



Shedding Light on the “Shadow of TTIP and TPP”: Why Have Negotiations on the EU-Japan Free Trade Agreement Been Less Politicized?

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Abstract

Three major preferential trade agreements are currently being negotiated between the three largest developed economic blocks in the world: the EU and the US are negotiating on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), the US and Japan have recently concluded a Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and the EU and Japan are in talks on a Free Trade Agreement. Yet despite the similarities between them in terms of scope and scale, two of them have become intensely politicized, while the third has not. This thesis seeks to explain why the proposed Free Trade Agreement between the EU and Japan has remained so much less politicized than either TTIP or TPP.

I first examine some of the theoretical explanations offered for politicization and use a range of data sources to confirm my initial assumption that the EU-Japan agreement has indeed been less politicized than the other two. I next divide factors that could give rise to politicization into two blocks: those related to the content and those related to the partner. Using a range of primary and secondary sources, I identify those factors in the content of TTIP and TPP which have become controversial in the EU and Japan respectively, and so could be linked to the politicization of those negotiations. I then attempt to determine whether those factors are present in the content of the EU-Japan agreement, to the extent possible with the limited data sources available.

I find that the overwhelming majority of those aspects of the content of TTIP and TPP which have proved controversial are also likely to be present in the EU-Japan agreement, including notably provisions for investor-state dispute settlement and ongoing regulatory cooperation. This logically implies that the cause of the EU-Japan agreement's lower degree of politicization cannot lie in its content. I argue, therefore, that differences in the partner explain the different degree of politicization seen in the three cases. Public perceptions of the EU in Japan and vice versa may or may not be more favourable than that of the US, but there is strong evidence to suggest that it is weaker. As the relationship as a whole is less salient than that of either party with the US, it is not surprising that its economic and commercial dimension is also less prone to politicization.