Resolution on the stepping stone Economic Partnership Agreement between the EC and Côte d'Ivoire

2009/2537(RSP) - 25/03/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 23 March 2009, the European Parliament adopted by 568 votes to 65 with 50 abstentions a resolution on the stepping-stone Economic Partnership Agreement between Côte d'Ivoire, of the one part, and the European Community and its Member States, of the other part. The resolution was tabled on behalf of the Committee on International Trade.

Parliament stresses that EPAs cannot be regarded as satisfactory unless they achieve three objectives: offering the ACP countries support for sustainable development, promoting their participation in world trade and strengthening the regionalisation process. It stresses that the principal aim of this agreement is to contribute, through trade and development, poverty reduction and respect for fundamental human rights, to the achievement of the MDGs. It recommends a flexible and pragmatic approach in the ongoing negotiations for a full EPA, and calls on the Commission, in this context, to take into account, in particular, Côte d'Ivoire's request concerning the development aspects of the agreement. The Commission is also asked to consider any request by Côte d'Ivoire to renegotiate any provisions on the contentious issues that it wishes to amend or withdraw.

Members went on to expresses the hope that an accountable and democratically elected government will be in place as soon as possible in Côte d'Ivoire. They believe that Parliament's support for a full EU-Côte d'Ivoire EPA should take account of whether elections have taken place and whether a democratically elected government is in power.

They recall that intra-regional trade accounts for a small proportion of Côte d'Ivoire 's trade and highlight the need for increased regional trade links in order for sustainable growth to be ensured in the region. The Commission should take into account the policies of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) regional grouping.

With regard to the EU Strategy on Aid for Trade, with the commitment to increase the collective EU trade-related assistance to EUR 2 billion (2 000 000 000) annually by 2010, Parliament insists that Côte d'Ivoire receive an appropriate and equitable share. It calls for an early determination and provision of the share of the Aid for Trade resources. These funds should be additional resources and not merely a repackaging of the European Development Fund (EDF) funding. They should conform to the priorities of Côte d'Ivoire and that their disbursement should be timely, predictable and in line with the execution schedules of national and regional strategic development plans. Parliament opposes any kind of conditionality linked to the ratification of this EPA in the matter of granting European aid, and calls on the Commission to guarantee that access to the funds of the 10th EDF is kept separate from the results and pace of the negotiations.

It expresses its continued support for a full EPA between the European Community and Côte d'Ivoire. The key issues that must be negotiated include:

- rules for the protection of significant local ‘infant industries’ for development purposes;

- the key area of intellectual property right negotiations that cover not only Western technological artefacts, but also biodiversity and traditional knowledge; furthermore, intellectual property right negotiations must not go beyond WTO rules and not demand TRIPS+ obligations from West African WTO or non-WTO members;
- a human rights clause;
- a chapter on the protection of biodiversity and the Gulf of Guinea forest, which would thus reinforce the FLEGT mechanism;
- allowing taxes in justifiable cases for development purposes;
- the transparency of government procurement, with openness to EU contractors triggered at a point suitable for the needs of Côte d'Ivoire;
- working visas, which must be made available to Côte d'Ivoire nationals for periods of at least 24 months to enable them to work as 'carers' and in similar professions.

Members regret that many products, including cement, gasoline and cars, whose lower-cost import may be essential for local entrepreneurs and infant industries further up the value chain, have been excluded from liberalisation.

They call on the Commission to provide viable alternatives that guarantee market access for those countries not wishing to commit to the full EPA.

Lastly, Parliament stresses the crucial role of ACP parliaments and non-state actors in the monitoring and management of EPAs, and asks the Commission to promote their involvement in the ongoing negotiation procedures. This requires a clear agenda between the EU and ACP countries, based on a participatory approach.

This resolution should be read in parallel with the EU-Côte d'Ivoire stepping-stone Economic Partnership Agreement which is the subject of a separate assent procedure (see AVC/2008/0136).