Resolution on the opening of negotiations for an EU-Tunisia Free Trade Agreement

2015/2791(RSP) - 25/02/2016 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 479 votes to 123, with 31 abstentions, a resolution tabled by its Committee on International Trade, on the opening of negotiations for an EU-Tunisia Free Trade Agreement.

Parliament recalled that on 13 October 2015 the EU and Tunisia opened negotiations on an ambitious free trade agreement.

Parliament condemned in strong terms the terrorist attacks committed in Tunisia in recent months. It noted that the Tunisian economy faces major difficulties, that GDP grew by 2.3 % in 2014, that the unemployment rate in 2015 was 15 % of the active population, that 28.6 % of graduates have no jobs and that unemployment among young Tunisians is rising.

In addition to the clear demographic and economic imbalance in this country, Parliament recalled that Tunisia faces a very unstable regional environment, particularly as a result of the conflict in Libya and the sporadic violence in Algeria, both of which are neighbouring countries. Tunisia has taken in more than 1.8 million Libyan refugees.

Criteria for a successful trade agreement between the EU and Tunisia: Parliament considered that this agreement has more than just a trade dimension, and that it should seek to contribute to the **stability of Tunisia**, to the consolidation of its democracy and to the reinvigoration of its economy. For Members, it is essential that **Tunisia receive substantial financial and technical assistance from the EU** so that it can properly implement the provisions of the free trade agreement. In this regard, Parliament called for the financial aid to be granted in a transparent manner and for steps to be taken to ensure that it actually benefits its recipients.

Parliament called on the EU, as well as the Member States, the EIB and the EBRD, to continue to stand alongside the Tunisians and to step up aid and assistance programmes, including through the introduction of exceptional autonomous trade measures.

The Commission is called upon to ensure that the negotiations quickly produce tangible gains for the EU and Tunisian economies in key sectors and for all stakeholders, including SMEs and VSEs.

This agreement must **contribute to the development and diversification of the Tunisian economy**, which is currently heavily dependent on agriculture, and to a reduction in regional disparities, and must provide tangible benefits for all Tunisians and Europeans.

Measures are also called for to associate Tunisian and EU civil societies and to enhance high-level dialogue.

Parliament called for **impact assessments** and sectoral evaluations to be carried out, on both sides, including by the European Parliament working with Tunisian experts, of the impact of the agreement in various areas, and for these to be funded by the European Union.

Parliament emphasised that environmental conditions in the Mediterranean basin, in particular the **shortage of water**, must be taken into account.

Sectoral approach to the negotiations: Parliament called for the agreement to accord proper importance to the services sector, which offers significant growth potential for the Tunisian economy. It recalled that Tunisia has many start-ups, micro-enterprises and highly dynamic SMEs in high-tech fields, and called for the agreement to promote their capacity to develop and internationalise.

Parliament called on the Commission to facilitate the granting of short-term visas for performing 'Move IV'-type services requiring the movement of natural persons for a limited period of time in accordance with precise conditions stipulated by contract and by domestic legislation. For Members, **nothing in the agreement should prevent the EU and its Member States from applying measures to regulate the entry of natural persons into, or their temporary stay on, its territory**.

Parliament hoped that the agreement will help permanently establish in Tunisia a favourable climate which acts as an incentive to long-term investments.

As regards agriculture, Members called on the EU and Tunisia to improve access to their agricultural markets, including organic farming.

Other measures are called for such as the establishment of rigorous, stringent standards in the fields of health and plant health. Parliament looks to the Tunisian Government and the EU institutions to establish suitable provisions on the identification of the origin and provenance and on the traceability of Tunisian products.

Parliament also called for the Agreement to include : (i) an ambitious chapter on intellectual property rights, (ii) enhanced protection of geographical indications to non-agricultural products, (iii) an ambitious chapter on energy and raw materials, so that research and cooperation can be stepped up in the electricity, gas, wind, solar and other renewables sectors, (iv) provisions to help strengthen scientific cooperation.

As regards human rights, Parliament called on the Commission to include in the agreement the **human rights clause**, on the strength of which the EU may suspend the agreement unilaterally should the other contracting party commit any breach of human rights.