

Extension of the provisions of the EC/Uzbekistan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement to bilateral trade in textiles

2016/2226(INI) - 15/11/2016 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on International Trade adopted an own-initiative report by Maria ARENA (S&D, BE) containing a motion for a non-legislative resolution on the [draft Council decision](#) on the conclusion of a Protocol to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement establishing a partnership between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Uzbekistan, of the other part, amending the Agreement in order to extend the provisions of the Agreement to bilateral trade in textiles, taking account of the expiry of the bilateral textiles Agreement.

Members recalled that this own-initiative report follows on from a report (from December 2011) in which the European Parliament decided to postpone its decision on consent to the EU-Uzbekistan Textiles Protocol, adopting an interim report to address allegations of the use of child and forced labour in the cotton harvest in Uzbekistan.

In that interim report, it was concluded that the European Parliament would only consider consent if the ILO observers were granted access by the Uzbek authorities to undertake close and unhindered monitoring and confirmed that concrete reforms were implemented and have yielded substantial results in such a way that the practice of forced labour and child labour is effectively in the process of being eradicated at national, provincial and local level.

Important action has been taken since this time with in particular the decision by the Government of Uzbekistan to authorise the ILO to monitor the cotton harvest and to engage in broad cooperation with ILO through a Decent Work Country Programme.

Members welcomed the substantial progress that has been made in Uzbekistan since 2013, including the adoption of laws which prohibit the use of child labour, achieving the **almost total eradication of child labour**.

Members stated that, because of the efforts by the Government of Uzbekistan in this area, **Parliament should give consent to the EU-Uzbekistan Textiles Protocol**. Such consent will constitute a positive sign of encouragement to the Uzbek Government to further pursue its efforts.

Continued forced labour: Members are concerned about reports by independent monitors of state-led mobilisation of citizens, including the forced labour of public employees and students, in the 2016 pre-harvest work. They called on the next Uzbek president to raise a new human rights paradigm by immediately terminating the continued use of forced labour and child labour in the cotton harvest.

The Commission and the EEAS are called upon to provide Parliament regularly with detailed information on the situation in Uzbekistan. Members called on the Parliament to reserve the right to call on the Commission and the Council to activate Articles 2 and 95 of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement so as to take **all necessary, general and specific measures** if the commitment to eradicate child and forced labour is not lived up to.

Further reforms: Members called on the Commission and the EU Delegation in Tashkent to contribute through policy dialogue and assistance programmes to structural reform in Uzbekistan. They stressed that

that the assistance provided by the EU over the past years, focusing on the rule of law and the judiciary, and aiming at triggering reforms and streamlining the work of the Uzbek parliament, must bring tangible results.

EU aid to Uzbekistan should also be aimed at **weaning the country off cotton monoculture**, and at decreasing its dependence on exports, by diversifying the economy.

Members also encouraged the Government of Uzbekistan to work towards the ratification and effective implementation of all 27 GSP+ core international conventions, in order to be able to apply for GSP+ tariff preferences.

Transition process: Members called on the Commission and the EEAS to monitor the political transition in Uzbekistan and to press for concrete, measurable human rights improvements.

They stressed that the EU should make full use of the extension of the PCA in order to ensure that the Uzbek authorities are engaged in a transition process, following the sudden death of the president, that leads to better governance, a strengthening of the rule of law, democratic reforms and a substantial improvement of the human rights situation. In this regard, Members urged the Uzbek authorities to respect fully their international commitments as regards the protection of human rights.