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Press Release

Bern, March 13th 2003:

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European action day against GATS and for public education

Education has a fundamental role in social development and in strengthening democracy when it focuses upon social mobility and participation of the community in which it operates. By the way, its importance as way of individual emancipation and collective growth is going to be strongly doubted by the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). It is true anyway that the process of commodification of education is a dangerous reality in many countries and that the expressions used by international institutions describing students as "*consumers*" and higher education institutions as "*providers*" of an "*educational product*" are signs of the spread cultural project oriented towards market.

On the 31st of March the European Countries have to present their proposal to the WTO for the negotiation in the framework of GATS, the general agreement on trade in services.

These are the principles which should guide the construction of the Europe of Education:

- 1) Education is a right, not a commodity. Education must be a public service, free and secular.
- 2) The mission of education is to educate, form and qualify workers, citizens and humans. Economic profits must not guide its objectives. Education also has a role of fostering social change.
- 3) Research and knowledge must develop in all fields in freedom and must respond to the needs of societies.
- 4) Education must allow the success of a greater number of people. The democratisation of Education systems is necessary all over Europe. The raising of the general level of education must be an objective.
- 5) Against the logic of deregulation and "competencies" for "employability". It is necessary to promote qualifications determined by social needs and recognised by all in Europe.
- 6) Lifelong learning is a right for all workers and citizens.

The European Commission and the Swiss government stated that education will be out of the draft that will be proposed to the WTO at the end of March. We need more than a simple promise!

We need a clear definition of what a *public service* and *education* are!

We need the complete stop of any negotiations on education within the GATS, because if education is only taken out of the draft, it doesn't mean that it will not be considered as an "exchange commodity" to obtain a different goal, nor does it assure that the European Commission and the Swiss government aren't asking to other countries to liberalise their own education. Nor that it will not be included next time!

We need that the discussion of a world wide framework of education takes place in a transparent and democratic way, by consulting the civil society, the national Parliaments and especially the students.

After the European Social Forum in Florence, European students call for an Europe wide action day in the universities, in close contact with students' communities, on March 13th against GATS and for public education with a key word:

EDUCATION NOT PROFIT!