including raising the salience of an issue—that is, the relative importance people attribute to it—and increasing the support.

If an issue is not at the top of the public agenda, it is crucial for interest groups, first, “to educate constituents” to influence the salience of an issue. During the agenda-shaping stage, interest groups use outside lobbying primarily to signal the current level of salience to selected policy-makers (Kollman, 1998, p. 118).

When the public salience of an issue is high, public opinion becomes a determinant element of public policy. This is because by raising the salience of an issue, interest groups raise the likelihood that these issues matter for people in evaluating politicians (Miller, Krosnick, & Fabrigar, 2017). This in turn increasing the likelihood for political elites to position themselves accordingly (Burstein, 2003).

How can interest groups influence the public salience of an issue?

According to Dür and Mateo, lobbying can increase the public salience, but only for issues that are amenable to outside lobbying: “Using an outside strategy, interests groups can have an impact on both the salience that an issue has to the public, and the position that people take on an issue” (2016, p. 183).

Moreover, if the topic can arise emotions, the effect of outside lobbying on public salience will be greater. In addition, outside lobbying will be more effective when interest groups can present a causal link between a problem and a policy and communicate an easy solution (2016, p. 184).

In these cases, the outside lobbying by lobbying outsiders increases the public salience of an issue. An issue’s greater salience can result in an attention cascade that motivates an ever greater number of organizations to get involved in the campaign.

To capture attention and increase public awareness, the channel employed plays a key role. An increasing number of citizens obtains information and news through social media and other online sources.

Raising salience alone does not help if citizens do not support interest groups policy stance. Accordingly, interest groups attempt to shape the public’s behaviors in their favor.

Dür (2019) finds that outside lobbying can be successful in influencing public attitudes toward an issue, but only if interest groups manage to convey strong arguments. An argument is a statement given in support of a specific idea.⁴ This effect is particularly large for people who have little information about a policy. In contrast, interest groups matter little as source cues, referring to “information on the source of an argument that potentially allows recipients to infer something about the argument itself”⁵ (Dür, 2019, p. 515). A cue is

an information shortcut to avoid investing time in learning about an issue. Cues can also work by activating certain emotions. For example, people that identify with a specific political party may react to a partisan endorsement of a specific policy without rationally updating their beliefs. (Dür, 2015, p. 6)

Dür (2015) finds cues to be more effective for political parties than for interest groups, as people tend to identify more easily with the former. For interest groups, framing can be more effective.

Interest groups can shape public opinion via issue frames—that is, influencing how an issue is construed and interpreted in the public debate. Frames can be seen as “ready-

⁴ For example, “this arbitration case shows how corporations circumvent democracy” cited in Eliasson & Garcia-Duran Huet, *Civil Society, Rhetoric of Resistance, and Transatlantic Trade*, 2019, p. 41.

⁵ For example, “the Greens oppose ISDS, therefore I should oppose ISDS”.

made interpretative packages” that emphasize the aspects that the speaker finds most relevant in describing a specific phenomenon (Conrad & Oleart, 2020). Strategic framing aims to focus the audience’s attention on particular portions of a message or aspects of a topic when forming an opinion to generate the desired reactions.

Interest groups can strategically highlight some aspects of an issue while downplaying others. This is important for mobilizing support on complex or new issues. Indeed, framing will in turn affect who policy-makers consult and listen to and therefore influence who gets the resulting policy outcomes.

However, the success of framing efforts depends on frame resonance, which refers to the capacity to resonate in the public sphere to impact decision-making. Baumgartner and Mahoney (2008) described this as the “two faces of framing.” At the individual level, actors frame issues to encourage particular interpretations of an issue. Such partisan frames aim to gain a hegemonic position in the public sphere rather than convince opponents. The second face of framing refers to the perception of such issues by the wider public and policy-makers.

Interest groups can be effective in shaping public opinion if their message framing is consistent with pre-existing beliefs (Dür & Mateo, 2014). In other words, messages should tap into and appeal to culture, values, and norms to generate the desired response (Eliasson & Garcia-Duran Huet, 2019a, p. 41).

Simplification also is important for generating public opposition. Moreover, anger can be useful to construct the communication message, and focusing on a single issue can be valuable (Siles-Brügge, 2017, p. 467). Finally, if the public is not aware of an issue and lacks a preference, “groups seeking its support must first engage in educating the public, which includes carefully selected information and/or propaganda to raise salience” (Eliasson & Garcia-Duran Huet, 2019a, p. 42).

Raising the salience of issues and persuading the public of a specific issue stance form the foundation of mobilizing people to take action.

If successful, public awareness increases, and more actors (bandwagoning) and coalition formation may be expected. Active outside lobbying raises salience, leading to even more groups becoming interested in the topic, which causes the issue to become even more salient among the public (Dür & Mateo, 2014). In turn, decision-makers will feel great pressure to adopt policies in line with public opinion.

In their analysis of the defeat of the Anti-Counterfeiting Agreement (ACTA), Dür and Mateo (2014) found that active outside lobbying by interest groups raised the salience of the issue in the public sphere. A petition was signed by three million European citizens, and widespread protests were organized in more than 200 cities across Europe, denouncing the secrecy of the negotiations.

The high public salience of the issue at the peak of the campaign created an incentive for a large number of outside groups to get involved in the anti-ACTA, thereby further increasing the salience of the issue and galvanizing the public opinion. In facing fierce public opposition, governments ceased ratification, and the European Parliament voted overwhelmingly against the final agreement by 478 votes to 39, with 165 abstentions (European Parliament, European Parliament rejects ACTA, Press release, 4 July, 2012). Public opposition to the ACTA therefore explains the defeat of this agreement in the EU.

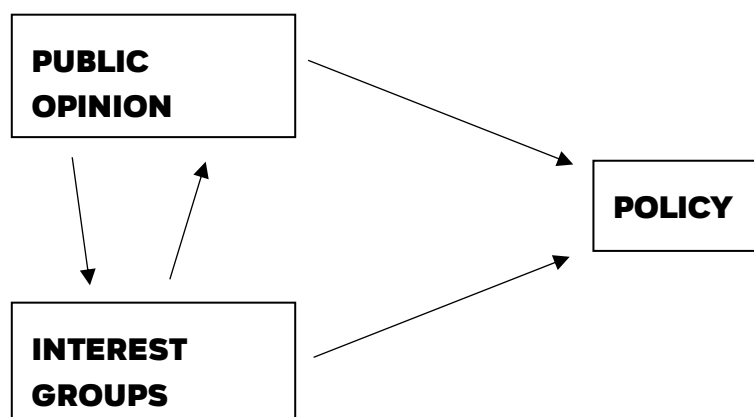
The campaign against the ACTA proves that public opinion can act as a restraint on business influence over trade policy. This agreement was indeed largely supported by business groups; however, a relatively resource-poor campaign initiated by a small number of citizen groups was successful in derailing the agreement (Dür & Mateo, 2014).

The relationship between interest groups and public opinion is not a one-way street. Public opinion impacts the behavior of interest groups, as well. Dür and Mateo (2014) develop a theoretical framework to stress the two-way relationship between the behavior of interest groups and public opinion: “Interest groups can try to mobilize and shape public opinion, at the same time as public opinion impacts on interest group behavior” (2014, p. 6). Finally, public opinion impacts policy choices. Decision-makers listen to public opinion, especially on issues that are highly salient and come from certain segments of the population.

A mutual interaction exists between public opinion, mobilization of interest groups, public debates, and political activity.

FIGURE 2

Public opinion and Interest Groups



2.4 Outside lobbying, politicization, and trade policy

Over the last decade, EU trade policy has evolved into a highly politicized area. For example, European trade agreement negotiations in the form of the TTIP and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with Canada have been strongly contested.

This contrast with the past is manifest. European trade policy has been insulated from societal influences, with the main goal of preserving a liberally oriented trade policy (Gheyle, 2016). Moreover, EU trade policy is considered to be a technical domain, which does not lend to common public interest.

A widely accepted definition of politicization was conceptualized by de Wilde, who defines it as “an increase in polarization of opinions, interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formulation” (de Wilde D. , 2011, p. 560).

The focus is on “the communicative process that lead to an increasing intensify and controversy of debate on international institutions in the broader public, encompassing not only political executives but also party politicians, NGOs, and other interest groups” (Schmidtke, 2014).

Politicization is equated with intensifying debates among an increasing number of groups or people located within the public sphere. In this sense, politicization can be understood as the “expansion of the scope of the conflict within the political system,” as defined by Schattschneider (1960).

According Zürn (2019), politicization, can be generally defined “as moving something into the realm of public choice, thus presupposing the possibility to make collectively binding decisions on that matter”. Politicization is a process by which a particular political issue enters the realm of mass politics, in which the audience is widened and public contestation increases. It is not sufficient that actors become aware of something; rather, it must become salient in political communication directed toward the decision-making process: “The more salient the issue, the more actors and people participate in the debate, the more positions are polarized, and the more politicized a decision or institution is” (Zürn, 2019).

The object of politicization can be either decisions (or non-decisions) or the institutions that make decisions. Therefore, politicization may involve the demand for change in the following areas: the process of deciding, the content of a decision, or the entire decision-making entity.

De Wilde, Leupold, and Schmidtke (2015) conceive politicization as a three-dimensional process consisting of salience, actor expansion, and polarization. The salience dimension captures the rise in importance of the EU and its policy-making. This can manifest as a greater interest in and concern about the decision-making process, issues, or institutions. It is typically measured by analyzing the number of newspaper articles reporting on how “aware” or “worried” citizens are of the EU institutions, politics, and policies. Actor expansion identifies a greater number of actors who dedicate resources in the form of time and money to follow and engage with EU topics. Finally, polarization refers to the emergence of conflicting views in the public debate.

Drawing on these definitions, trade politicization can be understood as an increase in the salience of trade negotiations, institutions, and rules; a rise in the number and type of actors mobilizing and participating in debates on trade policy; and the polarization of their opinions.

In the previous section, I analyzed how interest groups can shape public opinion. Interest groups can employ different tactics and strategies to affect the public salience of policy issues.

