



Stop the EU's corporate trade agenda

Seattle to Brussels Network, part of Our World is Not For Sale <http://www.s2bnetwork.org>

Seattle to Brussels Network
Press Release
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'NO' TO NEW EU FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS

Coalition of European civil society groups condemn proposed new bilateral agreements for benefiting only EU corporate interests and not people and environment.

Brussels, 24 April 2007 – NGOs, networks, trade unions, associations and social movements campaigning for equitable and sustainable EU trade policies and coordinating in the Seattle to Brussels Network, today condemned the decision by the EU Ministers to authorize the European Commission to negotiate new bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) with developing countries. (1)

The Ministers from the 27 Member States, meeting in the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) in Luxembourg, yesterday approved the official mandates for the European Commission to negotiate FTAs with India, South Korea and the ASEAN countries and Association Agreements (AAs) with Central America and the Andean Community.

Charly Poppe, Trade Campaigner at Friends of the Earth Europe, said:

“These aggressive free trade deals pose a greater threat to the environment and citizens in developing countries and in Europe than the bad proposals already on the table at the WTO. The rights of local communities and developing country governments to decide their own macro-economic policies are being removed at the behest of European transnational corporations.”

The new EU FTAs aim to establish bilateral or bi-regional free trade areas, by eliminating all import and export restrictions on trade in a majority of goods and services, with a particular focus on the elimination of ‘non-tariff barriers’ (NTBs). This agenda can jeopardize legitimate public standards or regulations aimed at protecting the environment, ensuring health and social rights, achieving food sovereignty or mitigating climate change, in Europe and in developing countries.

The European Commission is also seeking to include “WTO+” requirements (investment, competition policy, access to government procurement, trade facilitation and intellectual property rights enforcement) in these agreements despite that developing countries and civil society groups have already rejected these issues in the multilateral negotiations at the WTO.

Myriam Vander Stichele, Senior Researcher at SOMO said:

“It is shocking to see how this bilateral trade strategy is implemented only in the interests of big businesses which have privileged access to the EC while there was no meaningful public and political debate.”

The negotiating mandates were discussed between the Council of Ministers and the European Commission, without meaningful involvement of parliamentarians and without any consideration for the concerns of civil society.

Last week, a coalition of more than 90 NGOs, trade unions, social movements and civil society networks sent an 'open letter' to the EU ministers calling them to refuse the aggressive free trade approach promoted by the European Commission and to initiate instead a transparent and participatory debate among a full range of stakeholders within and outside Europe to establish what type of trade policy is most appropriate for the EU.
(2)

The Seattle to Brussels Network considers that the EU should stop forcing unfair trade deals on developing countries, actively develop alternative trade approaches based on principles of sustainable development, and end corporations' undue influence over EU trade policy.

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NOTES:

(1) Seattle to Brussels Network website: <http://www.s2bnetwork.org>

(2) Read the letter in English:
http://www.s2bnetwork.org/download/GlobalEurope_FTAmmandates_civilsocietyletter_apr_07.pdf

Read the letter in Spanish:
http://www.s2bnetwork.org/download/GlobalEurope_FTAmmandates_civilsocietyletter_apr_07_ES