

Publicly Funded German NGO Is Key Player In TTIP Opposition Movement

BRUSSELS — One of the driving forces behind the groundswell of organized opposition against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) here is a small and relatively little-known foundation linked to a leftist German political party and financed by the German government.

The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation — the political education arm of the German party Die Linke, or The Left — has launched a multi-pronged campaign to build opposition to TTIP. This effort includes funding a series of strategy sessions for anti-TTIP activists, including one here during TTIP negotiations last week; publishing and disseminating reports critical of the trade initiative; hosting conferences in EU member states to raise awareness of the issue; and funding research aimed at illustrating the possible negative effects of TTIP on third countries.

At last week's strategy meeting, which took place July 14-15, activists coordinated plans for an EU-wide "Day of Action" against TTIP on Oct. 11 that will involve street protests against the trade deal in EU capitals and even in smaller cities. The participants also plan to release a joint statement at the same time denouncing the trade negotiations.

The meeting brought together roughly 150 activists representing about 50 EU and U.S. groups who are either outright opposed to TTIP or want the negotiating agenda to be significantly altered. The strategy meeting also served as a planning session for a protest at a July 16 TTIP stakeholder briefing (*Inside U.S. Trade*, July 18).

The foundation paid for the space to host the meeting, food and drink, and also covered transportation costs for many of the participants, spending about 25,000 euros total, according to foundation officials. It has held three such strategy meetings since the TTIP negotiations launched — including one in March specifically oriented toward trans-Atlantic involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), national and local legislators, and others worried about the possible impact of the trade deal.

The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation has partnered with other EU-based groups critical of trade liberalization like Corporate Europe Observatory and the Seattle-to-Brussels Network, as well U.S. groups including Public Citizen and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.

Their push against the trade deal poses a direct challenge to an ongoing effort by U.S. and EU businesses — represented by BusinessEurope and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce — to advertise what the business lobbies argue are the deal's potential benefits. The business groups hosted a conference on TTIP in Rome earlier this month, following similar events in France and Spain.

Although closely tied to Die Linke, the foundation is technically independent from the party and receives its funding from the German government. But it is not unique in this regard. All political parties represented in the national and state legislatures in Germany are given money from the government, proportional to the amount of seats they hold, to establish political foundations.

Florian Horn, a project manager at the foundation's Brussels office, explained in an interview with *Inside U.S. Trade* that this structure was created in the wake of World War II in order to avoid a repeat of the kind of political consolidation that gave rise to the Nazis.

Other such political foundations include the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, associated with the Social Democratic Party of Germany, and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, associated with German Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union. The Heinrich Boll Foundation, associated with the Greens, has also hosted events about TTIP.

In addition to the strategy sessions, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation has published and translated into seven EU languages lengthy publications warning of what it says are the dangers presented by the trade deal, and has hosted conferences in EU member states like the United Kingdom and Italy to spread its message to other NGOs, legislators, officials and journalists. It plans to continue those efforts with similar events in Warsaw and Prague this fall.

The main publication it is disseminating is titled "The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership: A Charter for Deregulation, an Attack on Jobs, and End to Democracy," written by John Hilary, the executive director of the anti-poverty charity War on Want.

The foundation has also initiated a program it calls "TTIP and the World" that aims to explore and expose what it says are the possible ramifications for third countries of an agreement between the two dominant Western powers. That long-term project will involve social and economic studies commissioned by the foundation and conferences to present their findings.

Horn and Roland Kulke, another project manager at the foundation's seven-person Brussels office, said in the interview that the foundation has not waded into the trade debate to this extent before. It was not particularly active, they said, in the debate surrounding the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) — which was voted down in the

European Parliament — or the EU-Canada talks. They said the group is not anti-trade.

But TTIP has drawn the foundation's interest because of what they argued is its focus on creating a trans-Atlantic regulatory framework that is an affront to the democratic process. Horn specifically singled out the EU's aim of creating a "Regulatory Cooperation Council" that would push regulators on either side to consult with each other — and private stakeholders — about the measures they are implementing or considering rolling out.

Similarly, Horn took issue with a U.S. proposal to impose additional "transparency" requirements on the European Commission by allowing stakeholders to weigh in on legislative proposals before they are even formally introduced to the parliament. Both of these proposals raise the danger of chilling regulation and undermining the influence of the general public by installing lobbying as a formal structure in governance, he argued. He also flagged investor-state dispute settlement, which critics say would elevate the power of private companies, as worrisome.

"This framework — regulatory cooperation, investor-state dispute settlement, these major projects within TTIP which focus on future regulations, future legislation — these are the things that we think are in total opposition with what we understand as democracy," Horn said.

Kulke, however, explained that TTIP is not the sole focus of the foundation's operations; in total, it probably puts about one-fourth of its resources behind TTIP-related projects, he said. It also focuses on renewable energy and broader social justice issues, working primarily with partner organizations to do theoretical research, he said.

Kulke explained said that since the organization became involved in TTIP, he has seen the cast of organizations that are involved in pushing back against the deal grow to include activists who have worked on digital rights issues related to ACTA and the EU-Canada negotiations.

Rosa Luxemburg was a political activist that founded the forerunner of the Communist Party in Germany after World War I. She was assassinated in 1919.
