

Editorial



The entering into force of the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement earlier this year was a welcome development that appeared to signal member states’ realisation that cross-border trade is critical to global economic growth. At about the same time, however, the United States (US) formally withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement, potentially the world’s broadest regional free trade agreement in terms of both its scope and ambition.

The decision to withdraw was made by President Trump who had also described NAFTA as the worst trade deal ever, and indicated that it would be scrapped. In this edition’s Special Report, *Trump just might be giving us the opportunity to make NAFTA even stronger*, Alan Bersin provides an insightful commentary on the symbiotic relationship that NAFTA has nurtured between the US and Mexico, and the resultant interdependence that now exists. He points to the need to reinvent the North American security and trade role based on the guidance of those public and private sector entities who best understand the nature of its cross-border commerce.

Despite the US decision to withdraw from the TPP, the 11 countries that remain are continuing to pursue the long-term vision of an Asia-Pacific free trade area as a critical driver of regional economic integration. Importantly, once it comes into force, membership of the TPP will be open to other Asia-Pacific economies.

The message delivered by Alan Bersin about those who best understand the nature of cross-border commerce in the North American context is of equal relevance to the TPP: ‘Their knowledge and experiences of what actually works for states, cities and communities on the border should drive the national debate about what “secure” and “smart” borders ought to look like in national policy terms’.

Hopefully, others in the process of negotiating or contemplating free trade agreements will heed this advice, and seek the guidance of those who fully understand the practicalities of the cross-border environment when formulating such arrangements. The academic community, particularly contributors to the *World Customs Journal*, are well placed to provide empirical evidence that can inform such policy decision-making.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Widdowson'.

David Widdowson
Editor-in-Chief