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## Transatlantic Trade and Security: A View from Morocco

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April 30, 2014

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On both sides of the Atlantic in recent months, governments have acknowledged ongoing negotiations for the Transatlantic Free Trade Agreement (TAFTA), a free trade agreement between the European Union and the United States. Though the merits of this future transatlantic partnership went largely challenged at the outset, some differences of opinion have lately emerged among European leaders.

On the one hand, German Chancellor Angela Merkel welcomes the prospect of an agreement stating that <sup>[3]</sup>, “[Germany and the United States] will benefit enormously from the TTIP, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, which we need to try to bring to completion because that will be an economic engine for both of our countries as well as for all of Europe.” In a similar vein, Lord Livingston, the British Minister of State for Trade and Investment, stated <sup>[4]</sup>, “an EU-US deal is the biggest prize of them all. It has the potential to

be the biggest free trade agreement ever, and will make exporting cheaper and easier for businesses of all sizes and regions on both sides of the Atlantic.”

On the other hand, French leader Francois Hollande sounded a note of caution in March 2013. He has asked for “safeguards in certain areas”<sup>[5]</sup> of a potential agreement, emphasizing the importance of cultural autonomy with regard to “audiovisual services”—i.e., mass media. European parliament members, for their part, have insisted that the agreement be “acceptable to the European public.” They noted specific areas of concern, including health and safety standards for animals and plants, intellectual property rights, and data protection.

These differing views are indicative of the differing perceptions of the details and scope of any potential future agreement. Some worry about harmonizing European and American standards and protecting their cultural sovereignty, while others are concerned about the hidden costs of a hypothetical merger between the two largest markets in the world. Given the stakes, much is riding on European Commission President José Manuel Barroso’s management of the negotiations, which he hopes will reach a conclusion before the end of 2014. And time is ticking.

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Multilateralism has always been one of the foundations of European diplomatic and trade policy. For more than twenty years, the European Commission has maintained that “[C]ooperation within the international community is a prerequisite for addressing global challenges, ranging from the fight against poverty to climate change.” The EU has been a prime mover in some of the major global conferences—since the Rio Summit in 1992, which was a milestone in conceptualizing new forms of multilateral global governance. The EU has vigorously backed the Kyoto Protocol as well as the International Criminal Court, despite opposition from the United States in both cases. And the EU consistently defended the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, until the time it was supplanted by the establishment of the World Trade Organization in 1995.

But notwithstanding its support for multilateralism, the European Commission has also engaged in numerous bilateral negotiations with the likes of South Korea, India, Japan, and Thailand. The Commission appears to be close to concluding a free trade agreement with Canada, an initiative jointly advanced by the leaders of Canada and France. It has been viewed as a sort of “pilot project,” potentially to serve as a precursor for a more ambitious agreement between the EU and the United States.

Meanwhile, EU members are waiting for the TAFTA with baited breath. The leaders of the United Kingdom and Germany would like to see at least the first phase of an agreement reached before the end of the term of the current President of the Commission in June 2014.

But what about the parameters of the negotiations? All parties seem to agree that the discussions should focus on nontariff “barriers”. But in terms of broader issues, the parties disagree on how to structure the negotiations. François Hollande has already raised concern about “health standards” and called for a “cultural exception” for “audiovisual services” in any Franco-American negotiations. Others, such as the Dutch politician Frits Bolkestein, believe that the EU should not succumb to “French protectionist temptations,” and that the European side in the negotiations should have “as broad a mandate as possible.” At the moment, this

view seems to prevail. Androulla Vassiliou, the European Commissioner of Education, Culture, Multilingualism, and Youth, expressed a desire for the exclusion of audiovisual services from the agreement. [5]

These early indications of dispute have had the effect of revealing deeper disagreements among the various European governments. The absence of unity is a considerable weakness for Europe amid the United States' determination to gain the upper hand in international trade and impose its interests. Meanwhile, all these matters are of greater urgency to Europe than they are to the United States. Amid economic instability, Europe needs to establish an agreement that can help ensure a rapid recovery of growth without sacrificing fiscal stability. In addition to its disunity, Europe also lacks latitude and flexibility—a weak starting point for negotiations indeed.

Furthermore, the United States, for its part, is more concerned with stemming the rise of China. Washington has already started another set of grand-scale trade negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) with countries in the Asia-Pacific region, a partnership that the United States may well consider to be of greater consequence.

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As a Moroccan who travels frequently in Europe as well as in the United States, I view these matters with interest, concern, and a special focus on how they impact my own country. Though Morocco's participation in global trade is proportionately very small, it is clear that we need to adapt to the evolving situation. And it behooves our allies in Europe and the United States to take our perspective into consideration—both for Morocco in and of itself, and as an example of many other developing countries grappling with similar questions.

Since its independence, Morocco has chosen the path of integration into the global economy. Morocco signed an Association Agreement with the European Union in 1990, which required significant reforms, including the establishment of fledgling new industries which have struggled to survive. In 2000, a free trade agreement was signed with Europe; and in 2006, another was signed with the United States. The latter agreement, however, has not allowed the development of exports to the American mainland, and has, on the whole, been more advantageous to the United States. The reasons why relate to nontariff conditions and the battery of measures imposed on imports by the Washington administration.

This imbalance, in turn, is precisely what causes Moroccans in and out of government worry about the transatlantic treaty. It is understandable that each side should press for "standards" that serve its own capacity to compete. However, the settlements the two sides reach regarding "standards" will probably prove detrimental to Moroccan exports. Perhaps some Western voices would say that increased pressure on Morocco and other developing countries is a "blessing in disguise" that will require Moroccan producers to make greater strides faster. But the rate of acceleration they appear to expect is unrealistic.

Moroccans tend to share another fear as well. The "pivot to Asia," ultimately an interest shared by Americans and Europeans, may lead to a neglect of the Southern Mediterranean in terms of economic planning. This concern applies to Morocco as well as other countries south of the Sahara who are trying to come together through economic, political, and security cooperation. "Co-development" is a pillar of King Mohammed's diplomacy and

economic planning, as the king's successive visits to Mali, Gabon, Senegal, and elsewhere on the African continent demonstrate. The fight against terrorism, if waged successfully, cannot be limited to intelligence cooperation and military deployment when problems reach the point of crisis.

And yet unfortunately, both Americans and Europeans seem to have imposed a firewall between economic considerations on the one hand and military and intelligence activity on the other. In France, for example, François Hollande joined a high-level meeting in Paris to draw up a plan against jihadists in Syria. "A strategy was adopted and an action plan has been decided," wrote the Elysée <sup>[6]</sup> in a statement specifying that the particulars of the plan would be presented "later." Among the supposed planks of the "action plan" is an effort to combat "violent radicalization." And indeed, French interior minister Manuel Valls promised, in January, measures such as the establishment of an alert service for families to cope with the phenomenon of the departure of French youth to the battlefield in Syria to fight the Assad regime. But are these the sorts of remedies the French envision?

For years, King Mohammed VI has argued that a comprehensive approach is necessary to fuse hard-nosed security and economic cooperation with the fostering of peaceable alternatives to religious extremism, as well as economic opportunities for the disenfranchised. (I have described this approach in prior articles.) <sup>[7]</sup> Since Americans and Europeans plainly recognize that security threats emanating from the developing world are harmful to the global economy, it behooves both sides to consider how to ameliorate these threats when negotiating over economic matters.

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[5] <http://www.euractiv.com/global-europe/france-draws-red-lines-eu-us-fre-news-518616>

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