

# A message to all my constituents on the European Parliament TTIP vote by Richard Howitt MEP, 10 June 2015.

Today the European Parliament has postponed its vote on the EU-US trade deal "TTIP".

Labour MEPs have consistently said we oppose any TTIP which includes the NHS or "ISDS" secret corporate courts.

I personally was one of the co-signatories of the amendment 27 with 50 Labour and Socialist colleagues as well as MEPs from some other parties which categorically ruled out any ISDS.

To the campaigners, well done for making this an energetic campaign on an issue of such importance, but I have been surprised to receive so many emails and social media messages asking me to vote for my own amendment! Please give credit where it is due, and help us to have a well-informed debate which is needed if we are to have a chance to build the coalition of support necessary to win.

One campaign group even put me personally on a Twitter list titled "TTIP-supporting MEPs" - and you can understand that I do feel misrepresented when I read such things.

That is why political opponents who want to use the TTIP debate to attack Labour, are doing a dis-service to the campaign.

I have made my opposition to any TTIP which includes the NHS or ISDS clear numerous times over the past year, in public meetings, letters and emails. This has included meetings on joint platforms with 38 degrees at the Trades Council in King's Lynn, with War on Want at a meeting of the South East Region TUC, with Global Justice UK in a debate in Cambridge and on many other occasions.

I do respect that there are some who are critical of TTIP because they are against trade and hence against every trade deal including TTIP. But that is not my view nor can it ever be Labour's position. As a supporter of the fair trade movement, a campaigner with trade unions for binding labour and environmental standards in international trade agreements and knowing that jobs and business in my own constituency depend on trade - I want to reform international trade rules not stop international trade.

Indeed had the amendments we proposed passed, I wanted to vote for the TTIP report in the European Parliament, and still would hope to be able to do so. I fear that some would represent that as a "vote for TTIP", as happened when my Labour colleagues voted for a draft of the report at parliament's committee stage. It is not.

The European Parliament cannot vote to stop the TTIP negotiations. Our powers are to influence the negotiations by threatening to vote against its final ratification if our demands are not met.

Therefore to vote against a TTIP report, as long as the demands are the right ones - no backdoor privatisation of public services and no secret ISDS corporate courts - would be self-defeating. It would render the European Parliament silent and simply give the EU negotiators free rein to continue on their current course. It would signal to them that there is no firm majority in the European Parliament which could challenge their current position in the future.

I know many anti-TTIP campaigners simply want me to say I am opposed to TTIP. But I ask you to understand that voting against the report would be a suicide strategy for the very concerns you have. That cannot be my position.

However, if the 'red lines' on the NHS and on ISDS are not supported, I would vote against the report and that has always been my promise.

One final point if you read information from Labour's political opponents who want to use the TTIP debate to attack Labour rather than form a broad coalition on TTIP: why don't they attack Conservatives and Liberal Democrats instead?

Conservatives said they would protect the NHS in TTIP and were then exposed for failing to do so - I personally challenged the Tory Trade Minister on this. Not one Liberal Democrat was prepared to sign our amendment categorically rejecting ISDS. The UK Independence Party Trade Spokesperson wrote an article in favour of TTIP, and they explain their sudden conversion against only because they want unrestricted free trade.

Not only do I respectfully ask campaigners to give credit where it is due -but also to hold to account those where certainly it is not.

Thank-you to all my constituents who have contacted me - far too many to do justice with individual responses to all. You are right to care about TTIP. Even if you didn't know before, I hope I have demonstrated that I care too.

**Richard Howitt MEP**  
**Labour Member of the European Parliament**  
**10 June 2015.**