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DRAFT OPINION

of the Committee on Fisheries

for the Committee on International Trade

on the draft Council decision on the conclusion of the Free Trade Agreement
between the European Union and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam
(06050/2019 – C9-0023/2019 – 2018/0356(NLE))

Rapporteur for opinion: Pietro Bartolo

PA_Leg_Consent

SHORT JUSTIFICATION

In 2007, the Council authorised the Commission to enter into negotiations for a region-to-region Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with countries of the ASEAN. On the basis of the negotiating directives adopted by the Council in 2007, and supplemented in October 2013 to include investment protection, the Commission has negotiated with Vietnam an ambitious and comprehensive FTA and an Investment Protection Agreement (IPA), with a view to creating new opportunities and legal certainty for trade and investment between both partners to develop.

In the article 13(9) of the FTA - Trade and Sustainable Management of Living Marine Resources and Aquaculture Products - the Parties recognise the importance of ensuring the conservation and sustainable management of living marine resources and marine ecosystems as well as the promotion of responsible and sustainable aquaculture.

In October 2017, after having obtained evidence for a number of trespasses by Vietnamese fishing vessels into neighbouring countries' waters, the Commission informed Member States about the country's failure to meet requirements on the prevention of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and pre-identified it with a "yellow card" procedure under the IUU Regulation.

A delegation of this Committee visited Viet Nam (Hanoi and Ninham) in November 2018, in order to assess the measures taken by the Vietnamese authorities to address the fight against IUU fishing practices, inter alia the Action Plan aimed at reforming the Vietnamese fisheries sector.

The rapporteur for opinion of the Committee on Fisheries does not wish to venture into a political assessment of the Agreement, for which other committees are responsible. He believes that the Agreement should be endorsed by Parliament, since it would provide a stable framework for trade with a major partner of the EU. However, concerning the non-legislative resolution drawn up by the Committee on International Trade, he feels that some issues regarding the engagement of the Vietnamese authorities to tackle the fight against the IUU fishing should be addressed more specifically. For example, the still insufficient implementation of the new framework law for the fisheries sector, as well as of the coordinated monitoring, control and enforcement structures committed to effectively tackle and deter IUU fishing; the challenges still facing the Vietnamese Authorities as regards the overcapacity of its very fragmented fishing fleet and the overexploitation of resources stimulated by the fast-growing fish and seafood processing sector; the need to closely monitor its fishing fleet and to implement measures for the full traceability of fisheries products destined for exports to the EU market.

For these reasons, the rapporteur is of the opinion that preferential tariffs for fisheries and aquaculture products should be accompanied by the monitoring of the implementation of the Vietnamese Action Plan to tackle IUU fishing and by a review of the commitments made by Vietnam under the "Trade and Sustainable Development Chapter". Moreover, he believes that the EU should make full use of the tool at its disposal, such as a "red card", in case the conditions for sustainable fisheries were not fulfilled by Vietnam, in order to ensure the safety of imports of fish and seafood products into the EU market and to protect its consumers.

Finally, he recalls that the “yellow card” notification by the European Commission in October 2017 should be seen as an encouragement to the Vietnamese Authorities to persevere in their efforts to ensure the sustainability of the Vietnamese fishing operations and to effectively tackle IUU fishing activities. He therefore supports Vietnam’s application to join as a full Member the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), where the EU and Vietnam could further cooperate and push for more ambitious measures aimed at reducing IUU fishing in the WCPFC Convention area.

The Committee on Fisheries calls on the Committee on International Trade, as the committee responsible, to recommend that Parliament approve the proposal for a Council decision on the conclusion of the Free Trade Agreement between the European Union and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam.