

EUROPEAN PLATFORM for FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

for fair and sustainable production systems

NEWSLETTER

Newsletter 5
November 2005

Introduction

Here is the fifth newsletter of the European Platform for Food Sovereignty. These are hectic times, so we had some trouble getting the different platforms to contribute to this newsletter. The reports of the platforms are witness to the hard and sometimes inventive work that is being done in the different countries. Hard work indeed to push for alternative policies: the comment 'it is an uphill climb' made at the Luxemburg meeting might now be changed into 'it is an up-mountain climb'. See for instance the report on the meeting of members of the EU platform and the EU ambassador to the WTO, Mr Trojan, which concludes this newsletter. Hard to get our ideas across.

Still, our work is preparing the ground for changes that will have to be made once more people start realising that the current system works out disastrously in many respects. And supporting and inspiring each other helps.

Greet Goverde, g.goverde-lips@chello.nl

Contents:

- 1 List of activities on behalf of the EU platform since the Luxemburg meeting
- 2 Report of the mini meeting of the EU platform on the position text for Hong Kong
- 3 Report of the Soy-seminar on 19-20 September
- 4 Reports from the various member countries
- 9 Report on the meeting of the EU platform and others with the EU ambassador to the WTO, Mr Trojan

European Platform:

Activities

- 9 June, Brussels: Seminar on Sugar in the Belgian Egmont Palace (see Belgian Platform)
- 18 July, Brussels: Press conference on Sugar together with CPE and COAG.
- 6 September, Vienna: meeting with the Austrian Platform: preparation of a presidency project for the first half of 2006.
- 27-28 July, Geneva: Agricultural Strategy meetings with other groups and networks in Europe and elsewhere
- 19-20 September, Brussels: Seminar on Soy (*report see below*)
- 20 September, Brussels: Seminar on Market Acces Revisited in the European Parliament
- 19 October, Geneva: mini-meeting of the European Platform for the preparation of the common position- (*see below for separate report.*)

Representations:

- 28 June, Brussels: CIBE Colloquium on Sugar
- 17 October, Geneva: Seminar of CPE: debates on WTO agriculture
- 18 October, Geneva: meeting with the EU Ambassador in Geneva

Most documents are posted on our website:

[Http://www.agricultures-durables-solidaires.org/pf-europe.htm](http://www.agricultures-durables-solidaires.org/pf-europe.htm)

Mini-Meeting of the European Platform on Food Sovereignty in Geneva, 19 October 2005

Participants:

Anne Laure Constantin: Plateform française
Marek Poznanski : Belgian frenchspeaking Platform
Nora McKeon: Italian Platform
Gert Engelen: Belgian Flemish Platfrom

Since the majority of the national platforms are not represented, this meeting is not able to take any decisions. However, we have been able to reflect on proposals how we could continue with the work on WTO agriculture, which was the main subject of the meeting.

State of affairs of the preparation of a common position on agriculture towards Hong Kong:

After sending out a second draft proposal on 7 October, we received reactions from France and Italy, which were presented in this meeting: see annex

Both Italy and France insisted on the importance of the process, working towards a consolidation of the national platforms and the European Platform. A common European position on agriculture for the Hong Kong WTO meeting is not their first priority since the member organisations of both platforms are very much engaged in more sectorial positions.

Since the other platforms - which are not present – did not give us this kind of reaction, and since we decided in the last meeting in Luxembourg that we would try to come up with a common position, we will still go for it. We recall that also in the Luxembourg meeting we put a lot of emphasis on the priority of the process of consolidation; this should not be endangered by trying too hard to have a common position. This was also stressed in an informal meeting some days before with Fernando Fernandez from the Spanish Platform.

We think that the work on this common position is useful for the national platforms as it can strengthen the dynamics of the national platforms and strengthen the interlinking on the European level. If i.e. the Italians or the Belgians (Flemish Platform) already have another position, this EU Platform one can be an extra document that can be handed out to national politicians with the comment that this position has been endorsed by the other national platforms. It would prove that we are not defending this in Belgium or in Italy only.

The comments of the French and the Italian Platforms seem to be improvements on the text. They don't bring in new elements that are not already present in the Charter of the European Platform. The Italian platform wants to include the 'agriculture workers' as involved stakeholders. They also put in the concept on Food Sovereignty which is a basic concept in our Charter.

Conclusion

We will integrate the comments of the French and the Italian platform and send out the third and definitive version. It is up to the national platforms to check again whether or not they can adopt this position. It will be sent in a separate mail.

