

To: Peter Mandelson
EU Trade Commissioner

Brussels, 29 November 2006

Dear Commissioner Mandelson,

It has come to our attention that on Tuesday 4 December European Commission trade officials are scheduled to speak at a closed meeting between services industry lobbyists from the European Services Forum (ESF) and EU member state trade experts from the "Ad-Hoc Article 133 Committee on Services". We consider this meeting an example of the privileged access consistently granted to commercial interests to influence EU trade policy and call upon you to end this practice.

The European Services Forum, which organises the meeting, brings together large services corporations. The ESF aims to influence the EU position in the WTO GATS negotiations in such a way that it will promote the interests of European services companies and the liberalisation of markets worldwide. While this is maybe understandable from the services industry perspective, the narrow commercial agenda promoted by the ESF is in many respects at odds with the broader objective of making EU trade policy contribute to social and environmental sustainability worldwide.

The agenda for the 4 December meeting is determined by European Services Forum and the meeting will take place at its premises in the UNICE Building on Avenue de Cortenbergh. According to the draft agenda (which was leaked to us), ESF representatives will report on their recent activities such as lobbying visits to South East Asia, while Commission officials will give updates on ongoing bilateral and regional negotiations. The role of services in forthcoming bilateral negotiations is also to be discussed. The meeting will be concluded by a cocktail party.

While the meeting is facilitated by the Finnish Presidency, the agenda clearly shows that the European Commission has also been actively involved in its preparation. Transparency around this meeting is fully absent (as was the case with previous similar events). It is not mentioned on the DG Trade website on stakeholder dialogues or anywhere else on the Commission website, nor on the Council website. We only learned about the meeting through the attached documents, which were leaked to us.

This meeting between ESF lobbyists and EU trade officials is at least the second of its kind this year and similar meetings have been taking place on a regular basis since the founding of the ESF in 1999. Such meetings provide the ESF with a secretive forum to advance their agenda, parallel to DG Trade's official civil society dialogue (which the ESF also attends). This practice reflects the privileged access that the European Services Forum gets to influence EU trade policy and carries the risk that the EU's policy on international trade in services is effectively captured by commercial interests.

We consider such privileged access totally inappropriate and call upon you to cancel Commission participation in the 4 December meeting. Such a step is long overdue. At stake is the credibility of both the process and the outcomes of EU trade policy-making.

Yours sincerely,

Paul de Clerck, Friends of the Earth Europe
William Dinan, Spinwatch
Ulrich Müller, LobbyControl
Erik Wesselius, Corporate Europe Observatory