Implementing trade policy through efficient import and export rules and procedures

2007/2256(INI) - 05/06/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 610 votes to 31, with 8 abstentions, a resolution on implementing trade policy through efficient import and export rules and procedures.

The own initiative report had been tabled for consideration in plenary by Jean-Pierre **AUDY** (EPP-ED, FR) on behalf of the Committee on International Trade.

The Parliament stresses the importance of effective import and export rules and procedures for the implementation of trade policy. However, it deplores the fact that the "customs feasibility" of certain trade policy initiatives is not always properly assessed and taken into account. It draws attention, for example, to the problems encountered in 2005 in implementing the Memorandum of Understanding with China of 10 June 2005 on the import of textile and clothing products.

MEPs stress the need for better cooperation between the Commission departments responsible for trade policy and those responsible for customs policy, in particular by including the latter more systematically in the teams which negotiate trade agreements. The Commission is called upon to pay particular attention to the problems encountered by SMEs, in particular by facilitating the process of adapting their IT systems to those employed by customs administrations.

Tariff classification, value, origin and economic arrangements: MEPs point out the particular importance of the rules concerning the tariff classification, value and origin – preferential and non-preferential – of goods. They encourage the Commission to strive continuously to improve these rules, both at Community level and in the multilateral contexts of the WTO and the WCO, making them more transparent, predictable, simple and effective. Moreover, they deplore the persistent deadlock in the multilateral harmonisation exercise concerning non-preferential rules of origin, which began as early as 1995 on the basis of the Agreement on Rules of Origin (ARO) concluded in the Uruguay Round. They consider that the Parliament should be more closely involved, so as to enable it to exercise the right of prior scrutiny it enjoys under the comitology procedure, in considering the draft regulation on the reform of the rules of origin of the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP), currently under consideration. The Commission is also called upon to consider simplifying the 'procedures with economic impact' and introducing more flexible procedures and a paperless system.

Trade facilitation: MEPs attach the utmost importance to the trade facilitation negotiations under way since August 2004 in the WTO. They consider that the issue of trade facilitation could be concluded and implemented separately, without disrupting the Round, and therefore call for it to be removed from the Single Undertaking. The report also supports the Commission's ambitious plans to include a chapter on facilitating trade and customs cooperation in all the new free trade agreements it negotiates.

New customs tasks: MEPs reiterate the need to establish at European Union level a plan to combat counterfeiting and piracy. They call on the Commission and the Member States to take all necessary measures to ensure that goods imported with a view to being placed on the European Union market comply with European consumer protection standards, particularly as regards health and safety.

A worrying erosion of freedom in the name of security: while acknowledging the legitimacy of concerns relating to the security of people and goods, the resolution stresses the need to strike a fair balance between control and facilitation, in order not to hamper international trade needlessly or

excessively. In this context, MEPs urge the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue (TLD) and the Commission to continue their efforts to ensure that the US legislation requiring the scanning of all US-bound cargo is modified in line with a risk-based approach. They call on the Commission to raise the matter in the Transatlantic Economic Council (TEC) and other bodies and persuade the US to change its decision.

An ongoing lack of harmonisation: although the compatibility of the Union’s customs system with WTO rules was essentially confirmed, the resolution notes that EU trading partners and European economic operators themselves continue to call for greater harmonisation between national administrations in the implementation of Community customs legislation. MEPs criticise the reluctance of the Commission and the Member States to envisage, at this stage, new structures to ensure that Community customs legislation is applied in a uniform manner. They call on the Commission and the Member States to seriously consider the possibility of establishing a unified European Union customs service to enable customs rules and procedures to be implemented more effectively throughout the European Union's customs territory.