

## Education must be excluded from the Canada-Europe trade agreement

Montréal, October 18, 2011 - As the ninth round of negotiations on the Canada-Europe trade agreement (CETA) begins this week in Ottawa, the Fédération québécoise des professeures et professeurs d'université (FQPPU), a Quebec-based teacher's federation, is preoccupied with the fate of education in this agreement. The objectives of the business, trade and industry and the pressures they exert on governments raise fears about a profound transformation of the world of education and, especially, the university sector. FQPPU requires that the Quebec and Canadian governments openly commit to exclude public services, particularly education, from this trade agreement.

The Canada-Europe agreement promotes the removal of "barriers" that prevent foreign private investment in the government "procurement markets". The liberalization of trade in services it promotes would give priority to the rights of companies on the sovereignty of governments. Indeed, the agreement contains provisions for "investment protection", similar to Chapter 11 of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). They allow companies to sue governments and to be compensated when a public institution or, for example, an environmental law, deprives them of a potential market and an opportunity to reap profits. The agreement also leads to a tightening of laws protecting intellectual property, which could undermine academic freedom and impede the free circulation of knowledge.

The so-called "negative list" used in the CETA assumes that any service that is not explicitly excluded by name could be liberalized. In early September, a report commissioned by the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) and the Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour estimated that this approach "undermines the protection of public services such as education." However, at present, the Canadian government has not committed openly to exclude public services of the agreement, whose negotiations are shrouded in secrecy. FQPPU considers it unacceptable that negotiations be conducted in private and in the absence of legitimate representatives accountable to the community.

Without access to the agreement drafts, academics and the general population can not fully grasp the scope of CETA impacts on education. But the context calls for caution, since for more than a decade, the commercialization of university has been on the agenda of large corporations. Powerful international economic organizations such as WTO, OECD and the World Bank explicitly project to transform public higher education into a commercial market, the universities into 'private providers' and knowledge in an exportation merchandize. This is the spirit of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), which CETA emulates.

Considering that the university must continue to serve the common good, the FQPPU denounces the inclusion of educational services and academic practices in CETA. It demands that the Canadian government be transparent and commit to exclude the public services from the agreement. Since higher education is under provincial jurisdiction, FQPPU requests that the Government of Quebec and, in particular, the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sport oppose any provision that would undermine the Quebec university system, its uniqueness and independence towards external powers. The Federation therefore expects that the public services, including education services and the university sector, will be excluded from CETA.

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