If all the national platforms adopt the position we have a common position of the European Platform. If only some national platforms adopt the position, then the position can only be signed by this list of national platforms.

It is also clear that we need to finish the work on the Charter before the Hong Kong meeting. Anne Laure will take this up.

Soy-seminar, 19-20 September 2005

On 19 and 20 September NGOs and farmers' organisations from North and South got together in Brussels to join forces concerning soy problems, because the increase of soy production is affecting the local population and the environment in a bad way.

The seminar offered participating organisations the opportunity to exchange information about the work they are doing concerning soy. In the Netherlands nine organisations are cooperating with their partners in the south on lobbying with the soy industry, policy makers and the public. But a global problem requires a global approach, so international cooperation is needed to halt the increasing soy problem.

Soy is rich in proteins. In Europe it is mainly used for the production of animal feed. As the number of cattle keeps increasing globally to supply the increasing demand for meat, the demand for animal feed is increasing as well. Since the soy that is grown in Europe is not sufficient to supply demand, 95 % of the soy needed in Europe is imported. So the production of soy has increased dramatically during the last few years. Representatives from Brazil and Bolivia came to the meeting to explain the situation in their countries.

Large areas of forest and savanna are being cleared. In the Brazilian Amazon and the Cerrado alone 700.000 hectares of forest are lost every year to make room for soy. The massive use of pesticides damages the environment as well. This makes soy into one of the main causes of irreparable loss of biodiversity.

Moreover large firms are not only buying unused land but they are also buying or renting land from small farmers who are driven away from their land. Because machines rather than people are being used to harvest the soy, employment is decreasing. Fewer and fewer people have the possibility to grow or buy their food.

That is why the central question at the seminar was what we here in Europe can do to tackle these problems. Seven lobbying demands for industry, governments and the public were distilled and are being elaborated in working groups:

- 1 Studying alternatives for soy (e.g. clover)
- 2 Fair market access for small farmers, right to protect
- 3 transparency in the regulations for firms, and chain responsibility
- 4 respect for human rights (rights to food, land and health)
- 5 international regulations that enhance sustainable soy production , WTO criteria
- 6 halting investments in soy
- 7 regulation of private banks.

The European platform has agreed to work together with others especially on the demands 2 and 5. Some national platforms agreed to work on some of the other points.

Of course the role of the consumer is crucial if we want to make an impact on the bad effects of our meat consumption on people and the environment in South America. Strategies and methods to reach the consumer were discussed. The wish for one big European campaign appeared to be premature, but at least things have started moving.

Gert Engelen

News.....from Great Britain

News from the UK Food Group, October 2005
PO Box 100, London, SE1 7TR www.ukfg.org.uk

UK Government Department for International Development (DFID) consultation *"Productivity growth for poverty reduction: an approach to agriculture"*

The UKFG has engaged with DFID in its consultation process on developing its new long-term agriculture and poverty reduction guidelines for its programmes and country officers, in particular facilitating responses from CSOs to its 14 working papers. In the current draft guidelines, there is a lack of clear definition of productivity. They prioritise the high potential growth areas and therefore neglect the poorest farmers. The problems that have been caused by forced liberalization and the opening of markets as a solution to poverty are not recognised, and it is not clear how these strategies will be implemented alongside other government strategies e.g. on health, hunger reduction and environment. There's an unsubstantiated pro-GM technology approach. These are just a few of the key concerns of the Food Group members with the current draft. The UKFG submitted its response to the DFID consultation in September. The five-page submission is available at www.ukfg.org.uk/ (Click on 'Publications' link).

31st October, UK Food Group 'Make Hunger History' Parliamentary Briefing

3pm, Committee room 6, House of Commons, Westminster, London
Hosted by MP Joan Ruddock, this briefing will present views on what the European Union and the UK Presidency could do to support African farmers in the upcoming World Trade Organisation negotiations and avert the growing crisis in food and farming.

- Ndiogou Fall, ROPPA, "How Africa Could Feed Itself"
- Lies Craeynest, War on Want, UK "Food Sovereignty: democratising food and farming choices"
- Christopher Jones, Agricultural Christian Fellowship, UK "Why agriculture matters at home and abroad"

See www.ukfg.org.uk/ (Click on 'Events' link)

2nd November, 'Trade Justice not Free Trade' mass lobby, 12 - 6pm, London

This year UK NGOs have been mobilising their memberships through the 'Make Poverty History' campaign to campaign for a better deal for developing countries at the upcoming WTO Ministerial meeting. There was tremendous public support at the previous rallies, in April in London and July in Edinburgh, and we expect a good turnout at the upcoming mass lobby of Whitehall in November.

