EC/Switzerland agreement: trade in agricultural products, tariff and non-tariff obstacles

1999/0108(AVC) - 04/05/1999 - Initial legislative proposal

PURPOSE: conclusion of an agreement with Switzerland on trade in agricultural products. CONTENT: In the context of the overall package of liberalisation agreements negotiated with Switzerland and initialled by the parties on 26.02.1999, the Commission is proposing an agreement on trade in agricultural products. The approach advocated by the Commission is a 'global' one integrating in each of the 7 agreements a common clause regarding simultaneous entry into force (this is to avoid that the referendum process in Switzerland applicable to the approval of these agreements does not give rise to a partial application of the agreements). The aim of the Agreement is to achieve as broad as possible liberalisation of trade in agricultural products between the Community and Switzerland by abolishing tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade according to the principle of reciprocity. The Agreement is expected to significantly improve access to agricultural products on both parties' markets. The arrangements provided for during negotiations on the European Economic Area have been incorporated into the Agreement in accordance with the negotiating directives. It also takes account of both parties' rights and obligation under the Agreement establishing the WTO and its annexes. - On the question of market access, a large number of tariff concessions have been granted for plants and flowers, fresh and prepared fruit and vegetables, cheeses and milk products, meat products and wine products or sweet wines. In the cheese sector, the agreement provides for the full and reciprocal liberalisation of all cheeses over a five-year period following rhe Agreement's entry into force. - The Agreement includes a section on the wine sector designed to facilitate trade through mutual recognition of the two sides' respective legislation. This also covers intellectual property rights providing for mutual recognition and protection of geographical indications and designations of origin of wine products. Mutual recognition and protection are also provided for protected denominations of spirit and aromatised wine-product drinks. The Agreement also seeks to facilitate trade between the two sides through mutual recognition of legislation on plant protection, animal feedstuffs, seeds and organic farming. The Agreement also includes veterinary rules designed to facilitate trade in live animals and animal products. In the case of live animals, the two sides' legislation is deemed to be equivalent. For animal products, trade will be based on Community legislation. The agreement also provides that Switzerland will apply the same rules as the Community to imports from third countries.