

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Monday, Dec. 16, 2013

CONTACT:

Dan Byrnes, Sierra Club: (202) 495-3039 or daniel.byrnes@sierraclub.org
Ben Somberg, Public Citizen: (202) 588-7742

American and European Groups Press for Protected Safeguards in Transatlantic Trade

At the Outset of D.C. Trade Talks, Groups Call for Strong Protections

WASHINGTON, D.C. – A proposed U.S.-European Union (EU) trade pact being negotiated this week in Washington, D.C., will have little to do with traditional trade issues, but instead will be a back door for corporations to gut health, environmental and consumer protections, according to several civil society groups from the United States and Europe that briefed reporters today.

Leaders with [Public Citizen](#), [Sierra Club](#), [Consumer Federation of America](#) and the [Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue](#) voiced concerns about the effects of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership on consumer rights, privacy, communities and the environment. Since tariffs are already very low between the U.S. and the EU, the pact will be about “behind-the-border” policies such as health, environmental and consumer protections.

“U.S. and EU negotiators are clear that their purpose in negotiating TAFTA is to remove ‘regulatory barriers’ to trade,” said Robert Weissman, president of Public Citizen. “Big Business is clear about what this means; giant corporations hope to use TAFTA as a way to roll back or stall a vast swath of consumer and environmental regulatory protections in the United States and Europe – involving everything from food safety to privacy, consumer finance to chemical safety.”

Environmentalists expressed concern about the broad rights granted to corporations through the investment rules in the proposed trade pact. On the call, Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune [announced that the organization had just sent a letter](#) to United States Trade Representative Ambassador Michael Froman and European Union Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht on behalf of nearly 200 organizations from both sides of the Atlantic opposing a provision called investor-state dispute settlement. This provision would grant foreign corporations the power to directly challenge government policies and actions that corporations allege reduce their profits. Such cases would be heard in private tribunals for unlimited cash compensation.

“This pact could jeopardize critical safeguards necessary to protect our families, our communities and our climate by giving corporations undue rights to use secret tribunals to challenge public interest laws that they disagree with,” said Brune. “As negotiators meet this week, they must keep in mind that governments exist for the benefit of people – not corporations – and keep these dangerous rules out of the pact.”

Consumer groups also called for trade negotiators to uphold and increase privacy rights for Americans and Europeans.

“At a time of increasing commercial and government surveillance of individuals, we need stronger privacy rights on both sides of the Atlantic, not a trade deal that would allow personal information to flow across borders and into private databases and government hands, without adequate constraints,” said Susan Grant, director of consumer protection at Consumer Federation of America. “A vibrant transatlantic marketplace will only be achieved if individuals can trust that their data will be collected and used appropriately, and both partners in these trade negotiations have a long way to go to gain that trust, especially the U.S.”

The participating consumer groups also called for strong protections on shared data, in order to promote the interests of consumers who will be affected by expanded trade.

“Free flow of information around the web is essential to ensure freedom of expression and consumer choice,” said Anna Fielder, senior policy advisor of Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue and Chair of the Board, Privacy International. “But this does not mean rules on free flows of personal information enforced through trade agreements, at a time when consumer trust is at its lowest due to massive and unwarranted government surveillance. We need speedy adoption of ongoing data protection reforms in the EU before any talk of common privacy standards can begin – and in any case, such standards should be developed outside the trade agreement.”

An audio recording of the telepresser is available at:

<http://www.conferenceplayback.com/stream/96007449/SOMB1216.mp3>

The civil society letter opposing investor-state dispute settlement is available at:

<http://sc.org/InvestmentLetter> (PDF)

###

About Public Citizen

Public Citizen is a national, nonprofit consumer advocacy organization that has worked to protect health, safety and democracy since 1971. For more information, visit www.citizen.org.

About the Sierra Club

The Sierra Club is America's largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization, with more than 2.1 million members and supporters nationwide. In addition to creating opportunities for people of all ages, levels and locations to have meaningful outdoor experiences, the Sierra Club works to safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying, and litigation. For more information, visit <http://www.sierraclub.org>.

About The Consumer Federation of America

The Consumer Federation of America (CFA) is an association of non-profit consumer organizations that was established in 1968 to advance the consumer interest through research, advocacy, and education. For more information, go to www.consumerfed.org.

About Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue

The Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue (TACD) is a forum of US and EU consumer organisations which develops and agrees on joint consumer policy recommendations to the US government and European Union to promote the consumer interest in EU and US policy making. For more information, visit www.tacd.org.