



Liberalise and Lose?

Developmental Space for Regionalisation and Economic Integration in Free Trade Agreements between Africa and the European Union

Background

On October 4th 2006 the EU Commission presented a new strategy for its international trade and investment policy, which outlined an ambitious agenda for future bilateral trade and investment agreements. To enhance the competitiveness of the EU in markets of developing countries, Brussels included all relevant trade-related topics, such as, investments, competition, public procurement, intellectual property rights, and non-tariff trade barriers in its endeavour for liberalisation. Current negotiations for Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with 74 states from Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific (ACP), which shall be concluded by the end of 2007, seem to be an integral part of this new EU trade strategy. Brussels negotiates with six ACP regional groupings: The Monetary and Economic Community of Central Africa (CEMAC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), with some East and Southern African states (ESA), with the Southern African Development Community (SADC), with Caribbean ACP-states (CARIFORUM), and finally with Pacific ACP-states.

The debate whether EPAs in their current form will contribute significantly to the reduction of poverty and the strengthening of regional integration in the South or if they will simply serve as a tool for the enhancement of European economic interests is still pending. Particularly the intended mutual opening of investment and service sectors contains numerous challenges for structurally weak ACP-regions. It might further limit the political space still available for autonomous decision-making by ACP-states. Lessons learned from the free trade agreement between the EU and South Africa, signed in 2000, demonstrate several difficulties of economic development for the region of Southern Africa. This is due to far reaching liberalisation concessions made by South Africa.

Prior to the German EU-presidency in 2007, the conference will provide a critical reflection on the state of current EPAs negotiations and their open developmental questions. Politicians, academics, and representatives from civil society will discuss with you options for a just and sustainable trade policy of the EU towards ACP-countries. You are welcome to join and participate in this discussion.



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