Negotiations in the "trade and environment" committee in WTO

1996/2011(INI) - 24/05/1996 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted the report by Mr Wolfgang KREISSL-DÖRFLER (V, D) on negotiations in the WTO on trade and the environment. The report relates mainly to the decision by the WTO ministerial conference in April 1994 to set up a WTO Committee on Trade and Environment which is to submit specific proposals for agreements to the WTO ministerial conference in December 1996 with a view to concluding agreements to ensure greater compatibility between efforts to liberalize international trade and a policy of sustained environmental protection. Mr KREISSL-DÖRFLER's report starts by stating that the work programme of this committee largely corresponds to the demands made by the European Parliament in its resolution of 24 March 1994. However, it regrets that some of the demands were not taken into account, e.g. the call for a WTO Environment Council, a moratorium on all decisions by the GATT/WTO panel pending the amendment of GATT Article XX, a fully worked-out programme of measures to be taken by the GATT ministerial conference to follow up the UNCED conference and an increase in development aid as compensation for environmental clauses. Parliament insisted that, at the meeting on 28 May 1996 in preparation for the Singapore conference, the Commission should endeavour to achieve tangible results beyond the current work programme and progress on the following points: - the acceptance of internationally agreed Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAS); - increased transparency in WTO procedures (mainly through the active participation of NGOs); - non-mandatory and non-discriminatory eco-labelling; - dispute settlement procedures which take account of the provisions of both trade and environment instruments; - improved cooperation and consultation between the WTO and international environmental agencies. Parliament called for developments in the areas of "environmental taxation" and "exports of products banned on national territory". With regard to relations between industrialized and developing countries, it called for the ministerial conference to take clear decisions on the subject of the link between trade and the environment. It also pointed out that the implementation of environmental protection clauses in trade should not give rise to a new outbreak of protectionism. The report also called for a new international framework for competition which would oblige multinational companies engaged in international trade to behave in an environmentally acceptable fashion, taking the view that measures to restrict trade may be taken against a country which does not belong to an MEA (Multilateral Environmental Agreement) where, for example, that country obtains an unfair trade advantage by not belonging or where it contravenes the basic principles of the agreement. It called on the Commission to ensure that the arrangements decided in Geneva within the framework of the WTO do not contradict EU environmental measures, particularly in the area of eco-labelling. The WTO committee was also called on to study the relationship between increasing trade and environmental pollution, particularly the problems of freight traffic volumes and increased energy consumption. Finally, the report called for NGOs with a part to play in the environmental sector to be able to bring their expertise to bear express their views before the deliberations of the WTO Committee on Trade and Environment.