



The Complicated New World of EU Trade Policy: A Case Study on the Varying Levels of Politicization in Recent EU FTAs

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to explain the underlying conditions that cause politicization of EU free trade agreements (FTAs) to occur. The EU's trade policy has seen mixed results in recent years. The failure to conclude the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with the US was mitigated by the conclusion and ratification of the EU-Japan Economic and Partnership Agreement. Finally, the EU is currently in the ratification process of the EU-Mercosur Agreement. These three agreements – US, Japan and Mercosur – contain a high level of similarity in terms of the depth and scale of their contents. Yet despite this, all three of them have experienced varying levels of politicization.

Against this backdrop, this thesis seeks to analyse the factors which have triggered this politicization. It first examines the previous literature on politicization and public perceptions of trade policy, before highlighting the varying levels of politicization among the three FTAs – high for TTIP, low for EU-Japan and, currently, medium for EU-Mercosur. In the following chapters, I present the key points of each of the agreements and the public perception of the partner countries, providing an analysis of those parts of each agreement that may have been a factor in its politicization. Building upon an analysis of the comprehensive politicization of the TTIP agreement, I derive the key variables that are primarily responsible for politicization and abstract their effect by investigating their role in the two other FTAs.

The analysis of the three case studies reveals that the contents of each agreement are similar – indicating that this alone cannot account for the varying levels of politicization. Instead, I argue that it is a combination of two other variables. The first is the nature of the relationship with the negotiating partner: if a relationship with a partner country is already politicized, this greatly increases the chances of the FTA negotiation being politicized. However, this alone is not determinative. The FTA also requires a highly salient issue, which I term a *cause célèbre*, for it to become politicized. This *cause célèbre* can either have a 'snowball effect' by transforming a non-politicized relationship into a politicized one, or it can build on the already politicized relationship and become an 'avalanche' of politicization.