

ACP States: agricultural products and goods resulting from the processing of these products

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The Committee adopted the report by Gastone PARIGI (Ind, I) on the arrangements applicable to agricultural products and goods resulting from the processing of agricultural products originating in the ACP States. The Commission proposal, which was adopted as it stood, seeks to implement the agreements on preferential treatment for imports into the EU of agricultural products originating in the ACP States (Fourth Lomé Convention, signed on 4 November 1995). The proposal has two objectives: to grant new concessions to those countries and to make the technical changes required following the GATT agreements which provided, in particular, for the abolition of agricultural import levies and their replacement by customs duties. Once the regulation has been approved by the Council it will come into force retroactively, with effect from 1st January 1996. This means that the difference between the old customs duties that have been in force since that date, and the new reduced duties - a difference which will, moreover, be collected by the EU - will be refunded to ACP exporters, provided that the latter furnish proof of having paid the corresponding export tax in their own countries, where this is provided for by the regulation. The changes, compared with the concessions already in force under Regulation (EEC) No 715/90, are not very significant. By and large, they concern further reductions in the customs duties applicable, the inclusion of new products to which the 16% reduction in duty will apply, or more significant reductions which are limited to single quotas (for instance, a 50% reduction is proposed for pigmeat in respect of a quota of 500 tonnes). For some fruit and vegetables the changes provide for abolition of the reference quantities, i.e. the quantities which, if exports from the ACP States exceed them, may trigger safeguard mechanisms. In other cases the annual period during which tariff concessions apply has been changed. The cost to the Community budget is minimal (ECU 10m per annum in loss of revenue attributable to the reduction in customs duties and ECU 2.7m in increased expenditure on export refunds on products originating in ACP States which the EU then has to re-export to third countries). The rapporteur tabled two amendments on the "serious crisis affecting the Community rice market", which is partly due to the large-scale imports of rice from the ACP countries and the OCTs. He withdrew the amendments and requested that the procedure of a vote without debate be used at the July part-session.