Hence, a crucial element concerns how to achieve “public visibility” or an “intensification debate.” Outside lobbying is

one possible avenue or starting point that can lead to the politicization of an issue. When several discursive claims are being made and countered, a discussion will start to look like a ‘public debate’ that can exhibit the characteristics of politicization. (Gheyle & De Ville, 2019)

Employing outside lobbying can be instrumental in raising public awareness about a specific issue. Furthermore, interest groups can shape public attitudes on issues through the frames they convey.

According to De Bièvre and Poletti (De Bièvre & Poletti, 2020),

The extent to which interest groups can trigger the politicization of a particular trade policy issue or a particular negotiation thus largely depends on their ability to stimulate the interest and attention of public opinion. Indeed, increasing public salience of issues can trigger a positive feedback effect, stimulating more groups to join the campaign and thus generating an attention cascade that ultimately makes the issue even more salient. (p. 249)

Politicization is not an automatic process, actors play an active role in driving politicization by increasing issue salience, actor expansion and actor polarization (Grande & Hutter, 2016, p. 8).

Civil society organizations can therefore attempt to instigate and mobilize indignation. They can act as agents of politicization when the public awareness and skepticism of international institutions are widespread among the public. In this sense, they can seize the opportunities their environment offers to trigger politicization.

For decades, international trade relations were the exclusive domain of a handful of experts and practitioners in the field, and trade policy reached low public salience in Europe. European media accorded little prominence to the trade negotiations that the EU conducted with other countries and regions worldwide. Scholars of European integration forged the term “permissive consensus” to underline the fact that pro-integration policies were conducted by elites with tacit support from the European public (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). Conversely, the WTO’s Third Ministerial Meeting in December 1999 and the negotiation of the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) in 2012 represent episodes of intense public salience. The negotiations for the TTIP represent a peak in the politicization of EU trade policy.

Civil society activists have been identified as key drivers of the politicization of EU trade policy. They played a pivotal role in bringing the GATS to the public’s attention and contributed to shifts in the EU’s position in these negotiations (Meunier & Czesana, 2019). Additionally, they played a key role during the anti-ACTA campaign. To analyze the role of CSOs during the TTIP negotiations, in the next chapter, I describe the agreement’s primary objectives and highlight the main concerns raised during the campaign.

3. THE TTIP: WHAT WAS AT STAKE?

Having outlined in the previous chapters that trade policy has been increasingly contested in the past decade and the TTIP labeled as being characterized by unprecedented politicization, I now step back to reflect on the contest of negotiations.

This chapter aims to set the scene by providing an overview of the campaign against the TTIP. I describe (i) the background and legitimization narrative behind the agreement, (ii) the main actors involved in the contestation, and (iii) their central arguments and main actions.

For the aim of this research, I focus primarily on the European campaign. However, I am aware that campaigns organized at the national level in some member states played a key role in amplifying the core mobilization messages. In doing such, they contributed to making the campaign against the TTIP a transnational one.

3.1 An ambitious contested agreement

The launch of talks on the comprehensive Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership was announced by then U.S. President Barack Obama in his State of the Union speech in February 2013. According to his views, “trade that is fair and free across the Atlantic supports millions of good-paying American jobs” (White House, 2013).

The joint declaration by Obama and then European Council President Herman Van Rompuy and European Commission President José Manuel Barroso on February 13, 2013, marked the beginning of the TTIP negotiations and stated the two pursued objectives:

Through this negotiation, the United States and the European Union will have the opportunity not only to expand trade and investment across the Atlantic, but also to contribute to the development of global rules that can strengthen the multilateral trading system. (European Commission, 2013b)

The TTIP was not a simple free trade agreement (FTA). Its ambition extended far beyond simply eliminating tariffs on transatlantic trade in goods. Regulatory cooperation served as the central focus of negotiations (De Ville & Siles-Brügge, 2016a).

Pascal Lamy, former European Trade Commissioner and former director-general of the World Trade Organization, defined the TTIP as “the first show of the new world of trade” (Lamy, 2015), in which negotiations were focused primarily on addressing the adverse trade effects of regulatory differences rather than removing tariffs. This emphasis set the ground-breaking character of the TTIP.

In terms of market size, the TTIP was the most important bilateral trade agreement ever attempted to be negotiated. It was an agreement between the two largest economies in

the world. Then, compared with previous trade agreements, between the EU and developing or smaller industrialized countries, negotiations for the TTIP were characterized by symmetry in power relations between the two negotiating partners (Telò, 2015).

Officials on both sides of the Atlantic presented this agreement as a means of spurring economic recovery in the wake of the global financial crisis, responding to the rising competition from emerging powers, and boosting the competitiveness of European and American firms.

The most important legitimization for the TTIP was the economic benefits. Advocates painted this agreement as a contribution to growth and jobs (De Ville & Siles-Brügge, 2016a, p. 13). Eliminating the remaining barriers to transatlantic trade and investment flow was said to be a benefit for businesses, workers, and consumers.

Two European-based think tanks—the Centre for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) and Bertelsmann Stiftung—projected GDP growth as the result of an “ambitious” TTIP.⁶ The most significant of these predicted that economic gains for the EU would result in an increase of 0.48% of GDP annually, which translates into a yearly growth of €545 per average household (CEPR, 2013). However, these economic projections became increasingly contested as the methodology was said to be “based upon unrealistic assumptions” (Raza, Grumiller, Taylor, Tröster, & von Arnim, 2014, p. vii). Increased contestation regarding the numbers behind the TTIP fed into a critical narrative concerning the negotiations (De Ville & Siles-Brügge, 2016a, p. 36).

In response, the European Commission increasingly highlighted the geo-economic benefits of the agreement. Working toward the convergence of regulatory measures would allow both parties to continue setting the standard for the global economy (HLWG, 2013). Given the scope and size of the transatlantic economy, standards negotiated by the EU and the United States would de facto become the benchmark for global models. The rising of China in the global marketplace was the main argument behind this objective. Joining forces would ensure that the Western heavyweights remain in the driving seat, thus obliging third-world countries to adapt to the standards they have established.

Accordingly, the TTIP was intended to reinforce transatlantic ties or create a “transatlantic pole” by agreeing to common standards in the world’s two largest markets. In this sense, this agreement would have played a key role in determining the type of global governance for the future (Morin, Novotná, Ponjaert, & Telò, 2015, p. 1).

The content of negotiations reflected these points. They were organized into four main areas: market access, regulatory cooperation and the setting of global “rules,” and arrangements for governing the relationship (Young A. R., 2017). Market access covers tariffs on goods and services, government procurement practices, government practices regarding service providers, and the presence and perceived advantages of state-owned enterprises. The regulations focused on non-tariff barriers (NTBs). Finally, a wide range of rules was being negotiated, such as a provision for Investment-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) to intellectual property rights.

⁶ Elimination of duplicative regulations and 95% tariff reduction

TABLE 2**TTIP main areas**

MARKET ACCESS	REGULATORY ISSUES	GLOBAL RULES	INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN
Tariffs	Regulatory coherence	Investment protection	Government-to-government dispute settlement
Services	Technical barriers to trade	Sustainable development (environmental and labor standards)	Regulatory cooperation forum
Public procurement	Sanitary and phytosanitary measures	Intellectual property rights	
Geographical indications	Sectoral cooperation: automobiles, chemicals, engineering, information and communication technology, textiles and clothing, pharmaceuticals, and medical devices	<div>Competition policy</div> <div>Energy and raw materials</div> <div>State-owned enterprises</div> <div>Small- and medium-sized enterprises</div>	

Source: Young A. R., The New Politics of Trade. Lessons from TTIP, 2017

Negotiations progressed much slower than its supporters had hoped. After three years of talks, a consensus was reached in only a small minority of subjects (European Commission, Report on State of Play of TTIP Negotiations, 27 April, 2016). This limited progress was the result of two factors. On one hand, there was severe disagreement between the EU and the US in some sensitive domains, such as investment protection, geographical indications, and public procurement. On the other hand, there was opposition to the agreement from civil society organizations.

Indeed, the TTIP negotiations provoked unprecedented engagement by civil society organizations and unique levels of public opposition, particularly in Europe.

As soon as the negotiations were launched, civil society organizations began raising multifaceted concerns over the TTIP. They were alarmed by the potential dangers of a far-reaching trade agreement and feared that the TTIP would result in a race to the bottom and the erosion of their valued regulations, such as product safety and environmental protection (De Ville & Siles-Brügge, 2016a). Moreover, the opposition was concerned about the ability of governments to adopt such regulations in the future and the consequential potential threat to democracy and the rule of law (Siles-Brügge, 2017).

They feared that the TTIP would further strengthen the role of corporations and thus labeled the agreement as an “unprecedented corporate attack” (Friends of the Earth , 2016).

3.2 Civil society organizations contesting the TTIP

The head of the TTIP opposition represented a series of organizations in Europe with a history of campaigning on trade issues in Brussels, the so-called Seattle-to-Brussels Network (SB2) (De Ville & Siles-Brügge, 2016a, p. 102).

The Seattle-to-Brussels network was founded in the aftermath of the Seattle protests of 1999 by a European organization to campaign on trade policy issues. This network has since become one of the core transnational groups working on these issues and has served as an effective “mobilizing device enabling face-to-face meetings, telephone conference calls, collaborative campaigns, but, most of all, sharing critical information and report” (Strange, 2015, p. 85). The network indeed played an active role in several previous campaigns, including the mobilization within the civil society against ACTA (Strange, 2015).

The Seattle-to-Brussels can be considered a transnational advocacy network (TAN), “a network of activists, distinguishable largely by the centrality of principled ideas or values in motivating their formation” (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). In the case of S2B, such motivation serves to “challenge the corporate driven trade agenda of the European Union and European governments.”⁷ Greatly aligned with what some have called the Global Justice movement, these actors strive for a “new, democratically accountable trading system that advances economic justice, social well-being, gender equity and ecological sustainability, and that provides decent jobs and necessary goods and services for all people.”⁸

The core countries represented and those most active in S2B are Germany, the UK, France, the Netherlands, Spain, and, to some extent, Belgium (Gheyle, 2019).

The Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO), the Transnational Institute (TNI), and members of the Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and Aid to Citizens (ATTAC) are some of the most prominent SB2 members.⁹ These organizations were at the heart of S2B’s initiative against the TTIP.

⁷ See S2B website: <http://s2bnetwork.org/>

⁸ <http://s2bnetwork.org/about-us/>

⁹ <http://s2bnetwork.org/about-us/member-groups/>

TABLE 3**List of best represented countries in the S2B network**

COUNTRY	ORGANIZATIONS
Belgium (Europe)	11.11.11, CNCD, Oxfam Solidarity, Food and Water Watch, CEO, Greenpeace EU unit, Friends of the Earth Europe, Via Campesina EU, Africa-Europe Faith and Justice Network
Germany	ATTAC Germany, COLIBRI, FDCL, PowerShift, WEED, Oxfam Germany, Germanwatch, Forum Umwelt & Entwicklung
United Kingdom	Friends of the Earth UK, New Economics Foundation, The Corner House, Traidcraft, War on Want, Women's International League Peace and Freedom, World Development Movement
France	AITEC, ATTAC France, ATTAC Morocco, Les Amis de la Terre
Netherlands	BOTH ENDS, Milieudefensie, SOMO, Transnational Institute

Source: Gheyle, 2019

In addition to S2B members, many consumers and public health and environmental groups that had not previously engaged with trade policy entered the debate over the TTIP.

The TTIP's broad agenda, the size of the transatlantic relationship,¹⁰ and the desire to set international standards in line with the EU's and U.S.'s preferences contributed to attracting large public attention. De Ville and Siles-Brügge (2016b) consider the TTIP a game-changer, a qualitatively different trade agreement, given the breadth and depth of its ambitions regarding regulatory co-operation and investment protection. This prompted an unusual mobilization of a broad and diverse group of civil society organizations (p. 102).

Most groups often cooperated, sometimes produced joint materials (Friends of the Earth Europe, 2015), and protested with— sometimes under the pan-European heading of Stop TTIP—an umbrella organization that boasted more than 500 organizations.

European CSOs also benefited from the support of American organizations. Public citizens provided material on ISDS, and members of the Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue (TACD) continuously exchanged ideas and tactics with European CSOs (Eliasson & Garcia-Duran Huet, 2019a, p. 53).

¹⁰ €700bn in annual bilateral trade, 44 percent of global GDP, 32 percent of trade, and 60 percent of foreign investments worldwide in 2012.

However, a large amount of pre-existing expertise was already available. Preparatory work for the campaign had been completed during the years, and the S2B network focused on the implications of the EU's new competence for negotiating investment (De Ville & Siles-Brügge, 2016a, p. 102).

Despite the similarity of their concerns, interest groups engaged with the TTIP pursued different objectives and deployed a variety of approaches. Based on these differences, they can be divided into two analytically distinct groups. Eliasson and Garcia-Duran Huet (2019b) distinguish between reformists, such as the European Consumer Agency (BEUC), which were ready to accept an agreement if extensive changes were proposed; and rejectionists, such as CEOs who saw no potential upside to the agreement and perceived it only as a threat.¹¹ Rejectionists simply wanted to prevent the agreement from being concluded, or at least from being ratified. They billed the agreement as a “transatlantic corporate bill of rights” (Corporate Europe Observatory, 2013a).

Rejectionists largely focused on an outside strategy targeting public opinion and thus policy-makers indirectly. At the same time, several reformists CSOs also pursued an inside strategy of influencing policy-makers directly, by sending letters to officials and participating in meetings such as the TTIP Advisory group created by DG Trade.¹²

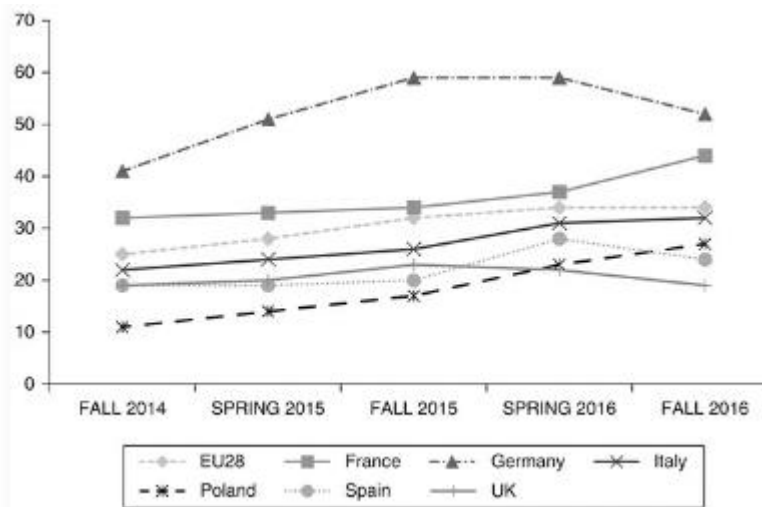
3.3 The TTIP according to civil society organizations

Civil society activism began soon after the approval of the EU negotiations mandate and the start of talks in June and July 2013. The campaign was launched during the summer of 2013 by key members of the Seattle-to-Brussels network of organizations and, in particular, the CEO and “all veterans of the first major mobilization against trade and investment agreements of the late 1990s and early 2000s” (De Ville & Siles-Brügge, 2016a, p. 102)

Debate on and contestation of the negotiations spread rapidly across some EU member states during the spring of 2014 throughout the run-up to the European Parliament elections in May (Buonanno, 2015). Since then, public opposition to the TTIP had risen (Figure 3). This led to an unprecedented level of mobilization throughout Europe, both on the streets and online.

¹¹ On this distinction, see also Young, A. *The New Politics of Trade: Lessons from TTIP* (Comparative Political Economy). Agenda Publishing.

¹² Civil society organizations members of the TTIP Advisory group included representatives of EPHA, BEUC, the European Environment Bureau, the Danish Consumers' Organisation and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC).
<https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm?do=groupDetail.groupDetail&groupID=2988>

FIGURE 3**Level of opposition to TTIP**

Source: Young A. R., 2017

In October 2015, up to 200,000 protesters took to the streets in Berlin to protest against the TTIP. At the same time, large demonstrations were being held in Paris, Brussels, Madrid, and London.

Civil society organizations, led by German organizations, launched a major initiative in July 2014: a European Citizens Initiative (ECI) to stop the TTIP.

The ECI is an instrument that allows EU citizens to call upon the European Commission to propose new laws.¹³ Once an initiative has reached 1 million signatures, the European Commission will determine what action to take.

More than 3.2 million Europeans signed the “STOP TTIP” petition between 7 October 2014 and 6 October 2015, far more than the 1 million signatures required under the EU’s formal procedure. Additionally, “STOP TTIP” exceeded the official thresholds in 23 member states rather than the required 7. The initiative has been described as one of the few episodes of “transnational politics” (Young A. R., 2017) where there has been a close connection between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition in the EU (Crespy & Parks, 2017).

The ECI was rejected by the European Commission in September 2014, as the repeal of a negotiations mandate did not fall within the scope of the Regulations on ECIs (Robert, 2014).

However, organizers decided to rebrand the ECI as a “self-organized European Citizens’ initiative” (sECI), continued their campaign of collecting signatures, and took the European Commission to the European Court of Justice. The sECI garnered more than 1.8 million signatures in May 2015 and fulfilled the member state threshold (De Ville &

¹³ https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/_en

Siles-Brügge, 2016a, p. 104). Until now, only five ECIs have met these requirements. The initiative's performance underscores how intense and extensive the opposition to the TTIP has been.

According to John Hilary, a member of the Stop TTIP coalition: "The 3 million signatures collected for this petition shows that the people of Europe stand firmly against these corporate driven trade deals. The people of Europe have spoken, the politicians must no longer turn their backs on their constituents" (Euractiv, Three million people unite to derail TTIP, 6 October, 2015).

During their campaigns, European CSOs criticized several issues areas: the lack of transparency in the TTIP negotiation process, a perception that the US has lower standards and safety regulations, concerns over losing what are thought to be higher environmental, health, and safety protections in Europe (The European Consumer Organisation, 2016b) (European Public Health Alliance, 2016), and that the agreement would secure unfair advantages for multinationals at the expense of citizens and consumers (Global Justice Now, 2015).

In Europe, citizens, CSOs, and member states expressed concerns about the implications of the TTIP on quality of life, employment, the environment, health, cultural identity, freedom, privacy, and democratic rights.

The main arguments raised during the TTIP mobilization were similar to those that emerged during the Battle of Seattle. De Ville and Siles-Brügge (2016a) consider that

aside from involving many of the same groups and activists, a number of the arguments in the Stop/No TTIP campaign mirror those of the anti-globalization protests of the late 1990s and early 2000s – famous for the 1999 'Battle of Seattle' and the intended launch of 'Millennium Round.' (p. 94)

Indeed, many of the arguments concerning the fear that trade and investment agreements would undermine democratic legitimacy and strengthen the power of multinational firms were again on the political agenda.

In the following sections, I focus on the criticisms leveled at the TTIP by civil society on three issues: investment protection, regulatory cooperation, and transparency, all of which have featured in the CSOs' campaign on the TTIP.

3.3.1 Investment protection

Some of the greatest fears expressed regarding the TTIP concerned corporate influences over governments' rights to regulate in the public interest. In this context, primarily the issue of the investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) system was referred to.

The ISDS is a mechanism that aims to guarantee foreign investors access to depoliticized legal redress for perceived violations of their rights in independent tribunals that issue a binding ruling on compensation (De Brabandere, 2016).

The Europeans have longstanding experience with the ISDS through bilateral investment treaties (BITs) that began in Europe after the Second World War to provide assurances to investors in former colonies (Eliasson, 2016, p. 37).

