Welcome to a new edition of the bilaterals.org podcast where we discuss the most recent developments around free trade and investment agreements.

Kenya and the United States have concluded the second round of negotiations on a trade and investment agreement.

The Kenyan government noted significant progress in several areas, including digital trade, services, domestic regulations, labour, agriculture, women and youth, and anti-corruption measures.

The Kenya Small Scale Farmers Forum called on the Kenyan government to stop the negotiations, saying the deal favours the US. They added that they had not been consulted, even though the deal will have a major impact on local farmers.

They're concerned that an agreement between a developing country like Kenya and a country that is one of the world's top agricultural exporters is likely to have a significant negative impact on Kenya.

They expect an uneven playing field that will leave poor farmers in poorer countries worse off, while large agribusinesses reap the benefits of agricultural trade liberalisation.

The group noted that in Kenya, smallholder farmers account for over 40 per cent of the country's employment and employ up to 70 per cent of the rural population.

Econews Africa, another civil society group, also questioned the lack of public participation in the negotiations and called for them to be abandoned.

Emails obtained by US Senator Elizabeth Warren have revealed that US trade officials sought advice from lobbyists for Amazon, Google and other 'big tech' companies to help shape the new Indo-Pacific trade framework.

The companies were able to get insight into the confidential talks long before the public and social movements knew about the 14-nation economic initiative. As a result, 'big tech' companies were able to influence the initiative to suit their interests.

This is another problematic development around the 'digital trade' negotiations. This sector is fast becoming the next battleground where trade rules could be used to hamper regulatory efforts around data privacy, algorithmic accountability and competition in the tech industry.

Ultimately, governments may not be able to control artificial intelligence systems, especially in sensitive or high-risk areas, including those related to worker surveillance, anti-competitive self-preferencing, and bias and discrimination.

The goal of ‘big tech’ companies is to lock countries into binding international rules that prohibit digital governance initiatives. This is all the more worrying as almost every aspect of people's lives is now affected by the digital sphere.

Over 170 groups have issued a statement calling for an alternative to the EU-Mercosur trade agreement based on solidarity, equality, cooperation, democracy and sustainability.

The groups, which include social movements, civil society organisations, trade unions and farmers' associations from both sides of the Atlantic, believe that the countries of Mercosur and the European Union must improve and transform their relationship.

They said that the proposed agreement would only serve corporate interests at the expense of planetary boundaries, indigenous peoples, family farmers, workers and animal welfare, and would drive de-industrialisation and unsustainable social inequalities.

The statement goes on to say that any future cooperation must ensure the widest possible policy space for governments to fulfil their public interest mandates as a precondition for democracy. No trade and investment measures should be able to threaten this policy space.

Finally it adds that people's common future depends on stronger democracies and people's power, not stronger and more entrenched vested interests and corporate power.

That is why the current agreement must be stopped.

The Ukrainian president has issued a decree announcing that he has appointed a delegation to negotiate Ukraine's membership of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, known as the CPTPP.

This potential wild card application is the latest in a series that consists of China, Chinese Taipei, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Uruguay, with South Korea and Thailand keeping a watchful eye.

It is believed that China's and then Chinese Taipei's applications should be considered next, but China's is likely to face opposition from some members, notably the UK, which has just been admitted to the treaty.

Ecuador became the fourth Latin American country to sign a trade deal with China. The Asian country has overtaken the US as Ecuador's main non-oil trading partner, and the agreement is likely to confirm this trend.

Groups in Ecuador's Coalition Against Free Trade Agreements rejected the deal. They say it was negotiated in secret.

They added that, like all FTAs, it will lead to the expansion of agribusiness, mining and oil extractivism, which destroy forests, wetlands and peasant lands. It will bring more agro-toxic pollution and health damage.

They also fear that the massive influx of Chinese products will displace domestic production, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, leading to greater job losses in Ecuador and the dismantling of many sectors of the local economy.

And that’s it for today. I’m Nicolas Roux, bilaterals.org. If you’d like to read more information about this podcast’s content, you can click on the links provided in the

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