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**OPINION: CETA - DAMNED IF YOU DO, DAMNED IF YOU DON'T**

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Belgian states have dropped their opposition to CETA. In so doing, the European Union may have averted a crisis in confidence as a serious player in global trade policy.

The free trade agreement with EU-friendly Canada was initially viewed as straightforward to regulatory purists: Trade issues are traditionally dealt with at the European and not national level. Negotiations are handled by the European Commission and overseen by European Parliament, which is comprised of the same free-trade critics among left-wing, Green and right-wing parties found in member state parliaments. They have the opportunity to make amendments.

Where is the problem? It can't be a "technocratic ramming through of trade deals," as Germany's Social Democrat Economics Minister Sigmar Gabriel called the European approach.

An obvious unease

Nor can it be so easy. Gabriel touched on widespread discomfort stemming from the impression that the EU makes decisions without regard to the wishes of those it represents. Regardless of the role the minister's party politics play into that statement and no matter if that discomfort is unwarranted, the feeling is there and the EU must find a way around it. In an attempt to mollify criticism, Germany and other states thought, albeit too late, to give national and regional parliaments a say in EU matters.

[Christoph Hasselbach (DW/M.Müller)]

DW's Christoph Hasselbach

The last few days have made painfully obvious that adding a local layer to the decision-making process adds complication, but also makes the CETA agreement more legitimate. This suggests an uncomfortable zero-sum scenario: Either the EU is efficient and risks being seen as lacking transparency, or it encourages maximum inclusion and appears incompetent.

The EU must guide globalization, not hinder it

The debate over EU processes could arise out of any European issue, but it is no accident that it has erupted over CETA. It, along with the TTIP agreement with the US, has globalization at its core. Globalization has become a bad word around Europe, associated with uncertainty, decline and a loss of identity.

For the same reason, the EU is free to proceed in negotiations as it sees fit. Resistance to any type of free trade agreement will only grow. The EU will be increasingly confronted with the expectation to protect its citizens from globalization. If it doesn't, it will be seen as having lost its purpose. This also explains the rise in parties that call both the EU and globalization into question.

Those against free trade must know that people cannot be protected from change. CETA and TTIP are primarily about Western nations setting common standards that cannot be surpassed in the world. If they fail to do so, someone else - namely, China - will, and that would certainly not be in Europe's interest.

Germany is home to its fair share of CETA and TTIP critics, as well. This is, however, a contradiction: If there is any country in the world to have benefited enormously from globalization, then it is Germany.

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