

Briefing Note



**Friends of
the Earth**

Global Europe

The EU's new, offensive trade strategy

In October 2006, EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson presented a new vision for Europe's trade policy which was laid out in the communication *Global Europe – competing in the world*. This vision is explicitly about serving the interests of European corporations – opening up new markets, natural resources and energy reserves for them.

The strategy paper outlines how a whole new series of free trade agreements are being launched between the EU and developing countries, outside the WTO and on behalf of European transnational corporations. EU negotiations with South Korea, ASEAN (10 South-East Asian countries), India, Central America and the Andean Community were authorised in April 2007. This adds to existing EU negotiations with the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) region, the Gulf states and MERCOSUR (Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Venezuela, Argentina).

Market access

The EU's aggressive agenda for opening markets abroad threatens the sustainable development prospects of developing countries as it exposes infant industry, farmers and fisherfolk to direct and unfair competition from powerful European corporations – resulting in environmental damage, the loss of livelihoods and undermining food security. Even the EU's own impact assessment has predicted that this rapid market opening could lead to the collapse of West Africa's manufacturing sector.

Yet it is the agricultural sector that is set to suffer the most as current proposals will fling open agricultural markets and pave the way for more dumping of cheap European processed goods. Our partners in Ghana have campaigned against the cheap EU imports of rice and frozen chicken that have destroyed thousands of livelihoods and pushed the poultry industry to the brink of collapse.

New EU trade deals known as Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) will signal even greater market access for European corporations and their products – undermining food sovereignty and threatening the livelihoods of millions of farmers and fisherfolk.

Natural resources

Within these new trade deals, restrictions protecting natural resources are to be removed to allow greater access to European corporations. This would severely undermine developing country communities' access to natural resources that indigenous, fisherfolk and farmers – in particular

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women – rely upon for their livelihoods, medicines, fuel and food security needs. The energy sector is singled out for particular attention by the European Commission.

Singapore issues

The EU is aggressively pushing the ‘Singapore issues’ that include investment, competition policy and public procurement, even though these have already been rejected by developing countries at the WTO because they would inflict lasting damage upon poor communities and their environment. New investment rules in particular would open up and deregulate sensitive sectors such as oil, mining, forestry and fisheries on behalf of European transnational corporations.

Attack on social Europe

The EU’s liberalisation agenda also has an internal agenda to lower domestic social and environmental standards. Earlier attempts to do this through, for example, the WTO have been blocked by resistance from European trade unions, farmer’s organisations and NGOs.

Conclusion

Global Europe – competing in the world represents a serious threat to the developing countries and their environment. Friends of the Earth is working with civil society groups and social movements from around the world in order to demand that this offensive strategy is scrapped and the free trade agreements that it promotes are stopped.

We need an alternative approach to trade that works for people and the planet. This means supporting local communities’ struggles and initiatives that put local communities and their environment before the interests of transnational corporations such as the millions of producers worldwide calling for food sovereignty.