

Policy Statement opposing the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)

Proposed by UCL

Summary

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is a free trade agreement, currently being negotiated by the United States of America (USA) and the European Union (EU).¹ The potential health impacts of TTIP include:

- Increasing marketisation of public services, including the NHS;
- Compromising equitable access to medicines;
- Reducing food standards;
- Reducing environmental standards;
- Reducing working standards.

Due to the potential damaging effects on health, we, Medsin-UK, are opposed to TTIP. We commit to joining a broad coalition of civil society organisations to oppose TTIP, and to joining and supporting efforts to lobby politicians on this issue. We call on students and grassroots organisations to take action in their universities and localities to campaign for the abolition of, and build public opposition to, TTIP. We call on our partner organisations in Europe to take similar steps in their countries, to multiply our efforts.

Introduction

TTIP is a free trade agreement currently being negotiated between the USA and the EU with dialogues originally starting in July 2013.¹ Traditional barriers to free trade, such as tariffs and quotas on goods, are already very low between the USA and the EU.¹ The primary aims of TTIP are therefore to “bind the existing autonomous level of liberalisation of both Parties at the highest level of liberalisation”, and to reduce what are known as non-traditional barriers to trade.² This means “the elimination of duties, the elimination of unnecessary regulatory obstacles to trade and an improvement in rules”.² Reducing these barriers to free trade means the harmonisation of rules and regulations, to allow for increased market access in goods and services, in addition to harmonisation of standards, such as in the areas of food and the environment.³

A commitment to negotiating such an agreement was made by President of the USA Barack Obama and EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso in February 2013.⁴ The negotiations were scheduled to be completed by the end of 2014, but the deadline has since been extended to December 2015.⁵

Concerns

The main areas that TTIP covers are “market access, regulatory component and rules, principles and modes of cooperation”.⁶ The following health concerns are noted for each:

- 1) Market access
 - a) Public services:
 - i) The barriers that TTIP aims to break down with regards to market access include barriers to investment of private companies in public services, such as education, water, health and infrastructure.⁷
 - ii) Public services are essential contributors to the Social Determinants of Health, and compromising their mandate to serve all people equitably by opening them up to privatisation has the potential to harm health.⁸
 - b) The National Health Service (NHS):
 - i) TTIP, as it stands, threatens to allow further marketisation of the NHS.⁹

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- ii) Increasing marketisation in healthcare has led to billions of pounds of direct costs, and has harmed the quality of health services.¹⁰
- c) Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS):
 - i) TTIP proposes to use an ISDS mechanism to protect investors' interests.³
 - ii) ISDS will give for-profit organisations the legitimacy to sue governments if governments act in a way that compromises potential profit.¹¹
 - iii) This means that public health policies, such as plain-packaging for tobacco or re-nationalisation of health services, may result in companies suing the government for potential profits.¹²
- 2) Rules, principles and modes of cooperation:
 - a) Food standards
 - i) Harmonisation of food standards risks lowering EU food standards
 - ii) EU regulations are based on precautionary principle, where caution is exercised "in the absence of of a clear understanding of whether something is safe", whereas US "requires 'scientific evidence' to justify restrictions on the use of a particular technique"¹³
 - iii) US regulation places the burden of proof on government agencies to prove that a chemical is unsafe, "rather than requiring producers to prove that it is safe before it enters the market"¹³
 - iv) Therefore TTIP weakens the "conception of consumer and environment protection that was adopted by ... fully democratic process ... passed by both the European Parliament and the Council."¹³
 - b) Environmental standards
 - i) TTIP risks a "'race to the bottom' in environmental regulation" if the EU's precautionary principle to applying standards is compromised by harmonisation of standards between the EU and the US.¹⁴
 - c) Working standards
 - i) There are also concerns about a "race to the bottom" with regards to labour rights.
 - ii) This is based on the fear that harmonising standards may lead to the EU adopting regulations closer to those of the US, where at least 24 US states' "Right to Work" laws inhibit the right to organise. They also allow lower wages and pensions, and worse access to benefits such as healthcare, than in the EU.¹⁵

Medsin-UK's existing stance

Medsin-UK reaffirms its stance that a neoliberal approach to global economy, which TTIP would promote through free trade in services, undermines health. We also reaffirm our stance that a publicly-funded, publicly-run NHS, which operates free from neoliberal policies of marketisation and privatisation, is the best way to achieve the best access to high-quality healthcare for those who need it.¹⁶

Conclusions

TTIP has a number of potential health impacts as demonstrated above meaning that if approved, the agreement will have a devastating impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals on both sides of the Atlantic. Because these problems appear throughout the agreement **it is the position of Medsin-UK that we oppose the agreement of TTIP in its entirety- not just the areas outlined above.** We do not believe that any part of the final agreement should pass the final round of negotiations.

We believe complete opposition to the entire agreement affords us the ability to engage with a wider range of activist and grassroots organisations in the below actions instead of simply opposing the provisions regarding health.

Considering all of the above, we call on Medsin-UK members to:

- 1) At a local level, members and branches should engage with their local Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) about TTIP enquiring about their position and where appropriate, engage with them about opposing the trade agreement
- 2) At a local level, members and branches should coordinate with other local non-governmental organisations to help educate students at university and/or the public about the potential negative effects of the agreement
- 3) At a local level, members and branches should sign the Stop-TTIP coalition petition found at <http://stop-ttip.org> and encourage others to do so
- 4) At a national level, Medsin-UK should sign the Stop-TTIP coalition list of supporting organisations and share the petition widely through communication routes to encourage as many members to sign the petition
- 5) At a national level, Medsin-UK should work with other large scale organisations to coordinate advocacy on the ground in Brussels at the rounds of negotiations for TTIP taking place between now and the end of the year
- 6) At a national level, Medsin-UK should engage with other nation-wide student organisations to add more organisations to coalitions opposing TTIP
- 7) At an international level, Medsin-UK should engage with other National Member Organisations of the International Federation of Medical Students' Associations in Europe and the the USA and coordinate lobbying of politicians and adding of organisations to the aforementioned petitions

We call on other organisations working in the health and development sectors to:

- 1) Ensure publication of policy if not already done so, outlining their position regarding TTIP to allow for organisations to coordinate more effectively in lobbying and advocacy
- 2) Add their name and contact details to the Stop-TTIP list of supporting organisations
- 3) To Coordinate under the Stop-TTIP coalition banner and coordinate large scale activism locally and at the negotiations taking place between now and the final round opposing TTIP in its entirety

We call on UK politicians and the UK government to:

- 1) Take the official position of opposing the TTIP agreement in its entirety and encourage negotiators present at the discussions to up ship and fly away

It is thought the final TTIP agreement will be decided by the end of 2015. This means there is a limited amount of time for organisations to fully mobilise and carry out action to ensure the negotiations break down indefinitely. We hope fulfilling the above actions, in particular through lobbying MPs within the UK, and engaging with other IFMSA NMO's across Europe and the USA, will create a groundswell that will force the negotiators in Brussels to abandon the agreement.

This policy statement is valid for a period of one year before requiring review and updating by the General Assembly. This is because it is hoped the outcome of the policy will be decided within this timeframe. Any questions regarding this statement should be directed to -insert-.

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