

# A PLEA FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A GENERAL ECONOMIC THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL COMMERCIAL AND DIPLOMATIC NEGOTIATIONS

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**Abstract:**

*The importance of trade negotiations involving countries or groups of countries (international trade and diplomatic negotiations) is growing. At the same time, these trade negotiations between countries or groups of countries, which may take place in bilateral, regional or multilateral fora, are increasingly difficult to conclude. Over and above their complexity (an obvious source of these difficulties), the question arises as to the relevance of the theoretical analytical framework (in the economic sense) of these phenomena. Based on a political economy analysis, this work argues for the construction of a general economic theory of international trade and diplomatic negotiations to make the players involved in this type of negotiation more effective. Firstly, beyond the difficulties in defining the concept of negotiation, international trade negotiations between countries or groups of countries are distinct from other types of negotiation (taken as a whole). Secondly, they have sufficiently specific characteristics to distinguish them from other types of trade negotiation. Finally, they satisfy the three main basic conditions defined by Arena (2020), which must be met by any phenomenon that can be the subject of pure economic theory. From this point of view, it may be relevant to understand them as a collective decision-making process in a situation of uncertainty with a view to liberalising trade.*

**Keywords:** International trade negotiations, international trade regimes, collective decision-making process, Pure economic theory, situations of uncertainty.

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## INTRODUCTION

The importance of trade negotiations involving countries or groups of countries (international trade and diplomatic negotiations) is growing. This importance of international trade negotiations can be seen at various levels, including the following two. Firstly, in the context of the multilateral liberalisation of world trade. Negotiations are the driving force behind multilateral liberalism. There have already been several rounds of negotiations: the pre-GATT negotiations (1944-46), the Geneva negotiations (1947), the Annecy negotiations (1949), the Torquay negotiations (1951), the Geneva negotiations (1956), the Dillon negotiations (1960-1961), the Kennedy negotiations (1964-1966), the Tokyo negotiations (1973-1979), the Uruguay Round (1986-1993), the Seattle negotiations (1999) and the Doha Round (2001- ). Secondly, the acceleration of economic integration through the formation of regional economic blocs and the signing of preferential trade agreements is symptomatic of an explosion in international trade negotiations and diplomacy. Every agreement is the result of negotiations between several countries or groups of countries. To date, there are some 623 regional and/or preferential trade agreements around the world, according to figures from the World Trade Organisation (WTO)<sup>1</sup>.

At the same time, these types of trade negotiations are becoming increasingly difficult to conclude. Examples include the Economic Partnership Agreements between the European Union and African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, the Transatlantic Free Trade Area, and the Doha Round 2021.

The explanations for these difficulties and failures can be found in the rules and balance of power, the increase in the number of member countries, the consensus rule, the assertiveness of emerging countries, and the absence of real leadership according to Krugman (1991) and Siroën (2007). They are also to be found in the complexity of the subjects under negotiation and the inadequacy of the concept of rationality, even if limited in the sense of Simons, to deal with such types of negotiation according to de Carlo (2004). However, these arguments are not entirely satisfactory, since the number of negotiating parties and the complexity of the issues to be negotiated must be an integral part of negotiations, as structuralists maintain.

Even if these arguments are satisfied, a central question arises: aren't these long delays and failures due to the absence of a global and adequate vision of these types of trade negotiations? Our answer to this question is yes, because the nature of international and diplomatic trade negotiations within the WTO or for regional economic blocs has specific features that make them fundamentally economic in nature. The question we seek to answer in this paper is whether it is possible to devise a general economic theory of this type of international trade negotiation. This question also arises because, although there is a great deal of thought being given to trade negotiations, these either focus on trade negotiations that cannot be extended to negotiations within the WTO or for regional economic blocs, or they focus on fragmented aspects of this type of trade negotiation.

Our aim in this paper is to provide arguments in favour of constructing a general economic theory of international trade and diplomatic negotiations by showing the economic specificities of this type of negotiation.

Our conviction is that at this stage, even if a general theory would be difficult to construct (due to the diversity of scientific disciplines that are interested in it, the variety of analytical tools that can be applied to it from the point of view of economic analysis, but also the diversity of aspects on which this type of negotiation can focus), it nevertheless presents its own (specific) characteristics that distinguish it not only from other types of negotiation taken as a whole, but also from other types of commercial negotiation.

