

Parliament approves deal to boost trade with Palestinian Authority



West Bank, Gaza to export farm, fish products direct to EU in 2012 ©BELGA/ZUMAPRESS

Parliament voted today to approve a trade agreement that will help boost the Palestinian economy by enabling the West Bank and Gaza to expand exports of farm and fisheries products to the EU from early 2012.

The agreement between the EU and the Palestinian Authority grants duty-free and mostly quota-free access to the European market for agricultural and fisheries products from the West Bank and Gaza Strip and provides access to Palestinian markets for some European produce. "This agreement offers an opportunity for the Palestinian people, a first step towards the development of a nation", said EP rapporteur Maria Eleni Koppa (S&D, EL) during the debate. She emphasized that the deal complied with the rules of origin and that this should ensure that the Palestinian economy will benefit fully from the expansion in trade. MEPs believe that opening EU markets to Palestinian products, which have up to now been under the direct control of the Israeli customs authorities, will help the Palestinian people expand their economy. Now that it has Parliament's approval, the agreement can enter into force early next year. The Palestinian Authority is at present the EU's smallest trading partner in the Euro-Mediterranean region and one of the smallest worldwide. Total trade amounted to EUR 56.6 million in 2009, of which EUR 50.5 million were EU exports. Imports to the EU from the Palestinian Authority amounted to EUR 6.1 million in 2009, with agricultural products making up 70.1 per cent of this total. Imports rose, however, by 32.6 per cent in the first three months of 2010. The import conditions are valid for a period of 10 years, which can be extended. In the unlikely event that Palestinian imports of agricultural products and fisheries products increase to a point at which they distort the EU's internal market, the EU can adopt safeguard measures.

Procedure: Consent