Resolution on the Euro-Mediterranean economic and trade partnership ahead of the 8th Euromed Ministerial Conference on Trade, Brussels, 9 December 2009

2009/2719(RSP) - 25/11/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 24 November 2009 on Oral Question O-0116 /2009 to the Commission on the state of play of the Euromed 2010 Free Trade Area, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the Euro-Mediterranean economic and trade partnership ahead of the 8th Euromed Ministerial Conference on Trade – Brussels – 9 December 2009.

The resolution had been tabled by the EPP, S&D, ALDE, and Greens/ALE groups.

While acknowledging certain improvements, Parliament deplores the fact that the Euro-Mediterranean partnership's **main objectives are still far from being achieved.** It stresses that the success of this process and of the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area (FTA) in particular, requires a **sustained effort from all parties** and greater involvement of civil society and of the people on both shores of the Mediterranean. The process of Euro-Mediterranean integration must, once again, become a political priority for the EU.

Numerous difficulties, not only economic but also political, such as the Middle East conflict, have had a considerable negative impact on the development of this process, and of the FTA in particular. Members deplore the fact that for these same political reasons, the ministerial meeting of Euromed Foreign Affairs Ministers which was to have been held on 24-25 November 2009 in Istanbul was postponed and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) is not moving forward. It calls for meetings scheduled within the UfM framework to continue to be held and for a **permanent secretariat to be established in Barcelona**. Parliament regards the current obstacles as an indication that the deepening of economic relations must progress hand-in-hand with a **deepening of political relations**. It believes that genuine regional and economic integration can be achieved only if concrete progress is made in settling existing conflicts and in the field of democracy and human rights.

The resolution calls on the Commission, the Member States and the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries (SEMCs) to take into account the effects of the financial, economic and environmental crisis by **incorporating social and environmental concerns into the economic and trade partnership to a greater extent**. In view of the fact that youth and female unemployment is the most pressing social issue in the Mediterranean countries, Parliament calls on the governments of the (SEMCs) to implement consistent and effective **employment and social protection** policies in order to mitigate the effects of the crisis.

It goes on to underline the following:

- the importance of the regional integration of the SEMCs and of increasing South-South trade, which is still under-developed, and accounts for only 6% of the SEMCs' total trade. EU institutions are asked to respond positively to requests for technical and financial support to promote such South-South economic integration;

- the need to strengthen the cumulation of origin system, since it is a useful customs tool for revitalising trade in the area, and to update rules of origin in order to take account of the interests of the Euromed partners;
- the importance of ensuring the right of the SEMCs to control the speed with which they open up their trade and to control their national strategies for economic and social development;
- in view of the difficulties faced by Euro-Mediterranean textile producers in the context of growing global competition, the need to strengthen the North-South partnership, and to promote SEMCs' activities with higher added value, based on creativity and innovation, and not only on business outsourcing;
- the need to create a Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Development Bank, which would secure donors from both shores of the Mediterranean and would be able to attract the FDIs which the Euro-Mediterranean region is lacking.

Parliament takes the view that the FTA should be complemented by the phased introduction, subject to conditions, of **free movement for workers**, while taking account of the situation on the European employment market and current thinking in the international community on the links between migration and development. Members regard it as a matter of urgency to establish **procedures to facilitate the granting of visas,** in particular for the stakeholders in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, students, university staff and socio-economic players. They also stress the need to reduce the cost of transfers of remittances by migrant workers so as to maximise their use in the local economy.

Parliament moves on to ask the Commission to keep it fully informed about progress on the **association agreement with Syria**, the signing of which was recently postponed by Syria. It considers that there are some concerns, such as bringing Libya back into negotiations for an association agreement and, more generally, into the UfM.

In view of the **Palestinian situation**, specific measures should be taken to assist the population with a view to integrating this area into Mediterranean trade flows, and a solution should be found to address the **issue of certification of origin** and subsequent preferential treatment under the EC-Israel Association Agreement applicable to goods coming from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Parliament further considers that **a balanced Road Map** based on a broad consensus and, inter-alia, a positive social and environmental impact assessment, could be a useful instrument for re-launching economic and trade cooperation in coming years, and it calls on the Euro-Mediterranean Trade Ministers to endorse it at their ministerial meeting in December 2009.

Lastly, Parliament stresses the role of the **Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA)** within the partnership, as the democratic body bringing together parliamentarians from both shores of the Mediterranean around the three pillars of the Barcelona Process. It calls for stronger cooperation on economic affairs between the EMPA and the Commission and Council.