Our approach consisted in highlighting the specific characteristics of international trade and diplomatic negotiations by confronting them with the general characteristics of negotiation, with those of trade negotiations and with the basic principles of economic theorizing.

The rest of this paper is organised in four sections. In the first section, we present an overview of the theories of international trade and diplomatic negotiations, emphasising their non-generalist character. In the third section, we analyse the difficulties of constructing a general theory of international trade and diplomatic negotiations. In the fourth section, we present our arguments for the construction of a general theory of international trade and diplomatic negotiations. The fifth section is devoted to the conclusion.

## **THEORISING INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND DIPLOMATIC NEGOTIATIONS, A LITERATURE REVIEW**

One of the major difficulties in the theoretical conceptualisation of negotiations is its degree of abstraction. Making an everyday instrument abstract is a relatively difficult thing to do as the temptation to describe it is so great. How is this theorisation done in the literature? In the literature, the answers to these questions are varied: case studies, disciplinary, cultural paradigms or generic in terms of globalising.

First, the dynamics of international trade and diplomatic negotiations is the subject of a vast and diverse academic literature including Waltz (1959), Singer (1960), Keohane and Nye (1977), Gourevitch (1978), Krasner (1983), Putnam (1988), Moravcsik (1997), Koné (2018), Nyomankwa-Obimpeh (2017), etc. However, this abundant literature is mostly case studies, describing a specific situation in international trade negotiations in which the authors have been involved in one way or another. This certainly creates a large body of results and reflection on the subject but does not allow for a general pattern of analysis, taking into account its specificities. As Darmon (2011) states: "The literature on commercial negotiations offers few formal definitions of this age-old

practice. On the other hand, it abounds in descriptions and typologies of certain aspects of negotiations, negotiation objectives, noises affecting negotiations or techniques, strategies and tactics commonly used (or to be used) during trade negotiations."

Secondly, we can start from disciplinary considerations. Indeed, theories of trade negotiations, whatever the category, borrow the logic of their reasoning mainly from game theories, cognitive theories, psychological theories, socio-anthropological theories and decision theories. But, from this point of view, it is the methodology of each discipline that defines the issue of conceptualisation. A subject, which, moreover, can be multiple within each discipline. For example, there are debates between Anselm Strauss and Zartman on the very definition of negotiation<sup>2</sup>, or the repeated criticism of sociologists against game theory. Various debates and possibilities for conceptualising negotiation exist at this level<sup>3</sup>. For example, the lawyer [law] does not have the same object as the sociologist [socio-anthropological interactions; the framework may be important], just as the sociologist does not have the same object as the economist [economic relations, the framework is not always important], etc.

Then, we can start from considerations of cultural paradigms beyond disciplinary paradigms. Following Lempereur (2006), there are two main groups of paradigms in negotiation theory:

the so-called "Anglo-Saxon" paradigms: game theory (initiated by Nash, 1950), decision analysis (Raiffa, 1982 for example) and cognitive and social psychology (Tversky and Kahneman, 1981 for example).

the so-called "continental" paradigms: cultural anthropology (as in Faure and Rubin, 1993), rhetoric, argumentation (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1958 for example), sociology and political science (as in De Callières, 1716 and Lempereur, 2004) and legal reasoning as in Mnookin et al. (2000).

The conceptualisation of negotiation will be radically different according to the nature of the purpose that each of these two paradigms gives to the reflection. In particular, there is a strong imprint of operationalisation of reflection in the so-called 'Anglo-Saxon' paradigms, giving more of a conceptualisation of particular cases. Reflection within the framework of the so-called "continental" paradigms has a strong imprint of standardisation giving a conceptualisation in search of generalisable generalities. The question of taking into account the specificity of international trade and diplomatic negotiations still arises.

Finally, however, beyond their differences, there is no generic theorisation of international trade and diplomatic negotiations. Indeed, theories of negotiations can be classified into two main categories: distributive and integrative theories. This categorisation certainly follows a chronological logic (Kuty, 2004), but it is also historical (distributive theories dominated the period 1950-1980 and integrative theories have dominated since the 1980s), conjunctural (bargaining conjuncture for distributive theories and valorisation conjuncture for integrative theories), and conceptual (theorisation of positions for distributive theories or theorisation of interests for integrative theories) Alfredson and Cungu (2008). Within this framework, analyses of trade negotiations are structuralist, strategic, behavioural or procedural in the case of distributive theories. Integrative theories are phased or reasoned.

