EU/Switzerland Agreement: modification of Switzerland's WTO concessions on meat not further prepared than seasoned

2019/0196(NLE) - 17/06/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 682 votes to 2, with 4 abstentions, a legislative resolution on the draft Council decision on the conclusion of the Agreement in the form of an Exchange of Letters between the European Union and the Swiss Confederation in the context of negotiations under Article XXVIII of the GATT 1994 on the modification of Switzerland's WTO concessions with regard to seasoned meat.

In line with the recommendation made by the Committee on International Trade, the European Parliament gave its consent to the conclusion of the Agreement.

Some years ago when Switzerland was faced with a sharp increase in meat imports, including ‘seasoned meat’, the Swiss Parliament adopted a motion at the end of 2015 to reclassify certain ‘seasoned meat’, which led to a sharp increase in customs duties for the products in question. In 2017, the EU challenged this measure at the WTO, alleging its incompatibility with WTO rules.

In April 2018, Switzerland agreed that it had to compensate for the increase of tariff and launched a negotiation procedure under Article XXVIII of the GATT in order to modify the tariff concessions in its schedule for the ‘meat not further prepared than seasoned’.

At the end of 2018, the Council authorised the Commission to negotiate compensation. Switzerland proposed to increase its WTO tariff rate quota for beef by 1 200 tonnes as compensation. Within this tariff quota, Switzerland committed itself in particular to allocate a specific sub-quota of 600 tonnes for ‘seasoned meat’. A new tariff line has been created for this purpose. Switzerland also maintains the previously agreed reduced duty for beef imported for the purposes of processing into dry meat.

A draft agreement was initialled in July 2019. On 24 October, the Council adopted a decision on the signing of the agreement, which was signed on 9 December 2019 in Brussels.

By exchange of letters, the EU and Switzerland agreed on the amendments to be incorporated in the Swiss schedule of commitments: new tariffs (including for dry beef meat) and the increased tariff quota from 22 500 tonnes (current) to 23 700 tonnes.