

Reaction of Robert Went and Koen Berden to *The Volkskrant* on TTIP

April 18, 2015

On April 18th, *The Volkskrant* [a major Dutch newspaper, ed.] gave a great deal of attention to TTIP, with 5 pages of articles. Together with Koen Berden, Chief Economist of Ecorys, I wrote a short reaction to what the paper wrote about Jeronim Capaldo and about norms and standards.

- Robert Went

Dear Mr. Went,

We're sorry to inform you your contribution to the column opinion & debate could not be published.

*Yours sincerely,
Editor Opinion & Debate
De Volkskrant*

Reaction TTIP

How great, all that attention for TTIP: the more debate the better! We recently contributed to it, with Ecorys reports (Berden) and a longread in *RTL News* (Went, with Hella Hueck), as well as participation in discussions in Pakhuis de Zwijger (Went) and the Volkshotel (Berden), among other actions. Last Saturday, the *Volkskrant* chipped in with 5 pages and an editorial about TTIP. We have read those with pleasure, but want to make two remarks.

First, it is of grave importance to keep the discussion pure and worthy, and to not fall into caricatures or disqualifications of certain points of views. We think to accuse Jeronim Capaldo of hooliganism, because he would have looked for 'a way to discredit TTIP', is an example of an ad hominem argument. We know Capaldo as an economist that dares to give his (nonstandard) opinion and with this contributes to the international debate. Such a person should be given a platform and invited for discussions as minister Ploumen [Dutch minister in charge of the TTIP-negotiations, ed.] has done. It's completely valid to criticize his economic model in a debate, just as other models, but this is different from criticizing his intentions.

Apart from this, norms and standards appear to be difficult subjects, even in a long article. It isn't the case that profit only can be made by lowering standards, as is suggested in the article. That could be the case and the societal and political discussion about whether we want that (chlorine chickens being an example) is of great importance and tends strongly to a 'no'. But there's also a lot to be gained – and that's what is emphasized in the TTIP negotiations as far as we are aware – for example reducing dual controls and requirements for (parts of) products that are produced in the US and the EU in commodity chains. Or by substituting two (nearly) identical certificates that apply to both sides of the ocean for the same product with one common certificate. Or by making the exchange of information compulsory and increasing the extent of consultation about (potentially) conflicting regulations. Or – to cite a recent example – by agreeing on testing procedures and performing checks to guarantee the quality of products (e.g. for pharmaceutical products). No one can object to that kind of harmonization, we assume. So let's keep focus on that and research the possibilities for it. For example, the next time *The Volkskrant* gives attention to trade between Europe and the US.

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Translation from [original Dutch](#): Herman de Jonge, B.Sc. Radboud University Nijmegen