The principle to give additional protection to foreign investors was seen by “rejectionists” as an example of a “transatlantic corporate bill of rights” (Corporate Europe Observatory, 2013a). The ISDS mechanism favors private firms and especially transnational businesses at the expense of governments (Seattle to Brussels Network, 2013). “Reformists” identified ISDS discriminatory nature, as it can be accessed only by foreign investors (De Ville & Siles-Brügge, 2016a, p. 115).

The ISDS was presented as a threat to democracy and public accountability in regulations: “Consumer, health, labor and environmental regulations are regularly challenged as violations of investor rights” (The European Consumer Organisation, 2014b). Signing the TTIP would give companies the right to lodge complaints against governments concerning decisions that could harm the future profits of enterprises, thus undermining democratic decisions made in the public interest. Civil society organizations emphasized that negative decisions of the arbitration court might not only expose European member states to large damages but also negatively impact the regulatory capacity of states in many socially important areas, including environmental protection. A “chilling effect” would dissuade governments from taking regulatory actions (De Ville & Siles-Brügge, 2016a, p. 116).

To reinforce these arguments, civil society organizations cited the past cases of the ISDS in trade agreements in which corporations successfully sued states for bringing about regulations that were deemed necessary for the public or the environment but had the potential to undermine the profitability of an investment by a foreign company. Frequently cited cases include Philip Morris’ establishment of a subsidiary to sue Australia over tobacco regulation, the Swedish company Vattenfall to sue under the EU Energy Treaty, and the German government’s decision to abandon nuclear energy (Eliasson, 2015b).

The functioning of the arbitration system itself was criticized for the lack of transparency and the systemic conflict of interest.

Finally, CSOs stated that there was no need for the ISDS, since the existing judicial systems would suffice in solving any controversy that would arise. The CEO and BEUC published policy papers opposing the inclusion of the ISDS, claiming its inclusion meant “privileging foreign companies” and “threatening public policy” (The European Consumer Organisation, 2013; Corporate Europe Observatory, 2013).

Civil society organizations expressed their outright opposition to the inclusion of the ISDS mechanism into the TTIP, among others, in a letter to Michael Froman, United States Trade Representative (USTR) and Karel De Gucht, Commissioner for Trade, which was signed by nearly two hundred organizations (Corporate Europe Observatory et al., 2013). For these organizations, “it undermines democratic decision-making”.

Opposition in the EU regarding the ISDS chapter became fierce, and the Commission decided to postpone negotiations to conduct an online public consultation. The European Commission also established a TTIP Advisory Group composed of experts from businesses and civil society to “provide EU trade negotiations with high quality advice in the areas being negotiated” (European Commission, 2014).

Public consultation on the ISDS took place between March and July 2014 and attracted 149,399 contributions from across Europe (European Commission, 2013; European Commission, 2015). The analysis of responses revealed that 97% of citizens who responded to the public consultation were mobilized by eight NGOs and opposed the inclusion of the ISDS in the agreement. It further revealed that 70,000 of the responses were identical or very similar, and 50,000 responses submitted by just one NGO (Buonanno & Dudek, 2015).

At the same time, member states that unanimously supported the inclusion of the ISDS in the EU’s mandate began taking a critical stance. Germany adopted a critical line in March 2014, a position followed by other member states, including France and several national parliaments (De Ville & Siles-Brügge, 2016a, p. 104).

Moreover, the elections of the European Parliament in May 2014 saw a rise in opposition among various political groups, particularly the European Greens and the Left Group.

The increasingly hostile climate touched another trade agreement: EU-Canada. It began to be labeled as a Trojan horse for the TTIP. This resulted in delaying the signature of CETA, which was initially scheduled for September 2014.

The arrival of the new Trade Commissioner, Cecilia Malmström, coincided with a fresh start in the negotiations.

In January 2015, the European Commission published its report on the ISDS consultation, which recognized the large opposition to the ISDS and suggested several improvements. In response to these criticisms, the Commission proposed a modernization of the ISDS called the Investor Court System (ICS), a permanent court in which arbitrators would be selected by both disputing parties.

Civil society organizations considered the Commission’s reform proposal for ISDS to be inadequate. As The European Consumer Organisation explained:

While the ICS proposal now includes a specific article on the right to regulate, this is insufficient to prevent investor claims from exerting a regulatory chill effect. Indeed, under the new ICS proposal, foreign investors can still threaten to sue governments for compensation where they, for example adopt a regulation to limit consumer exposure to nanomaterials (2016a).

3.3.2 Regulatory cooperation

One of the major aims of the TTIP was to address trade barriers due to divergences in regulatory approaches across the Atlantic through what is known as “regulatory

cooperation.” According to the impact assessment, two-thirds of the expected economic gains would come from eliminating regulatory differences (CEPR, 2013, p. 47).

In sectoral regulatory, the objective was to eliminate the existing regulatory differences between the EU and the US. In this sense, the TTIP compared other agreements, such as the EU-Korea Free Trade Agreement (KOREU) and the CETA (De Ville & Siles-Brügge, 2016b, p. 3). Moreover, the TTIP included a chapter on regulatory cooperation and domestic procedural disciplines on the development of new regulations. According to the European Commission, “the ultimate goal would be a more integrated transatlantic market where goods produced and services originating in one party could be marketed in the other without adaptations or requirements” (European Commission, 2013c, p. 3).

Conversely, regulatory cooperation was presented by opponent CSOs as leading to weaken safety regulations and prevent future improvements in standards. This argument is based on the assumption that the US has lower regulatory standards than the EU.

Civil society opposition forced the European Commission to tone down its proposals and not allow the regulatory cooperation body to create the powers to adopt legal acts (De Ville & Siles-Brügge, 2016a, p. 106). However, criticisms on this issue did not stop.

As Friends of Earth Europe stated, “fresh leaks from the European Commission revealed proposals that would lead to the weakening of standards deemed detriment to trade and investment” (2015). Moreover, Seattle-to-Brussels argued that

regulatory cooperation may result in increasing the business influence in rulemaking and establish mechanisms that make it easier for parties and business to challenge rules that result in technical barriers to trade. These interests apply to EU business as much as they apply to US business. For consumers and civil society, the rules that could be challenged by big business may come at the expense of safety, environmental protection, and consumer information. (2016)

3.3.3 Transparency and democratic legitimacy

The lack of transparency regarding TTIP negotiations was another central issue in the CSOs’ campaigns (Gheyle & De Ville, 2017). The lack of transparency was one of the main criticisms voiced during the negotiations regarding the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement, which the European Parliament ultimately rejected.

Anti-TTIP activists complained that negotiations were conducted behind closed doors “to change and lower public interest measures for the sake of commercial interest” (Public Citizen et al. , 2013).

For rejectionists, this was “because if people understood its potential impacts, this could lead to widespread opposition” (Corporate Europe Observatory, 2013c). To reformist organizations, more openness was needed to save the talks: “So far civil society is reliant on leaked document to have access to the content of the basis of negotiations that will affect all aspects of citizens lives.” The European Consumer Organisation insisted that

the Commission was discriminating against EU citizens by refusing “civil society access to that same information” (The European Consumer Organisation, 2014a).

In response to these criticisms and in hopes of gaining support for the negotiations, the European Commission responded with increasing transparency in several ways.

In the mission letter to the future Commissioner for Trade Cecilia Malmström, the then President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker wrote: “I will ask you to enhance transparency towards citizens and the European Parliament during all steps of the negotiations” (Juncker, 2014, p. 4). The Commissioner-designate Malmström committed herself to transparency and stated that “trade negotiations must be open and transparent, to allow all interested people and groups to understand what is on the table so that they can express their views” (European Parliament, Hearing of Cecilia Malmström (Trade). Brussels, 29 September, 2014, p. 6).

To underline the importance of transparency, the European Commission launched a “transparency initiative” committed to publishing more information on the negotiations and changing the rules for receiving access to documents by Members of the European Parliament. The Commission began by publishing numerous negotiating texts tabled by the EU and declassified the EU’s negotiating mandate.

The CEO considered that “the draft text of the TTIP agreement remain hidden from the public until negotiations are over.” According to trade union confederations of the EU and the US, “[t]he transparency we have called for has not been achieved” (ETUC, 2016).

The European Ombudsman collected many complaints regarding the lack of transparency. As a result, an own-initiative inquiry was launched to help ensure that the Council and Commission would establish a more proactive approach to the transparency of the negotiations.

To assure greater transparency and achieve public trust in the negotiating process, the EU’s ombudsman, Emily O’Reilly, demanded that the European Commission publish its negotiation documents (European Ombudsman, 2015).

Furthermore, on 3 July 2014, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) invited the Commission and Council of the EU to be more transparent regarding the negotiations process of the TTIP. The ECJ affirmed that access to documents related to international agreements should be ensured unless it is demonstrated that disclosure would undermine the conducting of the negotiations.

The Commission and the Council took steps forward to meet the public interest and increase the transparency of the TTIP negotiating process: they started public consultations on the TTIP, published most of the documents related to the transatlantic negotiations, such as the declassification of the negotiating mandate in October 2014, until that moment marked “UE restraint,” and provided access to “confidential” documents, including “consolidated texts,” to members of European and national Parliaments in December 2015.

The European Commission tried to gain public support for the negotiations through these measures. Nonetheless, criticism by CSOs with regard to the agreement in general and the lack of transparency in specific remained prevalent.

4. HOW DID CIVIL SOCIETY POLITICIZE THE TTIP?

Introduction

Politicization can be understood as an active use of contingency, of rendering something contested or controversial. It is not an automatic process but rather is driven by actors who attempt to politicize something by discursively (re)inserting conflict or contingency surrounding a topic that previously had none or too little (Palonen, 2019).

In this sense, activists or citizens can attempt to politicize an EU free trade agreement by arguing, for example, that a deal does not regard the economic benefits but rather democracy and transparency.

This chapter concerns the way a small core of CSOs succeeded in bringing the TTIP to public debate, increasing the salience of negotiations, and influencing public opinion. I analyze how the TTIP was framed by its opponents and investigate the tactics they employed to achieve this objective.