## **THE DIFFICULTIES OF CONSTRUCTING A GENERAL THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND DIPLOMATIC NEGOTIATIONS**

One of the major difficulties in the theoretical conceptualisation of negotiations is its practical or operational degree. According to Barth and Bobot (2010), "Trade negotiation has never gained its rightful place. It has long been relegated to the shelf of folkloric transmission, far from any research project". Indeed, to abstract an everyday instrument is a relatively difficult thing, as the temptation to describe it is great, as it appears in current writings on international trade and diplomatic negotiations. These difficulties range from the definition of the phenomenon of

negotiation, to the definition of the term 'commercial', to the variety of disciplinary fields interested in negotiations, be they commercial, international or diplomatic.

### ***NEGOTIATION: A DIFFICULT FIELD TO DEFINE***

Defining Trade negotiation is not an easy task. It is a concept that includes two words with very broad contours: the word "negotiation" and the qualifier "Trade" because the fields of the phenomenon called negotiation are vast. Indeed, the scientific field of negotiation borrows from very diverse fields: psychology, mathematics (game theory), legal sciences, political sciences, international relations and sociology. As a result, various definitions and typologies of the concept of negotiation exist in the literature.

Definitions of negotiation differ according to the disciplinary field and the angle from which the researcher views it. It is therefore a challenge to choose one definition, given the diversity of the disciplines that are interested in the concept, but also, and above all, the existence of a typical framework that is central to all types of negotiation. This amounts to having catch-all analyses (or models) and thus suggests the insufficiency of categorisation and typologies of negotiation. In this context, it is therefore necessary to first define the concept of negotiation.

To define the word negotiation, let us refer to its etymological meaning to begin with. According to Macquin (1998) "The word negotiation comes from negotiation meaning trade. Initially, therefore, this word would designate the various discussions that take place in commercial life and whose aim was to reach agreements, whether for buying/selling or bartering, for example. Gradually, the term took on a second meaning. It became associated with the notion of conflict. Negotiation was then seen as a way of resolving conflicts, as one of the possible alternatives to the use of force, like mediation or arbitration."

While this definition is general in nature, it has the unfortunate tendency to bring the theme of negotiation closer to that of mediation and arbitration. In so doing, it makes it difficult to develop an independent theory that would be something other than techniques and tactics that would be transmitted from generation to generation; which makes Barth and Bobot say that "It has long been relegated to the shelf of folkloric transmission, far from any research project.

Also, many other definitions have been proposed in the literature. According to Faure et al (1998) "negotiation is a process by which two or more parties interact with the aim of reaching an acceptable position with regard to their differences". For Lewicki and Littere (1985), negotiation "is as much a psychological game as it is a rational decision-making process". According to Henry Kissinger (1969), negotiation is "a process of merging conflicting positions into a common position through a unanimous decision rule". For sociologist Georg Simmel (1908), "negotiation is ultimately a means of being in a relationship, of interacting between human beings, it is a way of managing conflict or diverging points of view, it can take different forms, all of which have their own interest and specificities, and each of which allows us to gain a better understanding of the complex object that is the negotiation process". Similarly, some authors have defined negotiation as the art of diplomacy, mechanical reflections of relative power, weighted interactions between personality types or rational decision-making processes. Finally, game theory defines negotiation as a situation involving two or more agents who cooperate to create a surplus that turns out to be conflictual to share.

According to Thuderoz and Kutuy (2005), the use of the notion of 'negotiation' presupposes: 1) an intention (i.e. the voluntary search for an agreement, with a view to resolving a dispute, of course, but above all: a decision), 2) a compromise (i.e. : the acceptance by each protagonist of a co-regulation, of a mutual 'promise') and 3) a movement (i.e.: negotiation as an indeterminate process, both as regards its outcome and its course) - requires careful observation of reality.

