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The new bilateralism and the global race for profits

Resumption of negotiations between EU and MERCOSUR: Wrong agenda, wrong moment

Buenos Aires / Berlin, November 3rd, 2006

Trade negotiations between the European Union (EU) and the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) will resume November 6th in Rio de Janeiro. Negotiators have publicly declared their intention to rapidly reach a „broad and ambitious“ free trade agreement between both regions. According to the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from Argentina and Germany, *Foro Ciudadano de Participación para la Justicia y los Derechos Humanos* (FOCO) and *Center for Research and Documentation Chile – Latin America* (FDCL) this constitutes the wrong step with the wrong agenda at the wrong moment.

“Although both negotiating parties have expressed the opposite, the resumption of these free trade negotiations stands against the efforts of the South American countries to give priority to a regional integration in South America”, says Jorge Carpio of FOCO, an Argentine NGO based in Buenos Aires. “The structural and social consolidation of the South American regional integration should have priority over the interests of export-lobbyists that seek the opening of markets, tariff cuts and import quotas. The entry of Venezuela into the MERCOSUR opens an opportunity for a more democratic and social integration.”

“The resumption of negotiations between EU and MERCOSUR is part of the new EU-strategy “GLOBAL EUROPE: competing in the world”, which after the failure of multilateralism of the Doha-Agenda of the WTO is being vehemently propagated by EU trade commissioner Peter Mandelson”, says Christian Russau of FDCL, a German NGO based in Berlin. “In the global race of the USA and Europe for markets and resources, the EU now wants to seize its chance, after a continental free trade zone of the Americas (FTAA), led by the USA, seems no longer possible. While spreading panic regarding a “ threat by the Chinese ascent” the EU – defending the interests of its “global players” - massively pushes for a liberalization of the markets of the South.”

In view of the European demands for market access both NGOs fear further deregulations and massive privatizations in the MERCOSUR. The EU insists on lowering industrial tariffs, the elimination of investment requirements and access to government procurement markets for European corporations. „Social rights, environmental issues and the protection of infant industries can not be exchanged for profits of the export business“, says Jorge Carpio of FOCO.

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