



British MPs to interrogate Mandelson on controversial trade deals

British parliamentarians from the International Development Committee are today on their way to Brussels to demand answers from Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson about controversial trade deals between the EU and groups of the world's poorest countries.

22 January 2007

Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) are bilateral trade deals between the EU and groups of its former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. Mandelson has consistently stressed that the EU has no self-interest in these negotiations and that they are purely about promoting ACP countries' development. Yet the approach of his negotiators suggests the contrary - and MPs will be expecting some answers.

MPs will want to know why, for example, one of Mandelson's senior negotiators, Peter Thompson, just last week threatened African trade ministers that more financial aid is at risk if they continue to call for an extension to the EPA deadlines. EPAs are supposed to be concluded by the end of 2007, but African ministers had stressed the need for more time, given the little progress made to date, and the EU's failure to respond positively to the proposals put forward by African regions to make these deals developmental.

This follows a leaked EC proposal for the Southern African EPA, which has appalled civil society organisations monitoring the negotiations because of its old-style aggressive approach. The EC is insisting that Southern African countries - including Lesotho, Mozambique and Namibia - must open their markets to European businesses, including in sectors which they have repeatedly said they are not ready to liberalise.

Peter Mandelson's spin about EPAs being development agreements is blatantly at odds with the behaviour of his negotiators, who are approaching these deals as hard-nosed trade negotiations, said Sophie Powell of Traidcraft, which has been closely monitoring the situation. Aid and market access should be pre-requisites for making these deals pro-development, not negotiating chips used to force through EU interests. These recent attempts to bribe African countries suggest that Mr Mandelson is either unable to control his negotiators or he is not acting in good faith.

For more information, please contact [the Traidcraft press office](#).