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TRADE IN SERVICES AGREEMENT (TiSA) IS A THREAT TO QUALITY EDUCATION

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ETUCE, representing 11 million teachers and education workers in Europe, is expressing deep concern over the European Union's intention to include education services in the Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA) negotiations currently underway.

Martin Rømer, Director of the European Trade Union Committee on Education (ETUCE) said: "Trade rules are legally binding and can have the effect of locking-in and intensifying pressures of commercialisation and privatisation. Rules around market access can severely restrict the ability of countries that make commitments on education services to limit the entry and regulate the operations of private and for-profit schools and institution."

Initially proposed by the United States and Australia in early 2012, TiSA talks arose in response to the ongoing impasse in WTO trade talks, including talks to expand the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).

Last week, Wikileaks released the secret draft text of the TiSA annex on financial services that has highlighted concerns about how the deal will be used to deregulate the financial sector at a time when stricter rules are needed to avoid a repeat of the recent crisis.

Rømer noted that rules in TiSA could make it difficult for governments to regulate appropriately the education sector.

"It is particularly worrying that a so-called standstill clause is included in the leaked document. This means that governments would have to bind their existing levels of liberalisation with the implication that future governments will not be able to introduce new measures that might restrict trade. This is fundamentally at odds with democratic decision-making," stated Rømer.

The negotiations on the Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA) are proceeding rapidly. The basic framework of the agreement is in place according to the speech held by the US trade representative, Michal Froman to the Coalition of Services Industries on 18 June 2014 in Washington DC. The 7th round of negotiations is taking place this week (23-27 June 2014) in complete secrecy in Geneva, Switzerland.

The participants in the TiSA negotiations include the EU, Australia, Canada, Chile, Taiwan, Colombia, Costa Rica, Hong Kong, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Liechtenstein, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, South Korea, Switzerland, Turkey and the US. China and Uruguay have flagged their interest in joining the negotiations but so far are not included.