In sum, there is a very large number of definitions, each of which focuses more or less on one or more aspects of negotiation. The large number of definitions proposed testifies to the difficulty of giving a definition that encompasses all aspects of the phenomenon at once. Therefore, it is appropriate to define negotiation by its fundamental characteristics. From this point of view,

Zartman (1977) understands any negotiation as a process which is characterised by 1) the existence of several parties in presence whether they are individuals, groups of people or institutions; 2) the existence of divergent interests between the parties in presence; 3) the absence of authority and rules as to decision-making, conflict resolution; 4) parties are sovereign; 5) parties expressing, submitting, modifying their offers during the negotiation process; 6) the existence of communication between the parties and 7) an outcome (which can be an agreement, a refusal, a failure... ) that comes from the interplay between the parties' "demand efforts", which will be able to satisfy the values and interests of the parties involved.

If there are difficulties in giving a definition of negotiation that is unanimously or widely accepted, due to the diversity of disciplines interested in the phenomenon as well as the aspects of human activities that it affects, there are also difficulties in making a widely accepted classification. Indeed, there are various classifications of negotiation. The typology that can be made of negotiation can relate to different elements of its main characteristics:

purpose (setting up a project, reforming an organisation, managing a conflict, defining and allocating a budget,...);

strategy followed;

the location (internal vs. external, local vs. global, international vs. national, etc.);

the domains (political, military, strategic, trade, social, diplomatic, union, business,...);

the initial structure of the divergence or degree of the conflict (perfectly negatively correlated interests, partially compatible interests and perfectly positively correlated interests,...);

the approach. Various theoretical approaches have been proposed. For Druckman (1997), for example, negotiation can be seen as the resolution of an enigma, as a bargaining game, as organisational management or as diplomatic policy. For Raiffa (1982), negotiation can be understood as a combination of symmetry-asymmetry dimensions and as a prescription-description process. As for Zartman (1978), negotiation can be structural, strategic, behavioural, procedural, integrative, etc. This list of the diversity of authors' approaches to negotiation could go on and on.

In short, on the basis of the definition of the word negotiation, it would be difficult to construct a general theory of international trade and diplomatic negotiations, as its contours are so fluid (Figure 1). What about when it comes to trade negotiation?

**Figure 1. A schematic presentation of negotiation**

| Negotiation | Areas      | Approaches  | Degree of                                 |
|-------------|------------|---|---|
|             | POLITICS   | Druckman (negotiation as puzzle solving, negotiation as bargaining game, negotiation as organisational management and negotiation as diplomatic politics)<br>Raiffa (combining dimensions of symmetry-asymmetry and prescription-description)<br>Zartman (Structural, Strategic, Behavioural, Procedural, Integrative...) | Perfectly negatively correlated interests |
|             | MILITARY   |   |   |
|             | STRATEGIC  |   |   |
|             | TRADE      |   |   |
|             | SOCIAL     |   |   |
|             | DIPLOMATIC |   |   |
|             | UNION      |   |   |
|             | BUSINESS   |   |   |
|             | Etc.       |   |   |
|             |            |   |   |
|             |            | Perfectly positively correlated interests   |   |

Sources: auteur

## ***TRADE NEGOTIATION, A MULTIPLE REALITY***

Trade negotiation is a subset of the larger whole of negotiation. However, the non-exclusivity of the fields and characteristics of the different types of negotiation also makes it difficult to define commercial negotiation. For example, business includes commercial. Therefore, several definitions exist in the literature with regard to trade negotiation.

According to Dupont (1982 and 1990), for example, trade negotiation can be seen as "all the steps aimed at concluding, immediately or in the future, a contract binding two or more parties".

This definition gives a rather general and impersonal character to the phenomenon of negotiation in which bargaining and selling could be integrated. However, trade negotiation is different from these two other economic activities. Indeed, several arguments can be developed for the difference between selling and trade negotiation on the one hand, and haggling and trade negotiation on the other hand. A sale, for example, concerns a perfectly defined object (a commodity, a service), which is not necessarily the case in a trade negotiation. Moreover, if the nature of the object makes a difference, the object itself may also make a difference. In this context, Audebert-Lasrochas (2004) said "selling consists in convincing an interlocutor - the customer - that the product or service proposed best meets his or her needs; negotiating consists in analysing together a situation in which there is a *de facto* common interest, although the interests of each party seem to be opposed and each party seeks to sell something to the other, in order to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement". But at some level, when the internal processes of the sellers are involved, the sale can be equated with trade negotiation according to Barth. The negotiation has the price as its sole object, which is not the case with trade negotiation. Moreover, this definition of trade negotiation could include all kinds of activities, even those that are illegal.

