Fisheries: integrated framework for partnership agreements with third countries

2003/2034(INI) - 09/09/2003

The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Arlindo CUNHA (EPP-ED, P) on the Commission communication. The report underlined that fisheries partnership agreements with non-EU countries - which allow the EU fleet access to the waters of those countries - provide a vital economic boost to the outlying and outermost areas of the Union, generating 30 000 direct jobs and many more indirect ones. They also help to balance the EU's deficit in fisheries products. The committee therefore called for greater efforts to be made to conclude new agreements (at present there are 22). The Commission was also asked to prepare for the budgetary consequences of the signing of a number of new agreements in the near future. The report pointed out that spending on the agreements had actually fallen from EUR 278.5 million in 1996 to less than EUR 200 million in 2003. MEPs agreed with the Commission's view that there was a need for better integration of environmental and development aspects under the agreements and insisted that, in line with the precautionary approach, the EU should not seek an agreement where stocks are "already fully exploited or in danger of over-exploitation". However, the report also pointed out that the agreements are primarily commercial, and that a "clear separation" needed to made between compensation paid in return for access and general development aid forming part of the agreement ("targeted measures"). The Commission should draw up a "sound financial chapter" on the financing of fisheries agreements, ensuring that the cost was shared between the Community and the vessel owners in payment for fishing rights, regardless of the third country with which the agreement had been concluded. MEPs also endorsed the Commission's approach of earmarking part of the Community contribution for the development of the local fisheries industry. They added that measures should be taken to prevent coastal communities' traditional fisheries from being edged out by other, alien practices. Members also reiterated the need for much greater EP scrutiny of the agreements. Parliament should be updated on the course of negotiations and be provided with an annual report on the implementation of agreements already in place.