

**THE EU'S TRADE AGENDA:  
SERVING CORPORATE INTERESTS AT THE EXPENSE OF  
DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

Statement by the Seattle to Brussels Network, September 2005

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After the failure in July 2005 to reach agreement on moving the Doha Round forward, and in spite of the European Union's abundant development rhetoric, its statements in the WTO show that the EU is ever more determined to push through a bleakly corporate trade agenda.

This agenda undermines any sustainable development pretences the Doha Round might have had and will have negative social and environmental impacts for the world's people. The big profiteers are the EU corporations whose interests are at the heart of the EU trade positions.

The time has come to fundamentally change the EU's trade policies: they need to be just, sustainable and democratically accountable. The Seattle to Brussels Network – an alliance of European groups campaigning on trade issues- clearly rejects the EU's corporate trade agenda. We call upon European citizens and parliaments to urge their governments to change the EU Commission's trade mandate in the months remaining before the 6th WTO Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong [13-18 December 2005]. The EU Council meetings of 21-22 November offer one excellent opportunity to do this.

The EU's anti-development, anti-environment and anti-human rights agenda is most apparent in the so-called "non-agricultural market access" negotiations (NAMA) which deal with industrial, forest, fisheries and mining products and in the services negotiations (GATS).

In NAMA the EU is demanding "real market access" for its exports. To obtain this the EU demands a uniform mathematical reduction formula that would slash tariffs to very low levels in countries like Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Ghana, the Central African Republic, Swaziland, Barbados, Jamaica, etc. EU consistently but misleadingly refers to this group as "*the emerging developing countries like India and Brazil*".

At the same time, the EU claims that it is prepared to spare the "least developed and vulnerable developing countries" to some extent. However the EU is negotiating so-called Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) outside the WTO with most of these countries. In the EPA negotiations, the EU demands nothing less than the *elimination* of these countries' tariffs for most of their trade with the EU.

Such blind and radical liberalisations as in NAMA or Epas will cause loss of government revenue, industrial decline, unemployment and increasing poverty. Furthermore, as all natural resources are covered by the NAMA-negotiations, countries' natural resources and environmental policies will also be affected.

In the GATS-negotiations, the European Commission is pushing the interests of its services industries, aggressively seeking to expand their markets. The GATS is supposed to be a "bottom-up" agreement, in which WTO-members have the right to choose their own levels of services liberalisation. In complete contradiction with this approach, the Commission is trying to force its trading partners to adopt "benchmarks" to measure their liberalisation offers and to press for far more radical liberalisation.

Opening markets using abstract reduction formula or benchmarks to satisfy European exporters will do nothing to foster sustainable development in the South. Developing countries must maintain the right to determine their own trade policies, to pursue their sustainable development objectives and to foster economic, social, cultural, human and environmental rights.

In the agricultural negotiations, the EU is “less ambitious”. What this means is that the Doha Round negotiations will not stop the dumping of subsidised agricultural products onto the world’s markets, thereby undermining the livelihoods of millions. Moreover the negotiations are still heading towards the further opening of local markets to cheap imports and the dismantling of measures intended to protect local farmers. The WTO agriculture negotiations continue to favour agri-business, supermarket chains and traders; at the expense of sustainable family farmers, landless people, food workers, consumers and the environment. Existing rules, as well as most of the newly proposed ones threaten the right to food and the right to food production for local consumption. This violates the right of all countries for food sovereignty and also prevents them from respecting consumer choice and banning GMO products.

The EU’s continuous hammering on market access for its transnational corporations has sidelined the agenda of the developing countries. From the outset, the latter were reluctant to join a new round of negotiations, instead calling for a review and a rebalancing of the existing WTO agreements and effective, operational special and differential treatment provisions. In spite of promises made, their concerns have been completely disregarded.

Even the urgent matter of access to affordable medicines has not yet received a workable solution. The TRIPS [the WTO’s Intellectual Property agreement] has not been amended because of rich-country resistance on behalf of their pharmaceutical companies. Other TRIPS issues in the interest of developing countries, such as misappropriation of traditional knowledge and genetic resources, equitable benefit sharing and the patenting of life are not treated or are effectively blocked by the rich countries, including the EU. Simultaneously, the EU is trying to reinforce its control over intellectual property via bilateral negotiations and the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO).

Thus, the corporate trade agenda of the EU is not limited to the WTO but infiltrates such institutions as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and other “development banks”; bi-regional and bi-lateral agreements including the hundreds of Bilateral Investment Agreements negotiated by the individual the EU member states; as well as the EU development policy which promotes liberalisation and structural adjustment.

EU Trade Ministers must change the current EU trade policy and therefore the negotiating mandates of the European Commission in order to:

- protect and fulfil social, economic, cultural and human rights;
- protect livelihoods and the environment;
- provide access to essential services and affordable medicines;
- create a just international property rights regime;
- ensure people’s food sovereignty and necessary policy space for peoples to define their own sustainable development policies;
- address the imbalances of the WTO agreements;
- drop reciprocity demands in the EPA-negotiations;
- stop imposing trade conditions directly or through World Bank and IMF.

EU trade policy must be based on increased transparency, debate and participation both at the national and the EU levels and submitted to systematic sustainable impact assessments. The corporate lobbying industry in Brussels must be made transparent and regulated. Privileged relationships to big business must be ended to ensure that EU policies serve the interests of the people and sustainable development - not the narrow commercial agendas of corporations.

**The Seattle to Brussels-Network, member of the Our World Is Not For Sale network,**  
[www.s2bnetwork.org](http://www.s2bnetwork.org)