

Trade in Educational Services: A European Perspective

Prof. Dr. Ir. A. Oosterlinck

President of K.U.Leuven (Belgium)

Board Member of the European University Association

- GATS is a very unfamiliar concept to many people
- Main ideas of GATS: liberalize tradeable services in order to guarantee best possible quality for lowest possible cost
- Size of scope

- Fears:

- danger for basic right to free education, with a minimum quality level to be guaranteed by government?
- danger for governmental freedom to grant subsidies and to “steer” education?
- unlimited commercialisation = overall quality decrease?
- danger that English dominates all other languages and cultures?

- **Benefits:**
 - get rid of barriers, increase mobility of tradeable services, decrease of costs
 - no risk for national education authorities

- Result: very polarized discussion
- My aim: give balanced attention to pros and cons
- Keep an open eye to reality

- *No to GATS: the Joint Declaration (EUA, AUCC, ACE, CHEA)*
 - Education is fundamental human right
 - Education is to be guaranteed by government: free access; guarantee of quality level; guarantee of differentiated subsidies, also to private providers
- >Don't include education in GATS talks

- *Yes to GATS*

- It would be *unwise* not to take part in the discussions, in order to influence the negotiations
- Several anti-GATS arguments can be countered
 - Improve access to information
 - GATS as extension of Bologna
 - Clarify ambiguity

- Recommendations

- Let's be realistic
- Adequate communication
- Gradual and differentiated approach: *first things first*
- Protect the term 'university'

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- Recommendations (contd.)
 - Focus on quality, prevent race to the bottom
 - Guarantee the right for governments to grant subsidies on a differentiated basis, to provide (basically) free education, and to define quality standards. Only *then* can free competition be an issue for discussion.

- Allow inspiration by the Belgian Constitution, which uses a double approach to the *right to education*.
- Make use of the stakeholder model.
 - Don't ignore international reality.
 - But don't allow it to define the balance between the other stakeholders of education.