Civil society activists contributed to expanding the number and type of actors involved in the public debate over the TTIP in addition to the polarization of positions. Thus, all three ingredients—a politically salient agreement, polarization, and actor expansion — constitute elements of politicization. To analyze these elements and answer my research question, I base my investigations on the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 1.

First, I identify how CSOs selected key issues to frame the risks associated with the TTIP. I underline the work of the Seattle-to-Brussels network as coordinating actors and the way they collectively framed the TTIP. Both points are crucial in understanding the framing campaigns aimed at galvanizing public opposition to the TTIP. Second, I analyze how CSOs trigger actor expansions toward a larger group of societal actors. The TTIP negotiations were characterized by a large engagement. Different organizations without a history of trade campaign joined the mobilization. The third step in the argument is that intense civic interest group campaigns provoked significant public opposition, a polarization of opinions that in turn influenced policy-makers' decisions on the TTIP.

4.1 How opposition increased TTIP salience

The major objective of interest groups is to influence political decisions. In the theoretical chapter, I analyze how interest groups engage in lobbying to achieve policy outcomes that are close to their ideal points.

The salience of policy issues—the attention that issues raise among interest groups—has an important impact on the ability of interest groups to lobby policy-making successfully.

Interest groups are most likely to mobilize on issues that are of high salience to citizens. Interest groups in turn have been demonstrated to play a key role in shaping the public salience of issues (Dür & Mateo, 2016). While some issues may inherently be more likely to attract broad public attention, interest groups can help to make a potentially salient issue into an actually salient issue.

The salience of the TTIP negotiations was unprecedented in Europe (Eliasson & Garcia-Duran Huet, 2019; Young A. , 2019). These negotiations attracted great attention among several interest groups.

During the TTIP negotiations, CSOs played a pivotal role in raising the salience of the TTIP and influencing public opinion.

Interest groups can shape public opinion in line with their preferences via frames, meaning a particular emphasis on and interpretation of an event. Using outside tactics including demonstrations, petitions, and social media, interest groups may be more effective in disseminating interpretations when framing issues in their favor.

4.1.1 Framing the fear: the TTIP as a threat to European standards and policies

Central to the anti-TTIP movement were discursive frames deployed by CSOs for the sake of their emotive contents. Civil society organizations strategically chose to frame fear messages to maximize the perceived threat posed by the TTIP (Garcia-Duran Huet & Eliasson, *The Public Debate over Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and Its Underlying Assumptions*, 2017). As one CSO representative confided, “we needed something to raise fears and capture attention” (Eliasson & Garcia-Duran Huet, 2018).

In the German and Austrian campaigns, as Bauer (2016) underlines,

anti-TTIP groups have continued to spread messages that evoke widespread fears about TTIP and the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). Their key narratives are: ‘TTIP encourages the proliferation of genetically modified organisms in the EU’, ‘TTIP and CETA are an attack on democracy’, ‘TTIP allows the United States to veto and eventually block EU law-making’, and ‘TTIP allows multinational corporations to sue EU governments for enforcing laws on consumer, health and environmental safety.

Civil society organizations largely refrained from attempting to undermine proponents’ claims of the economic and geopolitical benefits of the TTIP; rather, they opted to focus on the fear of losing precious European achievements. They framed the TTIP in negative

terms as a threat to high protection levels in policy domains, such as environmental, consumer protection, and food safety (De Ville & Siles-Brügge, 2016a). These arguments were based on presumptions of lower American product safety standards.

In analyzing the frames employed by the Stop TTIP campaign on its Facebook page, I found various categories of threat frames that refer to the perceived consequences of the proposed agreement. The TTIP campaigners portrayed the TTIP as a threat to higher EU standards. They argued that the TTIP would create a race to the bottom as corporate interests were placated and the convergence of standards across the Atlantic was touted. This would lead to destroying achievements in the EU on food safety, health, and nutrition. One of the main arguments advanced was the risk of allowing genetically modified vegetables and meat into European markets.

TABLE 4

Narratives and phrases used on the Stop TTIP Facebook page

FRAMES			
	Main political catchphrases		
Threat to regulatory standards	TTIP would take away your right to know your food produced	Stop TTIP to protect our public water supplies	Don't let TTIP rob us of the capacity to protect our standards and regulations.
Threat of private courts	TTIP would allow corporations to sue countries over environmental protection that threaten their profit	Multinational enterprises rule over governments	Investment protection threatens regulation in the public interest, democratic change and state budgets
Threat to democracy/popular sovereignty	Democracy is not granted from above, it is made from below	Multinationals want you to say bye-bye to democratic laws	Preserve democracy, refuse to sign TTIP/CETA
Lack of democratic standards	Stop the secrecy	TTIP isn't about trade it's about control at the expense of rights	We cannot have legitimate policies without public trust, which implies full transparency

Food security, in particular, was a key issue of campaign debates (Eliasson, 2016). Moreover, this was the prominent theme in more than 500 street protestations against the TTIP organized across Europe on April 18, 2015 (Eliasson & Garcia-Duran Huet, 2019, p. 60; Barkin, 2015).

As Eliasson and Garcia-Duran (2019a) underline, in Europe, the importance of food goes beyond its nutritional value:

sixty percent of European check the origin of their food, and for nearly half the origin influences their purchase. This is higher than for any other category of products, indicating awareness of and concern with food, and likely higher receptivity to public campaigns regarding issues related to food. (p. 53)

Eliasson (2015a) argues that TTIP campaigners successfully tapped into “skepticism frequently presenting American food as chemically enhanced and driven by large-scale industrial output, in a society that has no food culture.” American standards were described as “weak” or “less safe,” as reflected in position papers, social media posts, videos, and public statements.

The controversial issues related to food as chlorinated chicken became a symbol associated with the negotiations, while complaints concerning hormone-treated beef also made the rounds.

As the European Consumer Organization explained:

It is not without reason that chlorinated chicken has emerged as a symbol of the detriments European consumers might face if a TTIP deal is signed that does not have consumers’ interests at heart. Chlorinated chicken has to do first of all with consumer preferences: research conducted in the UK, Denmark and Finland consistently found that European consumers’ acceptance of meat that has been treated with chemicals is low. (...) it is vital that EU consumers’ preference for meat that has not been rinsed with any chemicals is recognized and respected. (The European Consumer Organisation, 2014c, p. 2)

The same document continues with “[t]he European approach to meat safety is more efficient in protecting public health, and that the American approach is ‘[t]he “easy fix” to make up for poor farming and slaughter hygiene” (p.3).

In the Stop TTIP campaign, food security was the third reason cited, after democracy and public services, to explain why citizens should be worried about the TTIP:¹⁴ “Through a harmonization of food regulation, EU food safety standards would be lowered to US levels. This would remove EU restrictions on genetically modified organisms (GMOS), pesticides and hormone-treated beef.”

According to the Corporate Europe Observatory, the TTIP would “open the floodgate to GMOs” (2013) and this agreement “will lower regulations on food safety...and will lead to more industrialized, intensive food production that undermines the health of people and the planet. Trade policy should be for the benefit of people and the environment, not corporations” (Corporate Europe Observatory, Compassion in World Farming, ARC2020, Friends of the Earth Europe, & European Coordination Via Campesina, 2014, p. 8).

¹⁴ See annex 1: Anti-TTIP campaign – 10 reasons you should be worried about TTIP.

Moreover, the CEO declared “chlorine chicken, GM vegetables, chemical damaging for children: only efficient regulation can stop these, and this regulation is under attack by TTIP” (2015).

Friends of the Earth Europe defined the TTIP “as a Trojan Horse that will threaten our food safety and environment. ... A trade agreement is not the place to decide about our food safety (Friends of the Earth Europe, Compassion in World Farming, & Grain and the Center for Food Safety, 2015).

Civil society organizations presented sanitary and phytosanitary standards as a threat to Europeans’ health. Their messages were simplified to make them easy to understand to win public support. The message sent throughout 2013–2016 was that the TTIP would sacrifice European values and standards (Young A. R., 2017).

FIGURE 4

Visuals and slogans — anti-TTIP campaign



Dür (2015) reveals that the strong framing of TTIP issues impacted public opinion, especially if knowledge or awareness was previously low. The TTIP campaigners successfully framed the TTIP and particularly technical issues, such as the ISDS, making them salient and educating people on this low-awareness topics.

Indeed, the ISDS was another issue simplified to gather public attention and raise awareness. An analysis of Facebook’s posts highlights the high salience of the potential impact of the ISDS courts on the rule of law in EU member states. The Stop TTIP campaigners largely considered such courts to be a form of private justice. The “threat of private justice” frame emphasized the role of the “private arbitration courts,” which

were seen as a challenge to the rule of law in EU member states. Similarly, the “corporations vs. citizens” frame portrayed the TTIP as a project for the benefit of large multinational corporations, whose interests would be prioritized over the interests of citizens, thus posing a threat to democracy in Europe.

Especially the ISDS triggered great anger and fear among citizens, as it was seen by TTIP opponents as a potential for large companies to force governments into dropping legislation to meet their demands. Furthermore, the posts introduced the idea that the TTIP favors the interests of corporations over those of citizens and that the agreement is therefore a threat to democracy. One key element in this way of framing the TTIP is the lack of transparency during the process. The primary argument was that nothing negotiated behind closed doors could produce a good agreement (De Ville & Siles-Brügge, 2016a).

Civil society organizations consistently paired big business or corporations with something negative, implying that the European Commission was unable to withstand U.S. pressure, thus jeopardizing European standards.

Another main topic of debate was the opacity of the negotiations, which proved to be a cause for distress and instilled a feeling of “being left out” in many protesters. They portrayed that the image of protest movement separates itself from governments and corporations, which leads to a notion as “them” against “us” and hence provides a valid framework of a non-democratic trade deal and the empowerment of large corporations (Lurz , 2017).

The comparison between our findings and the analysis of Bauer (2016) (table 5) regarding Germany’s campaign reveals that activists employed similar frames. Moreover, the anti-TTIP campaign did not build on a vacuum but rather on a growing EU-critical campaigning (Bouza & Oleart, 2018). Frames such as “people vs corporations” resemble the ideas put forward in previous EU-critical campaigns (Strange, 2011).

