

GATS-free zones

Zones hors AGCS

WTO-GATS: General Agreement on Trade in Services
(OMC-AGCS: Accorde General de Commerce avec les Services)

By Helge Christie

Project director

Regionrådet for Mountain region Nord Osterdalen – Roros, Norway
(400 km north of Oslo)

Illustrating example:

International law making may get large consequences for mountain regions.

Norway is part to the European Economic Area Agreement between EU and EFTA, Norway is not part of the EU.

The EC rules on state support from 1999 should be implemented in Norway 2004. That resulted in Norway had to eliminate the system of differentiated tax on industry differentiated according to regional natural handicap zones. Norway had industry tax zones with 0 percent, 5, 6, 10 and 14 percent tax on industry. When industries in rural and remote regions all had to pay 14 percent tax, problems occurred, closing down and investing abroad took place.

Therefore our mountain region in Norway is following tightly what happens in the WTO (OMC) negotiations.

Communities are concerned in GATS about a splitting in two of service offers and for public poverty, where mountain regions will be given low priority, while lucrative markets will get services from large companies. As example the Norwegian telecom company Telenor has after privatisation not been interested in building out broad band ADSL or better internet connection in mountain regions, because it costs too much.

The WTO will have a General Council meeting July 27. 2005, in order to come as long as possible in texts in GATS, agriculture and the 7 other items, in the direction of a ministerial declaration and new WTO agreement towards the ministerial conference in Hong Kong December 13. 2005.

Concerns, free taking, exceptions, extemtions, limitations of public services
Different GATS-free sectors, sectors without GATS, or modes of services delivery in different countries:
AER

Mountain regions in Norway declaring themselves as GATS-free zones

Mountain regions of:

Nord Osterdalen – Roros,

Nord-Gudbrandsdalen,

Valdres.

In addition The County Board of Hedmark County has made a declaration in the same direction.

The Mountain Region Board of mayors:

1.is of the opinion that current public services is so important for regions and local communities that peoples elected should have the complete responsibility and management of them, in order to take responsibility for the future of local communities.

2.is of the opinion that tasks within health, social care taking, water, culture, education, transport and energy is a public responsibility and should be managed in public regi.

3.take clear stand against that important basic services for the population should be ruled by an international trade agreement.

4.is of the opinion that Norwegian negotiators should keep these principles clearly separated from trade in services within ordinary commercial secors.

5.In order for the GATS-negotiations not to end up with public services to be regulated by a free trade agreement, the Mountain reqagion Board declares that the Mountain region should be GATS-free zone.

The Mountain Region Board will cooperate with other Region Boards and challenge them to declare the same, so that Norwegian negotiators should keep these important public services outside a GATS-agreement.

GATS-free zones globally

USA exempts mode 4 of GATS service delivery – i.e. movements for unskilled, middle skilled and skilled service workers from developing countries into the USA, based on the new stricter immigration laws in the “fight against terrorism”.

In **Canada** 68 people elected bodies and the federation of Canadian peoples elected bodies have asked central authorities to exempt local poples elected bodies permanently from the GATS. The city board of Quebec argues that the government should safeguard that international agreements do not limit the inhabitants to decide which public services that is offered and are controlled by local peoples elected bodies.¹

Because of strongly debate and popular mobilisation, **Bolivia, Brasil and Argentine** probably will evaluate if some sectors should be taken out of GATS, maybe for instance water.

EU: The power of regions is about to be strengthened in the EU. There has been a large popular engagement in several EU member countries for GATS-free zones:

AER (The Assembly of European Regions) representing 250 regioner and 12 interregional associations in 30 countries in Europe recommended september 2004 that no movements is done in the direction of liberalising of the sectors culture, education, health, social affairs, water supplyment and water purification and manure deposition at international arenas and especially not within WTO og GATS.ⁱⁱ

Movements Bevegelser for GATS-frie soner er også på gang i Belgia og Østerrike, og bevegelsene er gryende i Italia, Spania og Storbritannia.

I **Belgia** er det fagforeninger som utfører helsetjenester og har gjort det klart for parlamentet, slik at parlamentet sier at helse ikke kan forhandles i WTO. Dette vil hindre EU i å behandle helse i WTO i alle fall ut 2005.ⁱⁱⁱ **EU**s reviderte tilbud i GATS 25.1.2005 ser ut til å unnta helse og audiovisuelle tjenester fra forpliktelser om liberalisering i GATS. Det kan nettopp være et uttrykk for press fra Frankrike, Belgia osv. der opinionen er sterk på disse standpunktene.

Les Collectivités Françaises Hors AGCS mercredi 27 avril 2005.

De nombreux conseils généraux, municipaux et régionaux ont pris position contre l'AGCS, la plupart demandent un moratoire sur les négociations.

AGCS : 717 collectivités locales (soit plus de 55 millions d'habitants) se mobilisent contre l'AGCS ... De nombreux conseils généraux, municipaux et régionaux ont pris position contre l'AGCS, la plupart demande un moratoire sur les négociations. 27/04/2005 Communiqué

- **18 Conseils régionaux** : Aquitaine, Auvergne, Basse Normandie, Bourgogne, Centre, Franche-Comté, Ile de France, , Languedoc-Roussillon, Limousin, Lorraine, Midi-Pyrénées, Nord-Pas de Calais, Pays de Loire, Picardie, Poitou-Charentes, Provence- Alpes Côte d'azur, Réunion, Rhône-Alpes.

- **28 Conseils généraux** : Aisne, Alpes de Haute Provence, Ariège, Aude, Bouches du Rhône, Cher, Côtes d'Armor, Dordogne, Drôme, Essonne, Eure, Gard, Hérault, Haute Garonne, Hautes Pyrénées, Isère, Landes, Meurthe-et-Moselle, Nièvre, Paris, Pas de Calais, Pyrénées Orientales, Sarthe, Seine-Saint-Denis, Seine Maritime, Tarn, Territoire de Belfort, Val de Marne

- **28 Villes Préfectures** : Agen, Auxerre, Belfort, Besançon, Bobigny, Brest, Calais, Charleville-Mézières, Cherbourg-Octeville, Clermont-Ferrand, Le Creusot, Dijon, Digne les bains, Evry, Foix, Grenoble, Montpellier, Le Mans, Nanterre, Nantes, Niort, Perpignan, Poitiers, Le Puy en Velay, Rennes, La Rochelle, Tours, Tulle.

ⁱ La Ville de Quebec exprime son disaccord face aux visees de l'AGCS en matiere de liberalisation des services publics, 10 janvier 2005. www.eg-contre-agcs.org

ⁱⁱ The Assembly of European Regions (AER), sept.2004: Draft AER response to the Commission white paper services of general interest. www.a-e-r.org

ⁱⁱⁱ Medlem av Det franske parlament. Personlig meddelelse, Rodez, Frankrike, 26.11.2004.