

To Minister of Foreign Affairs Børge Brende

No educational demands from Norway in TISA

The Union of Education Norway has learned that Norway, together with Australia, New Zealand and Colombia, has proposed including private educational services in the scope for the TISA Agreement's appendix on professional services. We strongly recommend that Norway retract its support of this proposal in the further negotiations.

There is broad-based political agreement in Norway that education is and must remain a public service. This is reflected to a certain extent in Norway's initial offer in the TISA negotiations through the reservations Norway included against market access and national treatment in central educational services. We were therefore surprised to read that Norway endorses a proposal that will expand the scope of professional services to include private educational services.

Liberalisation and facilitation of the private education market could have very unfortunate consequences for public educational services over time; particularly in countries where the educational sector is not as regulated as here in Norway. Including educational services in the trade agreement is therefore worrisome in and of itself. Trade rules are legally binding and the TISA Agreement – like GATS – has a dynamic which entails an ever increasing liberalisation level for trade in services and increasing market access. In combination with the fact that once market access has been established, it is almost irreversible; it creates pressure for increased liberalisation of services which, from a policy standpoint, it may be desirable to protect against competition. For instance, rules around market access can limit the ability of countries that make commitments on education services to restrict the entry and regulate the operations of private educational institutions or other educational services.

Union of Education Norway wants to secure universal rights to free quality education and maintain democratic control over the education sector at national level.

Education policy considerations, not trade policy considerations, must govern the educational system. It is therefore highly unfortunate that Norway has joined those who are exerting pressure to expand the scope of the agreement to include private educational services. The Union of Education reiterates its demand that Norway withdraws its support of the discussed proposal and instead join forces with countries such as Mexico, Switzerland, Korea, Taiwan and Japan, who, insofar as we know, have rejected the proposal to include educational services in the scope for the TISA Agreement's appendix on professional services.