Recommendations for the negotiation of economic partnership agreements with ACP regions and countries

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The committee unanimously adopted the own-initiative report by Yasmine BOUDJENAH (EUL/NGL, F) containing the European Parliament's recommendations to the Commission on the negotiation of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with the ACP countries and regions. Starting from the premise that the multilateral trade liberalisation decided on during the Uruguay Round had resulted in inequality and that, despite the trade preferences granted by the EU to the developing countries, the ACP countries were experiencing many difficulties in exporting to the EU (in particular owing to non-tariff barriers such as technical standards and health measures), the report drew the Commission's attention to the following points: - the principle of genuine EU-ACP partnership required that account should be taken, in the negotiations, of levels of development and of the huge socio-economic impact which introducing a form of reciprocity in trade relations with the EU would have on the ACP countries. The Commission was asked to conduct an impact analysis reviewing the current benefits and the future sustainability of the EPAs and to provide this information to the countries concerned so that each ACP state during the first phase of negotiations could undertake a proper EPA impact assessment study; - the need to redefine the notion of 'special and differential treatment' (SDT) in more specific and up-to-date terms in order to meet the new commercial, financial and technological challenges; - adjustment efforts would require specific aid programmes, which in turn meant that funds must be specially allocated by the EU. The committee stressed the importance of technical assistance for the ACP countries and the need to encourage technology transfer; - the question of the external debt of the ACP countries should be reviewed with the aim of reducing and, if possible, cancelling it; - MEPs called for regular parliamentary monitoring of the EPA negotiations; the timetable should be sufficiently flexible and the initial stage of the negotiations should extend over a sufficiently long period to enable a clear definition of the future EPAs' objectives to emerge; - the liberalisation of services should be tackled with the utmost caution and in all cases excluding the liberalisation of essential public services (such as education, healthcare, water, energy and transport). Lastly, the committee called for greater and closer cooperation between the EU and the ACP countries within the WTO.