Current situation and perspectives of fisheries agreements

1996/2141(INI) - 30/10/1996 - Document attached to the procedure

OBJECTIVE: this document takes stock of the Union's external policy on fisheries from 1977 to 1996 and presents perspectives for the development of these agreements in the short and medium-term. SUBSTANCE: at present the Community has concluded 26 fisheries agreements: 15 with countries in Africa and the Indian Ocean, 10 with North Atlantic countries (including 5 in the Baltic Sea) and one with Argentina for a total budget of ECU 280 m in 1996 and fishing possibilities of 132 000 GRT. There are five main types of agreement: . reciprocal agreements: fishing opportunities for the Community in exchange for equivalent opportunities for the other country (e.g. with Norway, the Baltic countries, etc.), . agreements on access to surplus stocks and allowing Community fishermen to operate in the waters of a third country (Canada, USA), . agreements on access to resources for Community vessels in exchange for financial compensation (ACP, Morocco), . agreements authorizing exploitation of resources in return for financial compensation and market access (Greenland), . an agreement with Argentina involving the constitution of joint enterprises and joint ventures. These agreements are negotiated in accordance with the negotiating directives decided by the Council and are based on the principles contained in the UN Law of the Sea Convention and the Lomé Convention (ACP states). They are commercial in nature but there is a specific element in the EC-ACP agreements - apart from the financial compensation the Community includes a development aspect including, for example, the recruitment of local crews, the landing of catches and training programmes. Provisions were also made for control on fishing activities. - Objectives of the agreements: the fisheries agreements have played a key role in the common fisheries policy (CFP). These objectives relate particularly to the direct and indirect employment in fishing, the stability of fishing opportunities provided for the European fleet, fish and fish products supplied to the Community market and the restructuring of the EC fleet. - Perspectives: various factors influence the development of the fisheries agreements: . the EC's available financial resources leave little margin for the negotiation of new agreements, . international management of fisheries stocks geared towards the sustainable exploitation of resources. The Community must therefore differentiate its external fisheries policy. Hence the Commission proposes four short and medium-term options: . reduction of the Community fleet operating in non-Community waters: such a solution would cause very severe problems in terms of employment and the conversion of the vessels concerned; it would also increase the EC's dependence for supplies of fishery products; . renunciation of the least attractive agreements: this solution would allow economies to be made and effort to be concentrated on the most economic agreements, but it disregards the links established with the third countries concerned; . concentration of financial resources on the most attractive agreements: this option, associated with the previous one, involves negotiating the financial component of those agreements awaiting renewal in order to match them to the Community's true interests (thus in this case all financing of 'development' programmes would have to be abandoned); . modification of the current repartition of costs of the fisheries agreements: currently the Community assumes the major share of the cost of the agreements; in this option the vessel owners and/or Member States would assume a greater share of the cost.