EU/Philippines Framework Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Elmar BROK (EPP, DE) containing a motion for a non-legislative resolution on the draft Council decision on the conclusion, on behalf of the Union, of the Framework Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of the Philippines, of the other part.

Members recalled that in terms of international and national human rights legislation, the Philippines are a role model for other countries in the region, having ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in 2011. They also recalled that the EU is the Philippines' fourth largest trading partner and fourth largest export market, accounting for 11.56 % of all Philippine exports.

Whilst welcoming the conclusion of the Framework Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation with the Philippines, Members called on the EU to continue providing financial support and capacity-building assistance to the Philippines for poverty alleviation and the implementation of policies to tackle climate change.

At the same time, they called on the Philippines to foster further progress in the elimination of corruption and the promotion of human rights.

Fight against terrorism: Members commended the Philippines for having been part of the international counterterrorism coalition since 200, but expressed concern over the continued reports of severe human rights violations by the Philippine military in the conduct of counter-insurgency measures. They pointed out that the Abu Sayyaf group is accused of carrying out the worst acts of terrorism committed in the Philippines, including deadly bombings such as the attack on a ferry in Manila in 2004 in which more than 100 people were killed.

They also stressed that there are growing concerns that ISIS will win over affiliated groups in South-East Asia. At the same time, they condemned the massacre of 24 December 2015 of Christian farmers by separatist rebels in Mindanao.

Human trafficking: the committee called on the EU and its Member States to support the government, and notably the Inter-Agency Council against Trafficking (IACAT), in the efforts being made to enhance assistance and support for victims, to put into place efficient law enforcement measures, and improve the legal avenues of work labour migration. The EU and its Member States were asked to engage with the Philippines and provide support for the government's capacity- building.

South China Sea: Members noted that the Philippines are strategically located in the proximity of major international shipping and air traffic routes in the South China Sea. They recalled their **serious concerns over the tension in the South China Sea**. Members were particularly concerned at the massive scale of China’s current activities in the area, including building military facilities, ports, and at least one airstrip. They urged all parties in the disputed area to refrain from unilateral and provocative actions and to resolve the disputes peacefully. Members supported all steps that will enable the South China Sea to become a ‘sea of peace and cooperation ‘and all endeavours to ensure that the parties agree on a code of conduct for the peaceful exploitation of the maritime areas in question.

GSP+: the committee called on the Philippines, as one of the countries having been granted GSP+ status by the EU, to ensure effective implementation of all the core international conventions relating to human and labour rights, the environment and good governance. Recognising that the Philippines have strengthened their human rights legislation, Members recalled that under the GSP+ beneficiaries will have to prove that they are implementing their obligations concerning human rights, labour, environmental and governance standards. They took note of the GSP+ country assessment of the Philippines, particularly as regards the ratification of all seven UN human rights conventions relevant to the EU's GSP+. However, they highlighted the work that still needs to be done for implementation.

Free Trade Agreement: Members welcomed the agreement of 22 December 2015 to open negotiations on a **Free Trade Agreement with the Philippines,** and recalled, at the same time, that the Commission and the Philippine authorities should ensure high standards on human rights, labour and the environment. Such an FTA should serve as a building block towards a region-to-region EU-ASEAN agreement on trade and investment.

Filipino seamen: Members took note that 800 000 Filipinos are living in the EU and that Filipino seamen working on EU-registered ships send remittances to the Philippines amounting to EUR 3 billion per annum. They recalled that the **majority of the crew on many non-Community flagged vessels calling at European ports are Filipino** and noted as well the **harsh and inhuman working conditions** in which many of these seafarers live. They called on Member States not to allow these vessels to be received in European ports when the working conditions on board contravene the labour rights and principles enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Lastly, they wanted non-Community flagged vessels to guarantee their crews' working conditions in accordance with international legislation and the rules laid down by the ILO and the International Maritime Organisation.