To push the message for trade justice not free trade, people are lobbying their MPs with the messages (1) Stop pushing poor countries to open their economies and (2) Respect poor countries' right to decide their own trade policies to help end poverty and protect the environment.

For more information see <http://www.tjm.org.uk>

NEW!! UK Food Group publication 'Achieving fairness in trading between supermarkets and their agrifood supply chains' by Anne Tallontire and Bill Vorley

What are the prospects for fair trade to become the norm rather than exception for trading between supermarkets, their suppliers, and farmers at home and around the world? That is the question asked in this paper, which comes at a time of widespread scrutiny of UK supermarkets and their influence on the livelihoods of food producers and suppliers. The paper reviews the opportunities and risks in incorporating fairness into supermarkets' trading practices. It was commissioned by the UK Food Group's Trans National Corporations Working Group to inform member organisations'

campaigning strategies and to propose a new agenda for future research. It will shortly be on the UKFG website. In the meantime contact Rachel for a copy.

Food Sovereignty debate in the UK

The UK Food Group hosts the recently formed UK Platform for Food Sovereignty. In June this year we held a Food Sovereignty seminar to facilitate debate on the principles of food sovereignty among food group members, in order to further understanding and consider the potential of the policy approach to hunger reduction. While it was recognized that this is a policy approach which would receive little support from DFID or DTI due to their lack of interest in livelihoods in favour of developing market based trade policies, it was also agreed that more discussion is needed to define Food Sovereignty and its potential and parameters among UK NGO's. The UKFG will continue to facilitate debate on this. The keynote presentation was given by Michael Windfuhr, based on a new report 'Food Sovereignty: towards democracy in a localized system'. This is now available free from the following website (and will be available in Spanish shortly) <http://www.ukabc.org/foodsovpaper.htm>

Ban Terminator campaign.

The UK Food Group has set up a working group on Terminator Technology. It is part of the international campaign to ensure that Terminator Technology continues to be opposed by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) at its meeting in March 2006. The UK Platform for Food Sovereignty sent a letter to the Executive Secretary of the CBD about this. More information on www.banterminator.org.

UK Platform for Food Sovereignty members: Banana Link, Catholic Institute for International Relations, ETC Group (formerly RAFI), Farmers Link, Farm Crisis Network, Find Your Feet, Friends of the Earth, GAIA Foundation, Genetic Food Alert, Grassroots Action on Food and Farming, HDRA International Programme, New Economics Foundation, Pesticides Action Network, Small and Family Farmers Association, War on Want, Women's Environment Network.

Contact Patrick Mulvany patrickmulvany@clara.co.uk & Rachel Sutton rachel@ukfg.org.uk.

News.....from Belgium

October 2005

Common activities of the Flemish and French speaking platform

On June 9 we organised a seminar on Sugar with our Ministers of Agriculture where we mainly looked at the international effects of the current proposal of the Sugar Regime reform. A lot of ACP and LDC Ambassadors participated and were pleased by this initiative. It seems that we have achieved rather good understanding between the different stakeholders and our positions are seen as very positive for ACP and LCD countries. Co-organiser of this seminar was the European Platform

We participated in the large European manifestation of sugar beet farmers in Brussels. On 26 Sept this convergence was expressed in a Belgian meeting with the Commissioner Fisher Boel.

On the occasion of World Food day - 16 October - both platforms published a common text in different medias, we had several advertisements on TV and Radio and got some newspapers articles printed.

Both platforms worked on a common position towards the WTO Hong Kong Ministerial conference, addressing the different Belgian ministers and Members of Parliament. The document deals with

each of the WTO issues (agriculture, AGCS, TRIPS, NAMA, Singapore issues). The text was approved by NGOs, trade unions, environmental NGO, and civil and political rights NGOs.

Flemish platform

On Sept 19 and 20: Soy seminar with participants from several European and Latin American Countries.

On 25 October, we had a first gathering for next year's campaign on food sovereignty. We discussed a vision document, policy proposals and had a first brainstorm on campaigning to the large public.

French speaking platform

The French-speaking platform has continued lobbying the external trade minister and the regional minister of agriculture about the Sugar reform. The regional minister's position is now not too far from the platform position.

The French-speaking platform continues to work on the GMO issue and on a common position regarding biofuel.