These effective framing techniques were facilitated by the movement’s inherent structure, including professional organizations such as S2B and Campact. According Eliasson and Garcia-Duran Huet, (2018) Campact worked as force multipliers by conducting

market tests on policies requests by the client by using phrases and words on topic or issue. It takes a name or process, ties it to a policy, and sends a query to targeted e-mails drawn from its list-sere. Building on the responses the message is modified, and the product, action, or process is associated with something negative (e.g. chicken and chemicals, or ISDS and circumventing democracy) before being rested. The client provided the results, or campaign fuel (e.g. which words, phrases, or associations evoked certain desired reactions.

Civil society organizations dominated the debate, strategically choosing fear frames and disseminating arguments on lower American standards and greater corporate influence on policy. By selecting such emotive frames, CSOs focused “on the alleged costs of the TTIP vis-à-vis the status quo, rather than directly challenging proponents’ arguments of economic and geopolitical benefits” (Eliasson & Garcia-Duran Huet, 2019a, p. 127).

The way they framed the TTIP was successful in raising public salience. Civil society organizations used specific words and phrases to help frame their messages and to educate and rally citizens (Eliasson & Garcia-Duran Huet, 2019a, p. 53). They simplified the message and connected to the European public's pre-existing beliefs and opinions on certain topics (food, corporations, and transparency). Civil society organizations created appeal to the existing public beliefs or opinions and build on them. As Bauer notes in the context of Germany, "Their simplistic narratives on TTIP aim to take advantage of German citizens' negative attitudes towards the US National Security Agency's spying, anti-Americanism, aversion to Brussels-made EU policymaking, and widespread anti-capitalist and anti-inequality sentiments" (2016).

TABLE 5

Narratives and phrases spread on the TTIP by Germany's most active anti-TTIP organizations

FRAMES	SPREAD BY				
	Attac Germany	Campact	Foodwatch	Greenpeace Germany	German Federation for the Environment and Nature Conservation
TTIP allows for the proliferation of GMOs in the EU	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
TTIP is an attack on democracy and the right to regulate	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
TTIP allows the US and/or multinational corporations to block EU laws	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
TTIP allows multinational corporations to sue EU governments for enforcing laws on consumer	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political catchphrases	TTIP is a free trade trap; Multinational enterprises rule over governments; Technocrats deprive governments of power	Stop TTIP; Additional power to multinational corporations; TTIP cuts human rights	An attack on democracy and consumer rights	Stop TTIP and CETA; CETA is extremely dangerous	Stop CETA and TTIP; TTIP- We will never agree; Public services under pressure to privatize; We will stop CETA

Source: Bauer, 2016

4.1.2 Online campaigning: setting the stage for what citizens think

The protest against the TTIP was primarily focused on the internet. To increase the salience and frame debates, TTIP campaigners largely employed online social media. The anti-TTIP movement was, indeed, greatly organized and narrated via online media. Facebook and Twitter were by far the most used social media platforms by the opponents, while pro-TTIP organizations rather relied on the websites of traditional news media.

Social media coverage of the TTIP was overwhelmingly negative (Bauer, 2016). Furthermore, Bauer found in a survey that Campact and Stop TTIP dominated the discussion on Facebook and Twitter and managed to create a haze of distrust and suspicion surrounding the pro-TTIP side and the European Commission.

Anti-TTIP groups dominated the online media debate. Bauer's analysis of the period ranging from June to December 2014 concerning the TTIP in Germany reveals that negative online media reporting was more than 20 times greater than positive reporting.

In Germany, anti-TTIP groups accounted for approximately 90% of social media reporting on the TTIP (Bauer, 2016). Additionally, most TTIP-related articles were in reference to the protestors. Compared with social media, the coverage on websites of traditional news portals was more balanced. Bauer explains this is in part a result of the efficient and goal-oriented organization on the side of the anti-TTIP camp and media's predisposition to the guiding principle "only bad news is good news" (Bauer, 2015, p. 9).

Furthermore, Ciofu and Stefanatu (2016) reveal that "no" campaign has dominated Twitter:

Tweets that include hashtag words generally favorable to the agreement (such as #yes2ttip, #jazuttip, #ttipquiz) only make up roughly 1% of total tweets, whereas tweets advocating a clear no (through hashtags like #stopttip, #nottip, #noalttip and others) represent 99% of total TTIP related activity on Twitter. The ratio for the month of October was 1.896/185.521, thus roughly 1/100. (ibid.)

Interestingly, several negative hashtags were developed locally in several EU member states. A Dutch-specific hashtag, #ttipalarm, with 6,588 hits, represented approximately two-thirds of TTIP-skeptic tweets in the Netherlands (Ciofu & Stefanuta, 2016).

The pro-TTIP organizations were unable to counter-frame the stories of their opponents and keep up with them in spreading their pro-TTIP message. In particular, they did not succeed in reaching and impacting social media audiences.

The members of the movement understood the potential of social media in creating viral campaigns with slogans, images and, even audio in addition to a sense of community among its followers. In taking a closer look at the discourse and references on social media, it becomes clear that the frames of the movement were repeated and re-distributed to large extents. Topics such as the ISDS, anti-capitalism, and the threat posed by the TTIP to democracy, the constitutional state, and environment and consumer standards are mentioned (Bauer, 2016, p. 125).

The anti-TTIP movement, by spreading its message on social media platforms, gained followers from all corners of society and managed to drag the network out of the virtual realm and into the streets and public debate. Via social media, the organizations that were part of the movement were linked with one another and could thus network, even internationally, and use these sites to publish confidential information and documents regarding the negotiations, such as the dissemination of the leaked TTIP documents by Greenpeace.

In addition to social media platforms, the anti-TTIP movement developed its own websites, such as Stop TTIP (stop-ttip.org). These played a large part in motivational framing to get people out of their living rooms and onto the streets. The protests, which were held in several cities in Europe, were largely advertised with sign-up lists on the websites and social media platforms.

Social media activism was a key element in the mobilization of opposition against the TTIP. Anti-TTIP campaigners strategically constructed their messages and framed people's perceptions of the TTIP to provoke emotional responses among citizens.

Anti-TTIP campaigners were more efficient and quick at spreading alarm related to food safety, democracy, and environmental and labor standards than the negotiators, so the supporters were put on the defensive.

Anti-TTIP movement made effective use of selective data, simplification, and preexisting beliefs, and they disseminated their message through social media while simultaneously attracting attention from traditional media. In their analysis of the Stop TTIP campaign, Conrad and Oleart (2020) reveal that frames employed by Stop TTIP on Facebook resonated in the mass media coverage of the Greenpeace leaks. Opposition CSOs succeeded in increasing public opinion awareness and generating media coverage across Europe.

4.2 Mobilization within the Anti-TTIP Movement: from actor expansion to coalition formation

The civil society organization campaign, as we have analyzed in Chapter 3, united a broad variety of organizations. Development, environmental, human rights, labor and consumer, women and farmer organizations, academics and journalists, citizens movements, municipalities, and cities engaged in TTIP mobilization. The Anti-TTIP movement had thus expanded beyond direct economic stakeholders to include groups not previously involved in trade policy. By building alliances, they pooled their resources (e.g., expertise, staff, and reputation) and voiced against the negotiations. This was essential to kick-start a durable mobilization and politicization process.

At the EU level, the S2B acted as a member-driven network, with organizations based both in Brussels and several member states. The network worked as a coordinator to

provide a backbone and ensure that different groups and campaigns were working toward the same goal. Gheyle's (2019) interviews confirm that S2B

invested a lot of time and capacity in trying to hold [everything] together somehow [...] So we do allow for a lot of dynamic and space, because it doesn't all have to be in one platform, but you still make sure that you're not running in completely different directions. (p.186)

In addition to staying in touch, S2B main objective was therefore to share information and position analytical and discursive material at the disposal of other member organizations. Seattle-to-Brussels members served as "spiders in the web" between S2B, the Brussels bubble, national campaigns, and new organizations (Gheyle & De Ville, 2019). This network sought to make the anti-TTIP campaign "European" from the start and was involved in spearheading the movement, in which many of its members played a leading role in coordinating national campaigns (Gheyle, 2019).

At the peak of the anti-TTIP campaign, many interest groups were active on that issue. The framing of the agreement as anti-democratic and in opposition to consumer, environmental, and worker interests served to expand the number and variety of groups that engaged in the mobilization against the negotiations. These organizations were alarmed by the fear that the TTIP, and particularly its investment protection and regulatory components, would endanger their ability to defend their interests.

By forming coalitions, CSOs contributed to sustained activism and subsequent politicization. The link between politicization and coalition formation is well documented in the literature. Crespy (2016) argues that coalition formation is the first step in an unfolding politicization process and empirically demonstrates that the simultaneous activation of transnational, supranational, and domestic channels of coalition formation has played a key role in politicizing EU legislation on welfare market liberalization. Empirical studies on interest group lobbying similarly find that the existence of coalitions is decisive for lobbying success or influence (Klüver, 2013). Moreover, protests regarding trade negotiations in the past and coalition formation have played a recurring role in fueling politicization.

The Seattle-to-Brussels Network adopted the coordination of the anti-TTIP movement and successfully activated transnational and domestic channels of mobilization and coalition formation.

In Belgium, an unprecedented coalition of CSOs was established to request the suspension of the TTIP negotiations, including many organizations not highly active on trade policy, such as health insurance (Deswaef, 2015). The ISDS represented one of the most important factors in this actor expansion. As one interviewee argued, "what was decisive in our decision to join the movement was the fact that the TTIP provided for the use of arbitration tribunals allowing investors to challenge states in private courts" (interview 1).

These civil society organizations were already linked to other groups and were therefore informed and engaged quickly. "The solicitation to join the coalition came mainly from our associative and trade union partners" (interview 1).

Subsequently, each of these organizations mobilized their own members and supporters at the local or national level. They employed different channels to influence their

constituency, including mailings, meetings, and participation in public debate through interviews and conferences.

