Situation and future perspectives of the European fishing sector in the context of the Free Trade Agreement between the EU and Thailand

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The Committee on Fisheries adopted an own-initiative report by Gabriel MATO ADROVER (EPP, ES) on the situation and future prospects of the European fishing sector in the context of the Free Trade Agreement between the EU and Thailand.

Members recalled that the European fishing and processing industry is vital in terms of securing the supply of food to European citizens and that the survival of the sector will be jeopardised if the EU liberalises trade in fishery products with developing countries that wish to export their products to the key Community market, especially if they are offered zero duty.

Thailand is the world's main producer of canned tuna, with 46% of world production, and its exports of canned tuna to the EU, more than 90 000 tonnes each year, amount to almost 20% of all Community imports from third countries.

The lack of progress in the negotiations on this regional agreement has led to the opening of bilateral negotiations with ASEAN member countries, including Thailand, with a political commitment to conclude the FTA within two years.

In this regard, the report requested that **fish products, such as canned tuna imported from Thailand**, which have the potential to disrupt the EU's production of and market for these products, be treated as sensitive products.

More specifically, Members called for access to the EU market for canned and prepared fish and shellfish from Thailand to remain subject to the current tariff and thus to be **excluded from tariff reductions**.

In order to safeguard the competitiveness of the Community tuna industry and preserve the significant activity and social dimension associated with the tuna industry in the EU (which provides 25 000 direct and 54 000 indirect jobs), the report recommended that **long transitional periods and partial liberalisation commitments**, including the imposition of quotas, be established for canned and prepared fish and shellfish products should tariff reductions be introduced.

The committee also:

- called for full compliance with solid and coherent strict rules of origin to be enforced without exception and for cumulation to be strictly limited to those products for which Thailand is mainly a processor rather than a fishing country;
- demanded that imports of canned tuna and other fish products from Thailand be subject, insofar as is possible, to the same competitive conditions as fish products of EU origin;
- called on the Commission to ensure that the **illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing** (IUU) Regulation is effectively implemented and that the FTA negotiations result in an explicit reference thereto within the body of the text of the agreement;
- called for **safeguard clauses** to be set out and requested the FTA to include a requirement for compliance with International Labour Organisation conventions and greater transparency, surveillance, oversight, and traceability in the Thai fisheries sector.