However, Dupont will go back on this first definition to propose a new one according to which the concept of trade negotiation is closer to business negotiation "defined as implementing an opportunity for the party who engages in it to achieve an objective thanks to the meeting, fortuitous or provoked, of its own interest and the interest of a third party" according to Barth and Bobot. However, in doing so, Dupont brings trade negotiation closer to diplomatic negotiation than to everyday negotiation, which stems from the various interaction situations that govern trade relations between economic agents on a daily basis. Delpech's (1980) consideration of this category of trade negotiation leads him to distinguish two categories of trade negotiations: small trade negotiations and large trade negotiations.

These various definitions of trade negotiations reveal the existence of three main categories of trade negotiations: (1) small trade negotiations, (2) large trade negotiations and (3) international diplomatic trade negotiations. Indeed, these three types of trade negotiations can be very different in their characteristics, a game played by Dupont (1982 and 2006) and Delpech (1980 and 2010). According to these authors, large-scale trade negotiation, as opposed to small-scale trade negotiation, is characterised by the following four elements

- the existence of a specific convergence of supply and demand: there is no impulse buying, as in consumer goods;

- the existence of an agreement of a technical nature between supplier and user as a prerequisite for any discussion of economic conditions;

- the single customer is the responsibility of very shifting decision centres depending on the stages of the negotiation

- at the final stage, the buyer's decision-making centre shifts from the technical to the political, with the complete transformation that this implies in the dialectics of the discussion.

This definition of trade negotiations is contested by Barth and Bobot who propose to define trade negotiation as "iterative exchanges of information flows between parties, with a view to exchanging a product-service flow for a financial flow". In doing so, they severely restrict trade negotiation by excluding trade negotiations for partnerships, since the latter cannot be qualified as either products or services. In particular, this definition excludes any trade negotiations between

countries or groups of countries or between a country and groups of countries. In other words, it excludes negotiations between institutions and focuses on sub-ordinary trade negotiations.

Yet, small trade negotiations and large trade negotiations are very similar in many respects so that they can be grouped together in what is commonly called business negotiations. However, they have sufficiently similar subsets of characteristics to constitute homogeneous subgroups each. Such a possibility therefore leaves the door open to their marginalisation in theoretical analyses; something that these authors sought to correct through their article.

It seems that what ultimately matters is not so much having perfectly identical groups of characteristics, but that any addition of new characteristics completely distorts the initially formed set. Taking this into account, Darmon (2011) defines trade negotiation as any "process (1) involving two or more parties who consider the possibility of exchanging goods and/or services for a consideration that is usually financial; (2) involving risks of varying degrees for each of them; (3) the objectives and interests of the parties are at least important for each of them; (4) each of the parties has at least some latitude to exchange information, make proposals, agree or disagree with the other party's proposals; (5) with a view to converging on an agreement to establish or maintain a trade relationship; (6) of short or longer term duration; (7) and deemed preferable to the status quo by each of the parties involved.

This last definition highlights the important distinction between trade transactions and negotiations. In the absence of precise and unanimously accepted definitions, the distinction between these two concepts has long been a matter of debate. A business transaction is defined as the one-off exchange agreement between parties, often referred to in management literature as the "sale and purchase" act. The transaction may be the outcome of a negotiation, but not necessarily. For example, trade transactions where the terms are fixed a priori by one of the parties and remain unchanging, such as those typically practised in retail outlets, do not give rise to negotiations. This debate is not the subject of our reflection in this paper. The purpose of recalling this debate is to show how often any definition of negotiation has more or less strong conceptual implications.

This definition certainly makes it possible to take into account the three categories of trade negotiation, infra-ordinary trade negotiation, small trade negotiation and large trade negotiation or business negotiation, however, it insists on the question of the place of trade negotiations between countries, between a country and groups of countries, between groups of countries. Indeed, while it is possible to see a country as an institution, Darmon's definition of the different categories of trade negotiations excludes them from this typology since the B-to-B that he proposes is necessary in a multilateral context (WTO) for international trade negotiations.

In addition to distinguishing between these two types of commercial negotiation theory, there is therefore a need to characterise international trade and diplomatic negotiations.