The platform has also participated in the huge agriculture mass event (bourse) at Libramont in July 2005 and in the globalisation commission

Gert.engelen@vredeseilanden.be

News.....from Austria

The Austrian Platform is planning and organizing a **public hearing** of persons from the ministry of agriculture and environment and the ministry of economy about the position of Austria/EU during the WTO-negotiations. We are cooperating with other big NGOs such as Attac Austria, AGEZ, Greenpeace, WWF and catholic organisations. If all goes as planned this hearing will take place on the 5th of December. It will be the only opportunity for interested Austrian citizens to ask questions directly to persons from the government about WTO and the Austrian position. I have translated the WTO-paper of the EU-Platform into German and I will send it to other organisations. We are also writing a more concrete position-paper on the WTO and Food Sovereignty.

We will have our **annual meeting** on the 16th of November. Then we will have to discuss internal affairs, such as how our platform will work in future. At the moment all of us are doing voluntary work and this is not so easy. That's one reason why we can't be active in all the important fields of agricultural policy. During this meeting we also want to start preparing the meeting of the EU-Platform in Vienna in the spring of 2006. The date still has to be decided. I guess we will found a working group for this event. One problem will be to find money for it.

On the 6th of September there was a meeting in Vienna organized by Alexandra Strickner and Austrian and European NGOs - they want to plan some activities around our platform meeting during the Austrian EU-presidency. But I have no news about what exactly they are planning. When I know more, I will inform you. We will invite the Hungarian NGO and **if you have contacts with NGOs in other countries of Eastern Europe, please invite them or give me the contact-address**, so that I can invite them myself.

We wrote a press release about the Common Agricultural Policy and the comments of Bush and Blair about the agricultural subsidies. The result was that I was one of the people interviewed (along with Franz Fishler and others) for a documentary on European agriculture that will be broadcast on the tv channel 3sat on 28 November. Parts of this interview have also been broadcast on the radio.

Best regards from Austria, Elisabeth. e-mail: ebaum@chello.at, www.agrarbuendnis.at

News.....from France

- **Sugar:** the French platform issued a report on the sugar issue, entitled « Alternative proposals for a fair and sustainable reform of the EU sugar regime ». It can be downloaded from <http://www.agricultures-durables-solidaires.org/ImgPageHTML/sucre%20rapport%20final%2022062005.pdf> . Through its 40 pages, it comes back on the current functioning of the EU sugar regime, its failures, the proposals for reform currently on the table and the positioning of the different players. It ends with the proposals of the French and European platforms proposals detailed. This report has been spread among decision makers and the press in France.
- **Food sovereignty:** the platform still has a group reflecting on the mechanisms needed to implement food sovereignty at the international level. Co-ordinated by Michel Buisson, former teacher in a School of agriculture, this group has started to draft proposals regarding an international binding law to guarantee the right to food sovereignty. Michel is looking for any input to his work. In case you are interested, you can contact him by e mail: mam.buisson@wanadoo.fr
- **Strategic orientations:** the platform is still trying hard to reinforce the participation of "consumers" and "environmentalists". To this aim, it will propose to organize a broad seminar on the occasion of World Food Day 2006, bringing together as many players as possible in the French agriculture game. The aim will be to confirm the need to change the way agricultural policies are conceived in France.
- Last but not least: the platform has a **new website!** It's still only in French, unfortunately, but much more attractive (or at least we think): www.agricultures-durables-solidaires.org . Do not hesitate to give us your feedback!

Anne-Laure Constantin, <anne-laure@agricultures-durables-solidaires.org>

News.....from The Netherlands

Sugar

Some of us have been involved in talks with the sugar industry and the larger farmers' organisation on the one hand and parliamentarians on the other hand. The 'broad platform' was not unanimous in their proposals: the sugar industry disagreed about the size of the quota for the LDCs. Still, on the main point, 'smaller price reduction', everybody agreed, and parliament voted for a motion to that effect. However in a meeting of the minister and the agricultural specialists in parliament, they backed down and withdrew the motion! (One of us in the agricultural press: 'farmers, are these christian democrats your defenders?!')

Probably the minister was pressured by the government to take up the position of staunch defender of the Commission's proposals in the next meeting of the agricultural council, and he in his turn put pressure on the parliamentarians of the coalition parties. In the agricultural council of ministers there has to be at least one country that agrees with the Commission or the Commission's proposal will be off the table. That is something Europe cannot afford with an eye to Hong Kong, where Europe needs trade-off material for GATS. (Maybe the minister felt he had to comply with the government's wishes and take up this role of defender of the Commission's proposals because he has been in the middle of a controversy over his interference with his two farms, which caused some damage to the government.....)

