Resolution on the stepping stone Economic Partnership Agreement between the EC and Ghana

2009/2539(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 397 votes to 129 with 155 abstentions a resolution on the stepping stone Economic Partnership Agreement between Ghana, 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 recognises the benefits that the conclusion of the IEPA between the EC, on the one part, and the ACP countries on the other, has had for exporters, by expanding the possibilities for exports to the EU after the expiration of the preferential tariff treatment provided for under the Cotonou Agreement on 31 December 2007, and therefore preserving and substantially expanding the export opportunities to the Union for Ghana, through both full market access and improved rules of origin. It stresses that the EPA with Ghana must under no circumstances endanger the cohesion, or weaken the regional integration, of ECOWAS. The Commission is asked not to put undue pressure on Ghana to accept liberalisation commitments in public services and the so-called 'Singapore issues'.

Parliament calls for the following:

- increased and adequate assistance both to the authorities in the ACP and to the private sector in order to facilitate the transition of the economies following the signing of the IEPA;
- clarification of the actual distribution of funds throughout the ACP region stemming from the pledged priority spending within the increased Aid for Trade budget;
- 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 European Development Fund (EDF) funding. Parliament opposes any kind of conditionality linked to the EPAs 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;
- the negotiators of the full EPA to account fully for a mechanism transparent management of natural resources and to outline the best practices in order that Ghana may make the maximum gains from such resources;
- a further lowering of tariffs between developing countries and regional groups, which today account for 15 to 25 % of the value of trade, in order further to promote south-south trade, economic growth and regional integration;
- appropriate and transparent monitoring mechanisms - with a clear role and influence - to follow the impact of EPAs, with increased ACP ownership and broad stakeholder consultation;
- the negotiating parties to include binding arrangements regarding investment, competition and public procurement, which could boost Ghana as a business and investment destination. Since these rules will be universally applied they will benefit both consumers and local public administrations;

The resolution recommends a flexible, tailor-made and pragmatic approach in the ongoing negotiations on a full EPA. It calls on the Commission, in this context, to take particular account of the request by Ghana concerning the development aspects of the agreement.

Parliament notes the large gap between levels of public spending on agricultural subsidies and support: whilst the EU spends EUR 55 billion per annum and the USA spends USD 55 billion per annum, since the

1980s Ghana has given no subsidies to its farmers/producers of agricultural products. It believes that, despite Ghanaian agricultural products having preferential access to the EU market, the EPA cannot bring about the development of Ghanaian agricultural production unless production capacity is strengthened and modernised through technical and financial investment. This disadvantages farmers in the ACP countries by decreasing their competitiveness both domestically and abroad, as their products are more costly in real terms than subsidised EU and US products. Parliament therefore supports the agreed tariff-line exclusions focused on agricultural goods and some processed agricultural goods, given that they are based chiefly on the need to protect infant industries or sensitive products in these countries. It notes that Ghana has received tariff-line exclusions for chicken and other meats, tomatoes, onions, sugar, tobacco and beer.

This resolution should be read in parallel with the EU-Ghana stepping stone Economic Partnership Agreement which is the subject of a separate assent procedure (see AVC/2008/0137).