## **FACTORS IN FAVOUR OF BUILDING A GENERAL THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND DIPLOMATIC NEGOTIATIONS**

The aim is to present the specific characteristics of international trade and diplomatic negotiations on the one hand and to analyse them as necessary and/or sufficient conditions for the construction of a general theory.

### ***THE SPECIFICITIES OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND DIPLOMATIC NEGOTIATIONS***

One of the fundamental characteristics of international trade and diplomatic negotiations is that they do not involve pure conflict. In fact, to understand this dimension of international trade and diplomatic negotiations, let us refer to Schelling (1960)<sup>4</sup>, according to whom, 'pure' conflict, defined as the existence of competing interests between parties with no common interests, is an anomaly in international relations, characterised by mutual dependence between states. In other words, in international economic relations, confrontation cannot be the desired outcome of a negotiation process given the stakes of losses for each of the countries involved and for every

country in the world. This quote from Schelling has never been more relevant than for international trade and diplomatic negotiations, as these deal with world trade in a context of strong and growing interdependence (globalisation).

Thus, international trade and diplomatic negotiations have characteristics that are specific not only to other types of trade negotiations, but also that set them apart from various other negotiations.

International trade negotiations can take place either within international institutions such as the WTO, WIPO, regional economic blocs (European Union, North American Free Trade Agreement, Economic Community of West African States, UEMOA, MERCOSUR, COMESA, SADC, ASEAN, APEC, etc. ), or between economic blocs (EU-ECOWAS, EU-MERCOSUR, EU-ASEAN, etc.), or between an economic bloc and a country (EU-China, USA-ASEAN, etc.). While these negotiations concern international trade and related issues, they go far beyond business negotiations.

These are negotiations in which parties other than those directly concerned by the issues under negotiation are present. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the reshaping of international relations, new players such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have entered these types of negotiations, changing not only the nature of the forces employed but also that of the players involved. This presence implies the presence of different groups of actors such as interest groups, lobbies, think tanks, etc.

International trade and diplomatic negotiations also involve new issues with a high conflict potential. Indeed, since the creation of the WTO in 1994 (which came into force in 1995), in Marrakech, new issues have emerged in trade negotiations: 1) the liberalisation of services, 2) intellectual property rights, 3) the environment and climate change, 4) public health (epidemics and pandemics as well as their management mechanisms), 5) ethical and societal choices in the world, 6) global governance. These issues are primarily concerned with instruments of regulation, norms and standards (Suwa-Eisenmann and Verdier, 2002), and are therefore highly conflictual in nature.

Compared to international business negotiations, they are trade in the sense of Darmon's typology, but they are also diplomatic in the sense that they are spread out over time as they become increasingly long. In other words, whether they are multilateral, regional, interregional or bilateral, international trade negotiations do not exclude a good dose of diplomacy or negotiations between companies. Indeed, in these types of negotiations, governments must manage competing concerns of its population, cultural protection or economic interest, while respecting national commitments to international trade and law. However, a dividing line can be found by looking at the nature of the actors and the forces employed in each type of negotiation. Indeed, whereas diplomatic international trade negotiations are conducted by ambassadors or diplomats using state power, large-scale trade negotiations between large industrial groups do not necessarily need it.

They are systemic rather than immediately profitable. Indeed, what is at stake in international trade and diplomatic negotiations is the global trading system itself, its regulation, principles, configuration, structure and functioning. The importance of the issues in such negotiations is necessarily 'systemic'.

Indeed, the ultimate objective or goal of any international trade and diplomatic negotiation is the establishment of an international trade regime. As Abass (2010) argues, an international regime is an explicit or implicit set of principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations, and that area is free trade in international trade.

### ***ARE THESE SPECIFICITIES NECESSARY AND/OR SUFFICIENT CONDITIONS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A THEORY?***

To answer this question, let us begin by briefly recalling the main characteristics of a theory. The aim is not to review the debates on theory or even methodology, but to explain the main



fundamentals of an economic theory at a minimum in order to detect its existence or the possibility of applying it to international trade and diplomatic negotiations.

In this context, our answer to the question posed by the title of this sub-section is yes, for at least two main reasons.