European platform

Some organisations in the platform don't want to get involved in all the discussions on positions and they feel uneasy about some points in the principles. However we are not a large platform and don't want to split up into two groups with different names. It would also be too confusing for the Dutch public. We first discussed this in a meeting at Joop's farm on a beautiful May afternoon on one of the Zeeland islands, enjoying a meal from products from his farm. Too good a setting to let differences of opinion become a big issue! So we just stick to the same name, as long as it is clear internally who do and who don't subscribe to all the EU Platform points. We are still figuring that out.

WTO

Some of us cooperated with the 'coalition for fair trade' which is raising awareness about the WTO. It was an effort to get 'our' agricultural points across but eventually they were included in the campaign. There has been a meeting with parliamentarians on 24 October and there will be debate with the minister for Trade on 23 November and a public gathering with a pop concert on 10 December in The Hague. There has also been a big demonstration in the Hague around the presentation of the governments' budget in September in which some of us took part (see picture).

Some of us are also involved in a 'trial' in which judges pronounce verdict on the Minister for Economic Affairs' plans to go to Hong Kong. Needless to say he will be advised to stay at home, or go and propose changes.



Soy

We thoroughly enjoyed the workshop on soy in Brussels: what potential for cooperation and awareness raising in Europe! Unfortunately no decision was made (yet) about starting one European campaign, but working groups were formed about issues such as the political aspects of the soy trade and the formulation of a policy on substitute crops in Europe which we think are relevant to our platforms. It was good to establish links with the other national and international groups because this is an urgent matter, for our own arable farmers but especially for the farmers and the environment in Latin America.

We may put some work into studying the **supermarket chain and/or agribusiness** from our perspective later this year. We have contacted an ngo that is active in that field.

Greet Goverde, g.goverde-lips@chello.nl

News.....from Italy

The Italian Food Sovereignty Campaign supported the **campaign "EuropAfrica: for sustainable and mutually supportive agriculture in the North and in the South"** in holding a national round table in Rome on 24 October. Organized by Terra Nuova and Crocevia with the participation of ROPPA and the Italian farmers' organization Coldiretti, the **round table** focused on the theme "Towards Hong Kong: what changes for agriculture? Taking stock after the General Council of the WTO. " Hosted by the Third University of Rome, it was conceived as an occasion to take stock of the agriculture negotiations immediately following the WTO General Council in Geneva from 19 to 20 October, with an eye to the interests of farmers in the North and the South. Some 70 people were invited to sit around the table, coming from the Italian Ministries involved in the negotiations (Agriculture Policies and Trade), the European Commission, civil society (farmers' organizations, trade unions, NGOs, social organizations, fair trade), international food and agriculture institutions (FAO, IFAD), universities, the political world. The positions of farmers' organizations, presented by ROPPA, Coldiretti and the CPE, were given particular prominence. The room remained full and the debate lively from 10:30 to 18:30, testifying to growing interest in the issues and increased capacity on the part of officials to listen to and dialogue with positions which depart from the orthodoxy of liberalism. The report of the round table will be available soon.

During September – October two **delegations from ROPPA** visited five regions of Italy to interact with local associations, farmers' organizations, NGOs, universities and local authorities on themes of agricultural and trade policy in Europe and Africa and to build relations of dialogue and partnership. The exchange of experience at field level highlighted the similarity of the problems faced by small producers in Italy and West Africa. The commodity chains of tomatoes and rice were subjected to particularly close analysis since the visits took the ROPPA delegations to Campania, a major tomato production and processing area, and Vercelli, where most of the Italian rice is grown. Proposals for joint research/action on issues of mutual concern emerged from the visited and will be followed up on over the coming weeks.

Nora, <nora.mckeeon@fastwebnet.it>

No news this time from Spain and Portugal.....

News from Luxemburg.....

Unfortunately Dominique has had to leave her job because the money ran out.

Report of the lobby meeting with the EU embassy at the WTO in Geneva

Participants at the meeting:

Several NGO's: Christian Aid, Oxfam Int, Coordination Sud, IATP, Brasilian coalition of NGOs.