As a representative of health insurance stated:

First, we raised awareness internally among directors and staff through a tour of the regions. Second, we prepared educational tools, flyers, position papers; we organized information evenings, conferences, trainings. We wrote press releases and articles, we made videos showing the TTIP's impact on healthcare and healthcare systems. It was the first time we engaged in a mobilization campaign using all these tools, and we succeeded. For us, the TTIP mobilization is an example to follow for future campaigns. (interview 2)

Public resonance played a central role in the actor expansion process. When a topic became salient for the public and received resonance, more organizations tended to engage with it. My interviews suggest that interest group behavior was influenced by the effect of the initial campaign on public opinion: "The fact that there has been a major mobilization of the civil society organizations has undoubtedly played a role in the involvement of the *Ligue des Droits humains* in this movement (interview 1).

Several civil society organizations and political parties were permanently solicited with questions on TTIP negotiations. As a Belgium policy-makers confided to me during the TTIP mobilization: "We have no choice, we need to engage in the public debate over TTIP."

The frame and arguments were quickly disseminated, primarily online through social media, and thus caught on well with the public. As a result, citizens became aware of the TTIP, which pushed even more groups to campaign. This dynamic occurred during the ACTA campaign, as well (Dür & Mateo, 2014). All these elements facilitated the outburst of mobilization against the TTIP.

4.2.1 The Stop TTIP ECI

Crucial in this actor expansion process were the petitions promoted by CSOs and the Stop TTIP Initiative, as well. These activities attracted an ever-greater number of participants and began receiving much media attention in several EU member states. They served as a coalition magnet, leading to actor expansion through the construction of a transnational network.

The STOP TTIP Alliance was established around March 2014. This could be seen more as the mobilizing pillar of the anti-TTIP movement, as they focused primarily on actions and demonstrations and similarly on coordinating these at a member state level.

Originally, the idea was to use the European Citizens' Initiative to campaign against the TTIP and influence the negotiations. The movement officially announced its filing for a European Citizens' Initiative in July 2014, requesting the EC "to recommend to the EU Council of Ministers to repeal the negotiating mandate for the Trade Investor Partnership

(TTIP) and not to conclude the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) either” (European Citizens’ Initiative STOP TTIP, 2014). The Stop TTIP ECI was quickly envisioned as a European social-movement building tool. Indeed, signatures from different countries were required, so national contact points or coordinators in each member state were identified.

Similar to the S2B members who were the focal points of the campaigns in their own country, these coordinators functioned as another point around which national networks were established. The difference was that these were more geared toward petitioning, actions, and demonstrations.

The idea took off, and throughout summer 2014, more than 200 organizations from different countries joined the movement as official partners. However, in September 2014, the European Commission refused to grant STOP TTIP the status of a European Citizens’ Initiative on legal grounds. What was significant was the organizers decided to launch a “self-organized” ECI (or sECI), continuing the online petition to stop the negotiations. Two months after its establishment, the 1 million mark was reached; yet, the movement did not stop there and continued to collect signatures. By the one-year mark, the movement gathered 3.2 million signatures, with a country quorum reached in 23 member states. In the end, a total of 515 organizations from 28 member states supported the initiative.

The signatures were handed to the European Commission during a public event on 7 October 2015 and (a month later) to Martin Schulz, the President of the European Parliament. After that, the coalition continued collecting signatures but was no longer under the banner of an ECI, rather a “European Initiative.” Therefore, the structure set up to organize the signature-collecting effort did not dissolve and remained the backbone of the movement against the TTIP.

The frame of pan-European cooperation served as a coalition magnet that sustained the expansion of civil society and other actors concerned with the TTIP. It succeeded in generating further outcry from citizens and enhanced media coverage.

4.2.2 TTIP-free zones

The municipal level became a central device for politicizing the negotiations. Civil society engaged in efforts to push local governments, cities, or regions (symbolically) to declare themselves free from the TTIP. These efforts aimed to expand the number of actors active on the issue and engage national policy-makers.

This tactic was already used during the anti-GATS mobilization, when numerous local governments established symbolic “Free Zones.”

Even if these “free zones” had no legal value, they contributed in highlighting the societal opposition against such deals, informing citizens about the negative consequences that the TTIP could have. Furthermore, campaigns at the local level fully involved activists and local committees, strengthening their engagement. Hence, it is viewed as essential

to a movement's identity-building process, a core point raised by Siles-Brügge and Strange (2020). Moreover, if local councilors are involved, this boosts the credibility of the movement as a whole and offers additional points for future advocacy.

In Belgium, the different resolutions focused on the possible impacts of negotiations on the local level. International trade negotiations were no longer a distant and technical issue but had become salient and relevant to the citizens. These resolutions underlined the centrality of trade in peoples' lives.

In the end, more than 2,000 municipalities and cities declared themselves TTIP-free (see Annex 2). A dedicated website (ttip-free-zones.eu) was made accessible to inform citizens and disseminate campaign tools (flyers, templates for initial letters to mayors or councilors, recommendations on who to contact, strategies for explaining the usefulness of such a motion, and templates for eventual resolutions).

Finally, opposition CSOs largely employed outside lobbying tactics to expand the scope of conflict. Throughout 2014–2015, the Stop TTIP campaign organized several protests. Graziano and Caiani (2018) identified an increase in protests during the second semester of 2014, with a peak in several member states, including Austria, Germany, and Italy.

Civil society organizations gathered an estimated 200,000 protesters onto the street of Berlin on October 10, 2015. These and other outside lobbying activities, such as flash mobs and public demonstrations, attracted ever-greater attention from the public.

Furthermore, civil society organizations comprised the bulk of speakers at public meetings (Bauer, 2016, p. 7). The public debate became so toxic that some proponents of the agreement even withdrew from the debate. Member-state governments, for instance, were unwilling to defend the ISDS in the face of the potent popular opposition. Moreover, SMEs in Germany did not want to speak in favor of the TTIP because it had become so unpopular.

5. CONCLUSION

The mobilization against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership represents a rare episode of collective attention. Throughout this research, I have analyzed the unprecedented politicization of the attempt to negotiate the largest bilateral free trade agreement in history. I sought to understand how civil society brought the TTIP into the public domain.

I address this main research question by considering the civil society mobilization and how CSOs achieved the politicization of the TTIP. I summarize my findings as follows.

First, politicization entails an “expansion of the scope of conflict.” Civil society organizations primarily engaged in a massive outside lobbying and waged an opposing multilevel campaign to increase public awareness regarding TTIP negotiations. Anti-TTIP activists initiated an “outside strategy” of protests, speeches, and social media campaigns targeting the public, and thus indirectly policy makers. I find that outside lobbying served as the starting point for the politicization of the TTIP.

Second, I introduce framing and coalition formation as cogs in the politicization process, as they are theoretically linked to the main idea of expanding the scope of conflict. Civil society organizations contributed to shaping public attitudes regarding the TTIP through the frames they conveyed or by affecting news content. Furthermore, coalition formation contributed to sustained activism and politicization.

To trace the theoretical roots of this argument, I review the literature on outside lobbying, politicization, and public influence and underline the complex relationship between public opinion, interest groups, and policy outcomes. Interest groups influence public opinion, and public opinion, in turn, affects interest group behaviors. Finally, public opinion shapes policy outcomes.

Other studies have assessed this complex relationship (Dür & Mateo, 2014). This research confirms and adds to this existing literature.

Politicization is not an automatic process; civil society organizations played a critical role in rallying public opposition to the TTIP. In doing so, civil society organizations served as trigger actors of politicization. The intensity of public opposition to the TTIP coincided with the vigor of the anti-TTIP campaign. I find correlations between CSOs’ campaign, shifting public opinion, and developments in the TTIP.

The public campaign against the TTIP was particularly vigorous in the EU, especially in Germany, where opposition to the TTIP was highly potent. Importantly, however, the lack of public attention on other trade agreement negotiations, in the absence of a civic interest group campaigning against it, supports my conclusion.

The extent to which interest groups can effectively trigger the politicization of a policy issue thus largely depends on the groups’ ability to stimulate the attention of public opinion. These insights into interest groups’ capacity to actively shape public opinion can be leveraged to increase our understanding of the dynamics in the politicization of EU trade policy.

Civil society organizations framed the TTIP as a threat to democracy, the rule of law, the environment, health, public services, and consumer and labor rights. The framing was a central feature in the CSOs' strategy. Applied to the study of lobbying, framing postulates that by highlighting certain aspects of an issue and by omitting others, interest groups aim to influence the outcome of public policy debates.

Civil society strategy was largely coordinated and highly consistent. These groups presented the TTIP as directly impacting people's lives. They made deliberate strategic choices and concentrated their financial means to "manufacture discontent" (Bauer, 2016) by focusing on a limited set of issues amenable to mobilizing fear.

Civil society organizations succeeded in generating fear regarding whether the EU ban on the import of hormone-treated beef would be maintained and whether chlorinated chicken would be sold in Europe, concerns that were thus singled out by anti-TTIP activists to bank on already-present salience and polarize opinions and further actor expansion. To increase the salience, anti-TTIP activists appealed to preexisting beliefs on certain topics (foods, corporations, transparency), which is more effective when the public is largely uninformed. Anti-TTIP activism was a crucial factor in mediating how cultural consideration affected individual preferences and public opinion more broadly over trade policy.

Additionally, CSOs identified the parties to blame, namely the European Commission, the US, and major companies. The anti-TTIP movement presented an easy solution to the "problem": national governments and the European Commission needed only to be convinced to stop the negotiations.

Civil society organizations successfully targeted citizens, relayed specifically selected issues and emotive frames, and made efficient and extensive use of social media to spread these frames and wield influence. Indeed, the campaign's strong effect on the public salience of the issue clearly benefited from the new technologies.

Through online campaigns, the movement succeeded in distributing and articulating its frames and generating online participation. Additionally, CSOs campaigned via websites on which one could sign petitions, donate, read blogs and press releases, sign up for mailing lists, watch explanatory videos, and become directly interlinked via social media platforms. These websites played a vital role in disseminating their frames, while the websites of Stop TTIP played a crucial role in mobilization.

