Research objectives

The research objective is answering the question how regional trade agreements (RTAs) address challenges related to digital economy and whether they form a new paradigm of international trade relations of data-driven economy. The proposed research project is divided into two main phases: the first one, focused on the issues concerning the relationship between the international trade law and digital economy, and the second: focused on detailed issues concerning chapters in RTAs. In the first phase, the project is focused on examining uniqueness of the international economic law development in the era of digital transition: how do states and international organisations react in response to the growing power of digital companies? Do bilateral and regional agreements will have an impact on the multilateral agreements which will be adopted, or do they create a separate regulatory trend? Do they support the process of creation of unified standards concerning digital economy and its regulation? The second phase of the project will allow to dwell into more detailed issues, including chapters and provisions in RTAs which refer to e-commerce, data protection, and free flow of data.

Description of the research

The research will combine various methodological approaches. Firstly, it is necessary to identify what are the barriers for e-commerce development, which will be done by in-depth literature review. Secondly, the identification of relevant chapters and provisions in trade agreements will take place. The process will be supported by the usage of text mining tools: on the basis of UNCTAD *ToTA* database and the identification of the relevant agreements by the team, the text mining exercises will be performed. The analysis of identified trade agreements will be based both on traditional legal analysis approaches (formal and dogmatic legal analysis), comparative studies of various regulatory models used in regard to digital economy (comparative analysis) and on innovatory text mining approach. The results will enable verification of the main research hypotheses. In the second stage of the research, in-depth analysis of selected issues (e-commerce, data protection, free flow of data) in the relevant trade agreements will be conducted. This will allow to verify detailed research hypotheses. Finally, the project includes plans for the research results' dissemination, taking form of: articles submitted to international journals, participation in conferences, and information about the results published in social media and website of the research institution participating in the project.

Motivation for conducting the research

Motivation for conducting the research results from two reasons. Firstly, it is an important research topic. In last two years there is a growing number of publications which try to analyse selected aspects of changes ongoing in international economic law in relation to digital transition and the overall interest in the topic increases. However, these studies often lack broader perspective. The proposal allows for conducting more comprehensive research which will provide new insight into the research issue. Secondly, the project has high level of social significance. The digital transition transforms the way individuals and businesses participate in economy: it allows for more direct presence in trade relations (e.g. participation in cross-border e-commerce by individual entrepreneurs from distant countries which is facilitated due to e-commerce platforms existence). As such, the project will enable to identify regulatory trends which appear in the areas directly influencing lives of individuals.

Expected results

Expected results of the project include verification of the research hypotheses, which will provide basis for preparing articles for publications. As the topic is becoming vital for legal studies, the realisation of the research proposal will help Polish scientists to actively participate in an ongoing academic debate, e.g. due to planned research visits and participation in conferences. Moreover, the project involves usage of new methodologies (text mining) which will provide an opportunity to be involved in the experiments concerning using this new methodology in the area of legal studies and supporting quantitative analysis with qualitative dimension. Last but not least, project will provide opportunities for young PhD researcher to participate in an interdisciplinary team work, which will have an impact on the research excellence of young academics.