Farmers's organisations: Via Campesina, CPE, Canadian Farmers Union, Confederation Paysanne (France). *Coalitions:* European Platform for Food Sovereignty, Dutch GATS platform, Italian NGO-coalition

Summary

of the statements on agriculture by Mr Trojan, of the EU Embassy at the WTO,

On Agriculture

(report Gert Engelen)

- Statement of the EU delegation on the so-called paradox between development and market access: there is no contradiction between the importance of market access and development interests:
 - o It's necessary to distinguish between countries with an important export capacity like Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay: the importance of access to external markets is evident for this group. This gives possibilities for growth, for jobs, etc. For other countries like for most of the LCD countries who don't have this export potential right now, it is possible that market access becomes more important in the future. Trade has the potential to contribute to growth, creating jobs,...Of course trade does not only take place between North and South; South-South trade is becoming more important.
 - o As we talk of access to markets, we are considering at the same time the reduction of internal support in the EU, which gives more possibilities for competition for developing countries. There is even the perspective of that export subsidies may be abolished.

- The EU is not imposing any market access. Every country is free to accept or reject any offer or request that is proposed. In the July package it was already agreed that LDC countries don't have to contribute in any way to market access. Even the other countries that are close to the LDC countries don't have to contribute. There is enough policy space in the July package, many margins are possible, they have the special products,...The offensive negotiations are taking place between OECD countries, Brazil, India and others.

- We agree that the role of farmers is not only about production, but also about taking care of the environment, the landscape, etc. ¹This was exactly the base of our CAP-reform and this is what we are consolidating in the negotiations. Currently we have reached the limits of our margins for manoeuvring in the negotiations. With this CAP reform, the EU has already taken a very big share in reducing trade distortion. Now it is up to the US to deliver. Besides, we are also aware that the CAP reform is defining the limits of our mandate. Nobody is questioning the green box.

¹ At the end of the meeting, the assistants of Mr. ... said that agricultural products are not to be treated as simple 'merchandise'. But it gets more and more difficult to defend this. The legitimacy of subsidies is also questioned by groups like Oxfam i.e. in their 2 dollar per cow campaign, even if we are aware of the demagogy of this discourse.

- We should do something in the short term for the West-African countries which are producing cotton. The EU is ready to deliver for this.

Outcome of the Meeting with EU Ambassador Trojan

Services

(report: Roeline Knotterus)

The EU has a strong interest in services. The Union is dissatisfied with the request-offer process in GATS, which they feel is too slow and cumbersome. They're pushing hard on complementary approaches to introduce compulsory qualitative and quantitative benchmarks to speed up the process.

At the same time, developing countries feel that in this round they're faced with preference erosion and infringements of their right to regulate, while developed countries are opposing the emergency safeguard measures they feel are necessary to enable them to continue to pursue national policy objectives and counter possible adverse social effects of liberalisations. They feel these shortcomings are now being compounded by the EU push to introduce benchmarks which threaten to take away countries' flexibility to choose which sectors (if any) to bind under the GATS.

Not only was the EU ambassador, Mr Trojan, very dismissive of these developing country sensitivities. He attempted to skirt the concerns expressed altogether, by stressing that there was no real problem, as countries were at all times completely free in any decision on whether or not to introduce benchmarking into the GATS negotiating framework. Because of the freedom to reject or accept benchmarking proposals, according to Trojan, benchmarking could not be said to impinge on a country's freedom of choice, and thus full GATS flexibility was upheld.

He continued by stressing the need for complementary approaches, as the request-offer process is yielding insufficient results, as current GATS commitments are still far below countries' autonomous liberalisation levels. However, Trojan dismissed the argument that this might be inspired by the irreversibility of GATS commitments, the lack of clarity regarding the rules on domestic regulation and the absence of emergency safeguard measures.

Trojan further implied that opposition to the EU benchmarking proposals did not run deep, because all countries have some offensive interest in services and thus stand to gain from speeded-up services liberalisation. To which one of his civil servants later added that NGOs focus too much on the current defensive interests of developing countries, whereas they should be focusing – in the interest of development – on countries' production potential, which free trade would help unleash.

All in all, the EU representatives squared the benchmarking proposal with the development perspective of the Round, by stressing the need to differentiate between developing countries in terms of their level of development and individual needs. Trojan argued that LDCs were exempt from any commitments at this stage, and that the EU is offering LDCs substantial technical assistance to improve their capacity to benefit from increased market access to developed countries' markets.

NB. There are clear indications that the fact that LDCs are being exempted from commitments is also used to marginalise their voice in the negotiations. LDCs stress their wish to maintain full rights to engage in discussing the future trade rules they will be subjected to.

This Newsletter was put together by Greet Goverde, Nijmegen, The Netherlands,
November 2005

g.goverde-lips@chello.nl