Resolution on the opening of negotiations on a plurilateral agreement on services

2013/2583(RSP) - 04/07/2013 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 526 votes to 111, with 3 abstentions, a resolution tabled on behalf of the Committee on International Trade on the opening of negotiations on a plurilateral agreement on services.

Recalling that preliminary talks over the format and architecture of a Trade In Services Agreement (TISA) took place in 2012 among the members of the 'Really Good Friends of Services' (RGF) group, Parliament **welcomes the opening of negotiations on a TISA** and the EU's participation in these talks from the start in order to promote its interests and defend its views on the agreement's format and architecture. It feels that the stalemate acknowledged during the 8th WTO Ministerial Conference in December 2011 means that new bilateral and plurilateral initiatives to give impetus to trade negotiations in Geneva were necessary. The 21 WTO members negotiating with the EU are mostly OECD countries and represent 70 % of global cross-border trade in services (excluding intra-EU trade in services) and 58 % of EU trade in commercial services, but Parliament **regrets the fact that they do not include emerging markets and invites China and other emerging economies to join** in the negotiations. However, keeping open the possibility for other countries to be part of these negotiations should not cause the level of ambition of this agreement to be lowered, since only a high degree of liberalisation and of convergence of disciplines could convince those countries to join in the negotiations.

In order to keep open the possibility of 'multilateralising' the future TISA, Parliament feels that **the design of the latter should follow the GATS format and architecture**, including the concept of positive listing of commitments, and take up the fundamental definitions and principles set out in the GATS, along with its rules on national treatment, market access and disciplines. It urges the Commission to formulate a starting offer close to its last GATS scheduling offer and **makes a series of recommendations regarding market access commitments,** including: (i) **promoting an ambitious agenda for the EU's offensive interests**, in particular as regards business services, ICT services, financial and legal services, e-commerce, maritime and air transport services, environmental services, tourism and construction; (ii) **defending European sensitivities** regarding public services and services of general interest (as defined in the EU Treaties), in the areas of public education, public health, water supply and waste management and by continuing, as is the case under the GATS and bilateral FTAs, not to make any commitments in relation to audiovisual services or cultural services.

On this latter point, Parliament considers it essential for the EU and its Member States to retain the possibility of preserving and developing their cultural and audiovisual policies, and to do so in the context of their existing laws, standards and agreements. It welcomes, therefore, the exclusion by the Council of cultural and audiovisual services from the negotiating mandate.

Parliament regrets the fact that the Council granted a mandate on 18 March 2013 to take part in the TISA negotiations without having taken Parliament's view into consideration, and it reminds the Commission of its obligation to keep Parliament immediately and fully informed at all stages. It notes that no impact assessment was undertaken and insists that the Commission follow up on its intention to prepare a sustainability impact assessment and that it publish that assessment with a view to taking its conclusions into account in the negotiations.