

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2004



2009

Session document

21.11.2007

B6-0491/2007

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on the statement by the Commission

pursuant to Rule 103(2) of the Rules of Procedure

by Frithjof Schmidt, Caroline Lucas, Carl Schlyter, Alain Lipietz, Margrete Auken and Marie-Hélène Aubert

on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group

on Economic Partnership Agreements

B6-0491/2007

European Parliament resolution on Economic Partnership Agreements

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission communication of 23 October 2007 on Economic Partnership Agreements (COM(2007)0635),
 - having regard to the conclusions of the General Affairs and External Relations Council of November 2007 with regard to Economic Partnership Agreements,
 - having regard to the conclusions of the meeting of the Ministers of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of countries in Brussels on 8 and 9 November 2007,
 - having regard to the resolution adopted by the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly in Kigali on 20 November 2007,
 - having regard to its resolution of 23 May 2007 on Economic Partnership Agreements (B6-0084/2007),
 - having regard to Rule 103(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the time limit for the conclusion of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with the ACP countries under the WTO trade rules expires at the end of 2007, thus requiring an agreement to be reached between the negotiating partners,
- B. whereas the precise contents of the EPAs are of prime importance to the economic development of many ACP partner countries; whereas, therefore, decisions should not be taken in a rush just to meet a deadline,
- C. whereas according to the Cotonou Agreement of 2000 the EPAs are to be regarded as instruments for the sustainable economic development of the ACP partner countries, which include some of the least developed countries in the world,
- D. whereas delays in the conclusion of the EPAs have been aggravated by the failure of the Commission to identify alternatives, to which the EU committed in the Cotonou Agreement, thus placing a heavier burden on the EU to resolve outstanding problems in good time and in keeping with the sustainable development concerns of the ACP partner countries,
1. Welcomes the Commission's announcement of 23 October and the GAERC Council's decision of 17 November significantly to change the EU negotiating stance on the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with the ACP countries, with a view to concluding, as a first step, 'interim EPAs' with the ACP countries by the end of this year, covering only trade in goods, in order to guarantee an uninterrupted trade flow beyond 31 December 2007;

2. Regards the change in the EU negotiating stance as long overdue, in the light of the intense and repeated resistance of most ACP countries, including all African EPA regional groupings, to 'comprehensive EPAs' including the non-trade issues of investment, procurement, competition policy and service establishment, going far beyond the requirements of the WTO;
3. Regards the trimming down of the EPA negotiations to concentrate on the core issue of trade in goods as the first step towards overcoming the various hurdles which have blocked progress towards a successful conclusion of the EPAs for much of the last two years;
4. Is concerned that signing EPAs or interim agreements with only some of the countries in a given EPA region before all countries in that region are ready to conclude the negotiations could severely undermine the regional integration process;
5. Calls on the Commission and the Council to address the main hurdle to the conclusion of 'interim EPAs', namely the WTO requirement of reciprocity in regional free-trade agreements, which continues to be a problem for most ACP countries as well as the main obstacle to development-friendly future trade relations;
6. Calls on the Commission to offer ACP partner countries the maximum number of asymmetrical trade rules that are compatible with WTO requirements, including maximum flexibility with regard to the percentage of goods which ACP countries have to submit to tariff cuts in order still to meet the requirements for a free-trade agreement, the number of sensitive products to remain exempt from tariff cuts and the transitional period before the agreement has to be fully implemented;
7. Calls on the Commission further to facilitate the conclusion of 'interim EPAs' by offering to establish subsidy rules which give ACP countries the option of temporarily exempting European subsidised agricultural goods from entry to their markets;
8. Asks the Commission clearly to state that the 'interim agreements' are a sufficient legal basis for uninterrupted trading with ACP countries not wishing to commit to more market access in other, not directly trade-related, areas, and therefore to refrain from forcing APC countries to sign up to a clause in the 'interim agreements' under which they agree to the continuation of negotiations on such non-trade items;
9. Expects the Commission and Council to submit 'interim EPAs' to Parliament for consideration and assent;
10. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission, and to the parliaments and governments of the ACP States.