Firstly, although it is difficult to define the word 'theory' as it refers to various meanings that raise multiple and multifaceted debates according to Weber, (2003)5, however, following it is possible to prove that at this stage, our reflections allow us to establish at least two of the five main phases of theorisation according to Assar and El Amrani (2014). Indeed, according to Assar and El Amrani (2014), any process of theorising, regardless of discipline, involves five main phases: conceptualisation, operationalisation, confirmation, application and refinement. In this work, we are interested in the first two phases of theorising, but especially in conceptualisation, which requires abstraction and conceptual formulation. The debates on the definition of the word "negotiation" and the qualifiers "trade" and "international trade and diplomatic" as well as the search for the specific characteristics of international trade and diplomatic negotiations thus participate in its conceptualisation through the search for a specific outline of the phenomenon.

Secondly, if any negotiation can be seen as a decision-making process as suggested by Usinier (2004), international trade and diplomatic negotiations can be understood as a collective decision-making process for trade liberalisation and entrepreneurial freedom around the world since it is a decision-making process aiming at defining an explicit or implicit set of principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which countries' expectations converge for an optimal process of liberalisation of world trade and entrepreneurial freedom. However, this process takes place in a situation of uncertainty. A situation of uncertainty because at each stage of the collective decision-making process, if each stakeholder is aware of its choice, the choice of the other parties is not a certainty because of the uncertainties about the basket of occurrences and the uncertainties about the process itself (to negotiate, not to negotiate, to trust or not to trust, to cooperate or not to cooperate, etc.).

This modelling does not exclude the structural (power relations, etc.), social, personal, psychological and strategic (reasoned negotiations, etc.) dimensions of these negotiations, but explicitly takes into account the nature of the result sought by these negotiations, i.e. the establishment of an international trade regime with all its implications through a rational decision-making process, whether it be substantive, limited in the sense of Simon (1974) or in the sense of de Carlo (2004).

Ultimately, therefore, our approach shows that international trade and diplomatic negotiations can be the subject of pure economic theory, since the three components recognised by Arena (2020) have been established. First, the 'economic observation' component, which describes and classifies the lessons of experience or concrete details. Indeed, international trade and diplomatic negotiations can be understood as a process of optimal allocation of resources both from the past (as one has to take into account the past of the divergence of interest), from the present (as one has to take into account the multiplicity of interests of each negotiator) and from the future (as it is a question, in this particular case, of modulating the interactions in the future between agents not present either at the negotiation table or in the present space; to make a contract on the future) but also this process is both an individual (because it takes into account the impersonal and personal future profitability) and collective (the formal and informal rules of interaction) allocation of resources.

Secondly, economic theorising, which aims to: organise the facts in such a way as to reveal the uniformities and regularities that characterise human behaviour, develop concepts, seek out the determinants and effects of phenomena, reveal the general and stable relationships between them, abstract from reality a simplified explanation of the functioning of the economy, prune, idealise details, construct hypotheses and simplified models aimed at establishing links within the shapeless heap of facts, and ask appropriate questions, before seeing the world as it is. Describing the specifics of international trade and diplomatic negotiations reveals probable uniformities and regularities that allow for general and stable relationships.

Finally, the coherence of economic policy orientation which aims to better understand the world and inform policy choices. It is obvious that a good economic theorisation of international trade and diplomatic negotiations should help to avoid many situations of failure (Cancun, the Economic Partnership Agreement negotiations) and delay (the Transatlantic negotiations, the multilateral development trade negotiations or Doha Round, etc.).

## CONCLUSION

Our objective in this work was to show that international trade and diplomatic negotiations deserve a general economic theory. To this end, we have sought to characterise this type of negotiation by reviewing the definitions of negotiation and trade negotiation. We concluded that trade negotiations as defined in the economic literature do not allow for some specificities of trade negotiations. This situation allowed us to propose a definition of these negotiations.

We have concluded that by following the rules of theory building in general, and economic theory in particular, it is possible to see these negotiations as a collective process of decision-making by all stakeholders to define a set of principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures for the purpose of liberalising world trade, but all in a situation of uncertainty. This has yet to be made operational.

## NOTES DE FIN DE DOCUMENT

- 1- See <http://ptadb.wto.org/ptaList.aspx> (ACPr) et <http://rtais.wto.org/UI/publicsummarytable.aspx> (ACR)
- 2- See Allain (2009).
- 3- Zartman (2004).
- 4- Quoted by Boivin (2004).
- 5- Quoted by Assar et Amrani (2014)

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