EC/Comoros Fisheries Partnership Agreement: denunciation

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The Committee on Fisheries adopted the report by João FERREIRA (GUE/NGL, PT) on the draft Council decision denouncing the Partnership Agreement in the fisheries sector between the European Community and the Union of the Comoros.

The committee recommended that the European Parliament **give its consent** to the denunciation of the agreement.

As a reminder, the draft Council decision aims to denounce the Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Community and the Union of the Comoros, which entered into force on 6 March 2008.

As recalled by the explanatory statement accompanying the recommendation, the Agreement under review in this report involved a total financial contribution of EUR 1 845 750, around 49% of which was earmarked for sectoral support. The Agreement allowed 45 licences to be granted for tuna seiners and 25 for surface longliners (shared between Spain, France and Portugal).

Notwithstanding the conditions laid down in the agreement and the associated protocol, its implementation was affected by various constraints – particularly relating to piracy – that meant that these fishing licences were not used.

At the same time, the Comoros' involvement in operations in breach of the Regulation on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU), in particular by allowing the reflagging of vessels involved in IUU fishing, led the EU to notify the Comoros in October 2015 of the possibility of its being identified as a non-cooperating country – which indeed happened in May and June 2017 (when it received a 'red card').

In the absence of any reaction by the Comorian authorities throughout this process, the Commission and Council are proposing that the agreement be denounced.

Although the rapporteur sees no reason to disagree with this denunciation of the agreement, he called for progress to made as regards promoting transfers that will enable the Comoros, among other things, to:

- improve its system for fisheries administration and governance in legal terms and with regard to the institutional structure, capacity building for human resources (fishermen, scientists, inspectors, etc.), and the commercial and cultural value of the Comoros' traditional gear and fish;
- develop its capacities with regard to monitoring and scientific assessment, coastal protection, inspection, surveillance and quality control;
- create or renovate facilities for refrigerating, distributing and processing fish;
- construct and upgrade landing and security infrastructure at ports and harbours;
- promote the renewal of the small-scale fleet to improve safety, ability to remain at sea and fishing capacity.

The rapporteur took the view that sustainable fisheries agreements signed by the EU with third countries must be mutually beneficial and prioritise action to strengthen third countries' sovereignty over their fisheries, the development of related economic activities and protection for maritime resources, fishing communities and fishery workers.