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Obama and Merkel Should Change Course on TTIP and Heed Bipartisan, Transatlantic Revolt Against More-of-the-Same Trade Agreements

Statement of Lori Wallach, Director, Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch

“As President Barack Obama and Chancellor Angela Merkel meet at the Hannover Messe, they are expected to prioritize conclusion of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), a pact that has shaped up to be decidedly unfriendly to the interests of a majority of Americans and Germans. Two decades of U.S. “trade” agreements becoming delivery mechanisms for extreme investor protections, new monopolies that increase medicine prices and deregulation of food safety and environmental safeguards is fueling the bipartisan revolt against more-of-the-same trade agreements now occupying center stage in the U.S. presidential election.

Unfortunately, the same secretive negotiating process – that is dominated by the interests of 500 corporate advisors, that was used by the Obama administration to conclude the highly unpopular Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) now drives the TTIP negotiations.

When talks were launched in 2013, many hoped TTIP would finally break the U.S. “free trade agreement” model that sets a ceiling on consumer and environmental safeguards and exposes our laws to attack in corporate arbitration tribunals. Instead, the TTIP is shaping up to roll back superior European food safety, chemical and consumer privacy safeguards and climate policies that many Americans would like to see here.

We know that European banks that do not like our stronger financial regulations are using the TTIP talks to try to undermine them. Many Americans oppose European demands to eliminate our Buy American and Buy Local procurement policies that allow the federal, state and local governments to reinvest our tax dollars to support local jobs. And the TTIP would overnight quadruple the U.S. exposure to costly litigation outside our courts in corporate investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) tribunals, with 27,000 European corporations and subsidiaries newly empowered to demand taxpayer compensation for public health, safety and environmental laws that they claim undermine their profit-making.

President Obama and Chancellor Merkel should continue efforts to deepen the friendship, cooperation, and yes, trade, between our countries, but the deeply flawed, pro-corporate process and agenda of the TTIP must be rejected.”

Background: When the TTIP negotiations were launched between the United States and the European Union in July 2013, both parties claimed that the negotiations would conclude on “one tank of gas” by the end of 2014. Due to intense opposition to the corporate-dominated agenda of the TTIP, particularly in Europe, and serious differences between the United States and European Union in a host of areas, talks have floundered for the past three years. U.S. and European leaders recently have insisted that they plan to conclude the talks during the Obama administration, though few observers see this as a realistic scenario. Many chapters of the proposed pact still do not even have consolidated texts, which are the starting point for any endgame negotiations. The 13th round of TTIP negotiations are taking place this week in New York City.

Opposition to the deal is intense in many European countries, with more than three million signatures on an anti-TTIP petition and hundreds of thousands marching against the TTIP across capitals last fall – including 250,000 people on the streets of Berlin. The European Commission has been forced to respond to the growing critique among civil society, member state officials and political groups in the European Parliament by publishing some of its textual proposals, proposing a “reform” of the controversial investor-state dispute settlement system and pledging that the pact will not roll back environmental and consumer safeguards. These efforts have not stemmed ire against the pact throughout Europe, with tens of thousands of Germans expected to rally against the TTIP in Hannover at the Obama-Merkel summit.

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