



## **BM69 – CLUJ-NAPOCA**

### **Resolution: Education must be excluded from the scope of trade agreements of EU, EEA<sup>1</sup> and EFTA<sup>2</sup>**

#### **Education must be excluded from the scope of trade agreements of EU/EEA/EFTA**

ESU believes that TTIP, TiSA and future trade agreements which consider education as a tradeable commodity, are a threat to the intrinsic values of education and will have irreversible consequences on education systems.

Therefore ESU urges for the exclusion of education as a whole from EU, EEA and EFTA trade agreements.

#### **Education is a public responsibility that should not be traded**

The European Students' Union (ESU) firmly believes that education is a public good and public responsibility. Therefore countries should provide sufficient public funding to ensure the quality and equitable accessibility of education for everyone at all levels. Education is a meaningful tool to empower citizens and foster social mobility, creating a sustainable future for our societies. For this reason the commodification of education threatens sustainable development of our societies and disregards the meaning of education in building democratic participation.

When education is perceived as a tradeable commodity, education systems are subjected to instrumentalisation and narrowed down to solely fulfilling needs of the labour market. Education systems, that rely on private funding, subject students to paying high tuition fees and taking loans in order to be able to access education. This model threatens the quality of education as well as the financial sustainability and the autonomy of educational institutions. Moreover, it is necessary for society to ensure that access to quality education is not determined by a person's socio-economic, ethnic, religious or other background and that the appropriate measures are implemented by the public authorities.

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<sup>1</sup> The European Economic Area consists out of the EU, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein and has the purpose to include the aforementioned countries into the internal market of the EU.

<sup>2</sup> The European Free Trade Association consists out of Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein.

## **Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership**

While publicly funded education remains under the regulative authority of the member states and EU Trade Commissioner Malmström has promised to protect public services, the agreement still includes privately funded education services. To protect the public cause of education, some countries have excluded privately funded education services from the country-specific offer.

It is important to note that once the education sector is opened to foreign providers it would have irreversible consequences on future education systems as closing these markets after the agreement has been reached would cost government's significant compensations.

In the last Services and Investment Offer of the European Union on TTIP, published in August 2015, Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, Malta, Romania and Sweden have made restrictions for the provision of privately funded higher education services. Additionally Cyprus, Finland, Malta, Romania and Sweden have made a full reservation on privately funded adult education services thus protecting the public responsibility of education.

ESU calls on the rest of the member states' governments to follow in making full reservations and restricting privately funded higher education services.

## **Trade in Services Agreement**

The negotiation documents from the TiSA, that have been leaked to the public, indicate that education will be directly affected by this agreement. Therefore ESU calls on all European parties of the TiSA negotiations, namely the EU, Norway, Switzerland, Iceland and Liechtenstein, to make every effort to exclude all education services from the agreement through a carve-out in the core text.

The Committee on International Trade (INTA) of the European Parliament (EP) is currently drafting report containing the EP's recommendations to the Commission on the TiSA negotiations. The EP has preliminary scheduled the vote on the report in January 2016. The European Students' Union appeals to INTA and to the EP to support amendments submitted by members of the EP, that aim to exclude education from the scope of the agreement similarly to what was done in the EP report containing recommendations to the Commission on TTIP.

## **Accessibility of information and transparency**

ESU recognises the efforts that have been made to increase communication with civil society and the fact, that the EC shared some information after recent TTIP and TiSA negotiation rounds. This practice should be continued and extended to other free trade negotiations the EC is currently participating in. The secrecy of the negotiations should not serve as an excuse to exclude the public and advocacy groups from the discussions.

In order to ensure transparency the offers from EU and other involved parties should be published, before and after each negotiation round. Consolidated texts should be available to public as well. Accessibility of information is crucial as these trade agreements will have a significant impact on domestic issues and policies in the individual countries.

## **Background**

In 2013 the European Commission (EC) with the mandate of the European Union (EU) member states started two far reaching trade negotiations - the Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Free trade agreements (FTAs) aim to reduce barriers to trade and attract foreign investments in order to increase international trade

between the parties and thereby foster economic growth. Furthermore the EC is involved in free trade negotiations with a number of other countries and economic associations of nations.<sup>3</sup>

Since the launch of the TTIP and TiSA negotiations a lot of organizations such as political parties, higher education and students' organizations and other advocacy groups, have warned about the risk of inclusion of public services such as education and health. According to recently published documents by the EC it is known that education is included in the services part of both agreements.

**Proposed by:** \_EC\_\_\_\_\_

**Seconded by:** VSS-UNES-USU, CREUP, SYL, DSF, NSO, ÖH, UNEL, SFS

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<sup>3</sup> European Commission, Overview of FTA and Other Trade Negotiations. Last updated October 2015, [http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/december/tradoc\\_118238.pdf](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/december/tradoc_118238.pdf)