Once public salience was raised, the anti-TTIP movement managed to reach far beyond its usual suspects, attracting various organizations. At the peak of the anti-TTIP campaign, many interest groups were active on the issue. Forging coalitions is a key mechanism of an unfolding politicization process. By forming coalitions, organizations pool resources, exchange information, and decide on common strategies and frames—dynamics that contribute to sustained activism and subsequent politicization.

5.1 Discussion and future research

This research provides new insights into how pan-European organizations can mobilize and influence public opinion. The success of this campaign reveals how a relatively

resource-poor (compared with business organizations) campaign organized by CSOs could raise public salience and mobilize public opinion regarding trade policy.

Crafting a highly emotive frame was successfully at inflaming public opinion, mobilizing a broad coalition of CSOs, and putting pivotal decisions-makers under pressure. The analysis of the anti-TTIP campaign reveals that selecting issues that had the potential to mobilize public opinion in Europe was crucial in the success of mobilization.

Anti-TTIP campaigns managed to shape the public debate and consequently impact the policy preferences of political elites. Business organizations largely supported the agreement, and initially, trade labors were not very opposed to the TTIP. When CSOs managed to increase the public salience of this agreement and contributed to the polarization of opinions, several MEPs and national governments changed their opinion, which in turn impacted the negotiations issue. Indeed, civil society organizations can challenge policies promoted by EU institutions and incumbent groups and influence public opinion in the EU.

Some studies have argued that the influence that civil society actors can exert on trade policy-making is limited; this research provides good reasons to doubt this assessment. Indeed, public opinion acted as a restraint on business influence throughout the negotiations because the civil society campaign increased the public salience of the TTIP.

Empirical studies on interest group lobbying find that the existence of coalitions and collective framing efforts is decisive for influence. These factors can be considered background conditions, which create the opportunity structures within which agency and mobilization can unfold.

In this research, I examine agency dynamics in the politicization of the TTIP and focus on the relationship between the public opinion and the deliberate strategic mobilization and politicization by civil society organizations. I analyze how the existing literature on the mutual interaction between public opinion and interest groups can be mobilized to further advance research on the politicization of particular trade agreement negotiations. In my view, future studies should embrace this path to uncover the politicization of EU trade negotiations.

To that end, I identify two shortcomings of this thesis, and argue that these can be seen as stepping stones to further research. First, the role of public opinion in shaping the dynamics of interest groups. We should investigate how individual-level preferences and public opinion contribute to enabling interest groups to act as agents of politicization in EU trade policy. Second, there is probably not one single way in which issues become politicized. In this research, I identify outside lobbying as the key determinant of the politicization of the TTIP. However, future research could benefit from analyzing comparatively under which structural conditions interest groups success in acting as agents of politicization of EU trade policy issues.

Given that the EU is currently in the process of initiating, negotiating, and ratifying an entire set of such agreements, acquiring more in-depth insight into these dynamics will continue to be of great relevance.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1: Anti-TTIP campaign – 10 reasons you should be worried about the TTIP



18 DAYS TO SIGN AND COLLECT

1/10 REASONS YOU SHOULD BE WORRIED ABOUT TTIP

A THREAT TO DEMOCRACY

IF AGREED, TTIP WOULD GIVE CORPORATIONS THE POWER TO SUE GOVERNMENTS OVER DECISIONS THAT COULD HARM THEIR FUTURE PROFITS, UNDERMINING DEMOCRATIC DECISION-MAKING MADE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST.

STOP TTIP!

www.stop-ttip.org

Foto: Agustín Ruiz/flickr



2/10 REASONS YOU SHOULD BE WORRIED ABOUT TTIP

A THREAT TO PUBLIC SERVICES

TTIP WILL CREATE NEW MARKETS IN PUBLIC SERVICES LEADING TO LIBERALISATION AND PRIVATISATION. IT WOULD MAKE IT VERY DIFFICULT TO BRING THEM -AS WELL AS OUR ENERGY AND WATER- BACK UNDER PUBLIC CONTROL.

STOP TTIP!

www.stop-ttip.org



3/10 REASONS YOU SHOULD BE WORRIED ABOUT TTIP

A THREAT TO FOOD SAFETY

THROUGH A HARMONISATION OF FOOD SAFETY REGULATION, EU FOOD SAFETY STANDARDS WOULD BE LOWERED TO US LEVELS. THIS WOULD REMOVE EU RESTRICTIONS ON GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS (GMOs), PESTICIDES AND HORMONE-TREATED BEEF.

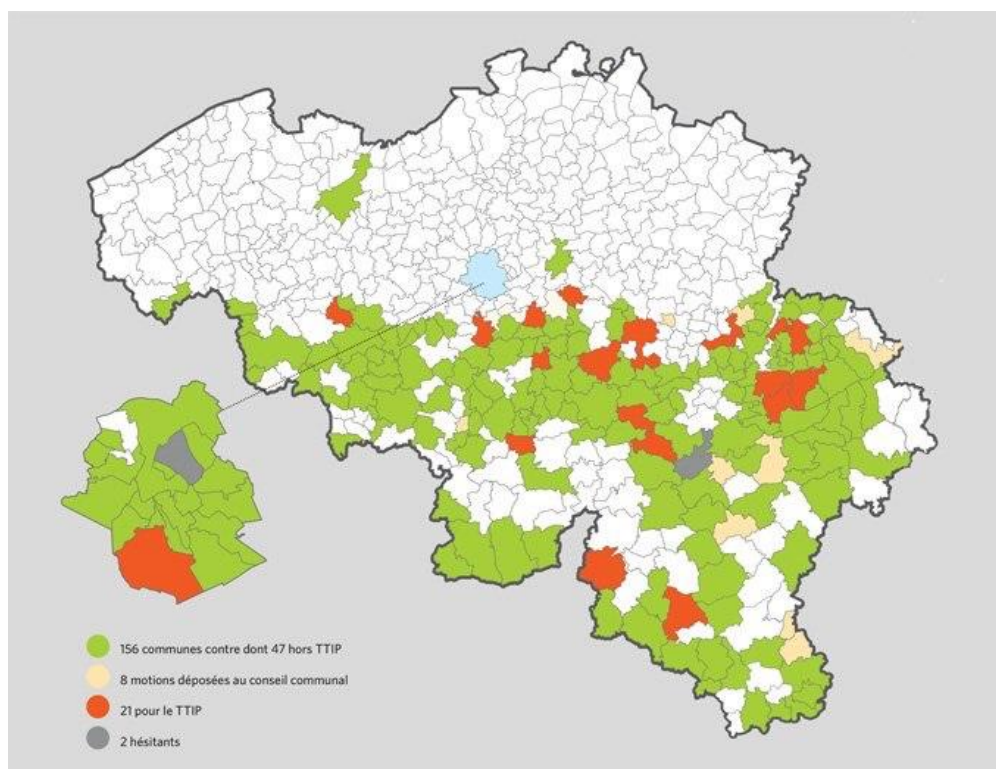
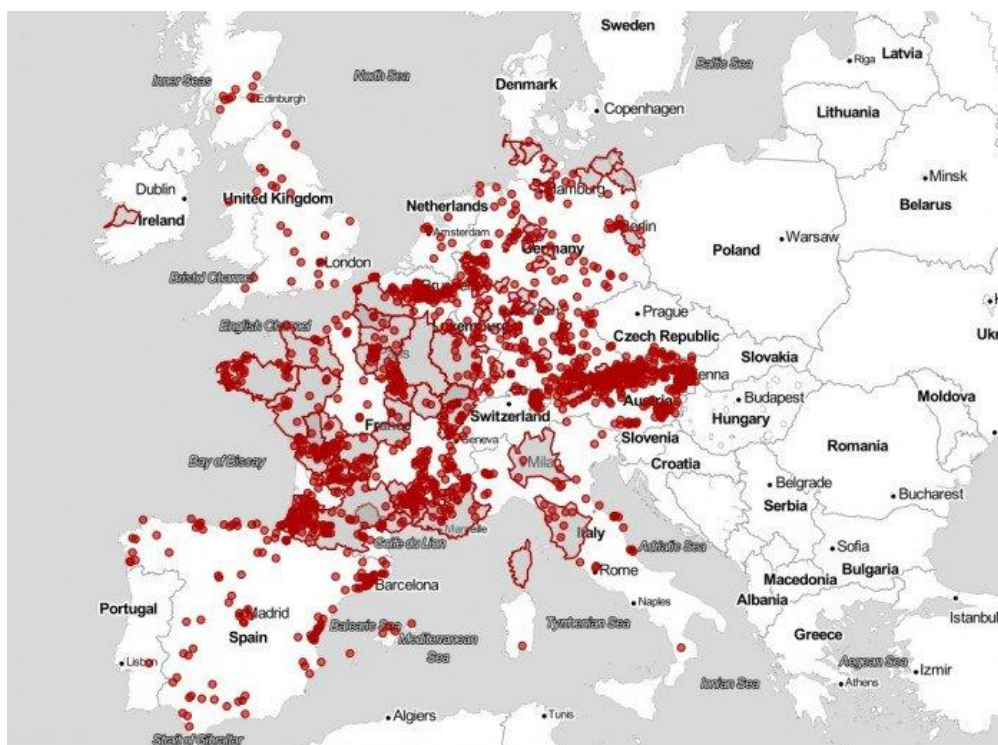
STOP TTIP!

www.stop-ttip.org

Foto: Liam Weller/flickr



Annex 2: Free-TTIP municipalities in Europe and in Belgium



Annex 3 : Interviews

Interviews carried out in the framework of the research:

1. Representative of *Ligue des Droits Humains*, September 2020
2. Representative of the *Alliance Nationale des Mutualités Chrétiennes* (ANMC), September 2020.
3. Representative of the *Stop-TTIP campaign coordination unit*, Belgium, June 2020
4. Representative of the *European Stop-TTIP campaign coordination unit*, June 2020

