



MEPs prolong Ukraine's duty-free access to the EU market

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Plans to prolong a largely duty-free access to the EU market for Ukraine's exports until the end of 2015 were backed by the European Parliament on Thursday.

MEPs voted by 497 votes to 78, with 56 abstentions, to take over the original Commission proposal and prolong the measure without amending it.

"Given the current situation, a timely approval to prolong the regulation granting autonomous trade measures for Ukraine proves that the EU can act swiftly and decisively. This is also a proof of our political will and moral obligation", said rapporteur Gabrielius Landsbergis (EPP, LT). He added that it would give Ukrainian producers and businesses chance to prepare for the full implementation of the "Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area" from the start of 2016.

Background

The unilateral trade measure was first introduced April this year, to provide immediate relief for Ukraine's economy, after Russia imposed restrictions on access to its market following political developments in Ukraine in the spring. The measures were first scheduled to expire after six months and be replaced by a mutual opening of markets in line with a EU-Ukraine association agreement ratified by the EU and Ukraine parliaments in September.

However, in talks with Ukraine and Russia on 12 September, the EU agreed to delay the establishment of a free EU-Ukraine trade zone until the 31 December 2015, as "part of a comprehensive peace process in Ukraine".

Content and impact of the measure

The unilateral trade preferences remove 94.7% of EU tariffs charged on industrial goods imports from Ukraine. They also remove EU tariffs on over 80% of Ukraine's farm produce exports. However the EU restricts duty-free amounts of "sensitive" products, such as cereals, pork, beef, poultry, and processed food so as not to harm the interests of EU producers. Ukraine is also bound to comply with the EU health standards, and respect human rights, fundamental freedoms and rule of law.

Statistics provided by Ukraine show that the exports from Ukraine to the EU in the first half of 2014 have increased by 25% (worth US\$ 587 million), thereby offsetting the reduction in Ukraine's exports to Russia (-24.5%).

Contact

Agnese KRIVADE

BXL: (+32) 2 28 43562

STR: (+33) 3 881 73612

PORT: (+32) 498 98 39 83

[EMAIL: foreign-press@europarl.europa.eu](mailto:foreign-press@europarl.europa.eu)

TWITTER: EP_ForeignAff