EC/Tunisia Euro-Mediterranean association agreement

1995/0132(AVC) - 21/12/1994

1. Category of referral Council Decision. 2. Expected date of referral Possibly first half of 1995, but a delay beyond that limit cannot be excluded. 3. Committee responsible Development and Cooperation. Opinions: Possibly REX and Foreign Affairs. 4. Previous community legislation Cooperation Agreement between the European Economic Community and the Republic of Tunisia. The Agreement was signed on 25 April 1976. It entered into force on 1 October 1978 for an unlimited period with effect from 1 January 1979. 5. Previous position of the EP In its resolution of 26 May 1993 on relations between the European Community and the Maghreb, the European Parliament came out clearly in favour of stepping up cooperation between the Community an the Maghreb and approved the new concept of partnership proposed by the Commission for its revised cooperation policy. The EP considered that in reviewing its development policy the Community should have as one of its priorities the countries of the Mediterranean region, particularly the Maghreb countries, although this should not be at the expense of regions to the south of the area. It believes that there is a vital need to develop cultural exchanges on both sides of the Mediterranean and considers it vital that the Maghreb countries embark upon a genuine process of democratisation based on participation and appreciation of the concerns and aspirations of civil society, respect for the fundamental rights of the individual, equality for men and women, an immediate end to the practice of torture and respect for minority languages and cultures. The EP welcomed the establishment of the Maghreb Arab Union (AMU) and reaffirmed the importance of regional integration in the Maghreb. On the question of political dialogue, Parliament called for a meeting of Heads of State of the Twelve and of the Maghreb and for the establishment of an institutional framework going beyond the purely governmental sphere, to bring together the various partners existing in society. Finally, the EP supported the idea of a free-trade area between the European Community and the Maghreb but maintained that, by itself, this would not be sufficient to impart the impetus and credibility required in order to link the Maghreb firmly to Europe. 6. Situation in the Member States Italy and Spain seem to have some difficulty accepting a continuation of the present arrangement allowing Tunisia access to the EU market for a quantity of 60.000 tonnes of olive oil per year. 7. Content of the planned legislation The new agreement, the name of which remains to be decided, will replace the previous agreement from 1976 and provide for the following: - political dialogue; - the gradual creation of a free trade area; - social and cultural cooperation; - the widest possible economic cooperation; - financial cooperation. It had originally been planned to conclude the negotiations before the end of 1994, but at present this seems unlikely. The two main points still giving rise to difficulties are: a. Access to the European market for Tunisian agricultural products. Tunisia, whose departure position concerning olive oil was to call for a definitive regime guaranteeing an outlet for 60 000 tonnes annually, has been promised an offer of compromise that it will be able to accept, one that maintains the traditional trade flows. The two parties hope to reach an overall compromise on the agricultural section taking into account the Tunisian concern to improve access for certain products (new potatoes, citrus fruits and tomato paste) and, in addition, not to lose the advantages that it has so far traditionally enjoyed under the specific access regime to the French market. A list of new products would be proposed under preferential access (cut flowers, asparagus, etc.). Finally, Tunisia is said to be hoping that the principle of establishing free trade in agricultural goods will be included in the agreement even if it agrees with the Commission that this cannot be achieved in the medium term. b. Tariff dismantling by Tunisia. Tunisia reportedly accepts the Commission proposal to limit the transition period to 12 years pending adjustments that will allow a less accelerated rate of opening, the insertion of safeguard clauses and the exclusion of certain products (negative list) from liberalisation. To accompany this, it is hoping for a substantial financial effort from the European Union in order to ensure that its economy is brought into line and in order to strengthen support to SMEs and, more generally, to increase to promotional means (investments, corporate partnerships, etc.) required within this framework. 8. Legal basis envisaged by the European Commission Not yet known. The likely basis will be Articles 113, 238,

228 and possibly Articles 130u and 130w. 9. Documentation and sources a. Present legislation Council Regulation (EEC) Nr 2212/78 of 26 September 1978 concerning the conclusion of the Cooperation Agreement between the European Economic Community and the Republic of Tunisia OJ L265, 27.9.1978 p. 1. b. Future legislation Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: The future of relations between the Community and the Maghreb. Brussels 30 April 1992, SEC(92) 401 final. 10. Complementary research Open.