

# EU/US trade talks: keep Parliament on board, MEPs warn

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**Parliament must be kept on board in talks with the US on what could become the world's largest free trade area, it warns in a resolution voted on Thursday. MEPs strongly favour starting the talks, but also state their expectations, e.g. as regards opening up access to the US procurement market and safeguarding the EU's cultural and audiovisual services market. This resolution is Parliament's input to the EU negotiating mandate.**

“An ambitious and comprehensive agreement would give a badly-needed, low-cost boost to our economies”, said rapporteur Vital Moreira (S&D, PT), before the vote on Parliament's input to the negotiations on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

“This resolution should now be duly taken into account by the Council and the Commission, as Parliament will only give its final consent if we have a positive outcome for our businesses, workers and citizens”, he added.

## **Parliament "has teeth and can bite"**

Besides giving the green light to start talks (460 votes in favour, 105 against and 28 abstentions), MEPs remind negotiators of their duty to keep Parliament "immediately and fully informed" at all stages of the talks.

They point out that no deal agreed in these talks can take effect without Parliament's consent, and that "its positions should therefore be duly taken into account at all stages". As Mr Moreira put it, "Parliament has teeth and can bite".

## **Parliament's priority list: removing restrictions...**

MEPs expect the deal to open up new opportunities for EU firms, especially small and medium-sized ones. For example, they expect the European Commission to seek full access for EU firms to US public procurement markets, and the removal of current US restrictions on EU suppliers of maritime and air transport services and particularly foreign ownership of airlines, and financial service providers.

### **...but protecting values**

As the talks will focus on differences between the two sides' laws and standards, which create the biggest barriers to transatlantic trade, MEPs caution that EU values that must be defended in the talks.

These values include the EU legislators' well-established precautionary principles with regard to food safety, such as genetically-modified organisms (GMOs), cloning, intellectual property rights, as the backbone of the EU's knowledge-based economy, the EU's geographical indication of origin system and a "high level of protection for personal data". MEPs also ask that the EU's labour and environmental standards should not be undermined.

### **"Cultural exception"**

In a separate vote, MEPs ask that cultural and audiovisual services, including online ones, be excluded from the negotiating mandate, in order to protect the cultural and linguistic diversity of EU countries (381 votes to 191, with 17 abstentions).

## **Background**

In a joint effort to revive the economy on both sides of the Atlantic, EU and US leaders announced at the start of 2013 that they would seek to achieve a comprehensive economic deal to exploit the full potential of economic cooperation.

Current impact assessments suggest that free trade with the US could boost EU GDP by 0.5%, which would translate into extra €545 a year for each family of four in the EU.

## **Timeline**

The EU Council of Ministers plans to authorize the opening of negotiations and approve negotiating directives in June. Talks could then begin in July and the Commission hopes to conclude them by the end of 2014.

*Procedure: Non-legislative resolution*