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REPORT

on the proposal for a Council regulation on the conclusion of the Protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and the financial contribution provided for by the Agreement between the European Community and the Gabonese Republic on fishing off the coast of Gabon for the period 3 December 2001 to 2 December 2005
(COM(2001) 765 – C5-0040/2002 – 2001/0301(CNS))

Committee on Fisheries

Rapporteur: Albert Jan Maat

Symbols for procedures

- * Consultation procedure
majority of the votes cast
- **I Cooperation procedure (first reading)
majority of the votes cast
- **II Cooperation procedure (second reading)
*majority of the votes cast, to approve the common position
majority of Parliament's component Members, to reject or amend
the common position*
- *** Assent procedure
*majority of Parliament's component Members except in cases
covered by Articles 105, 107, 161 and 300 of the EC Treaty and
Article 7 of the EU Treaty*
- ***I Codecision procedure (first reading)
majority of the votes cast
- ***II Codecision procedure (second reading)
*majority of the votes cast, to approve the common position
majority of Parliament's component Members, to reject or amend
the common position*
- ***III Codecision procedure (third reading)
majority of the votes cast, to approve the joint text

(The type of procedure depends on the legal basis proposed by the Commission)

Amendments to a legislative text

In amendments by Parliament, amended text is highlighted in ***bold italics***. Highlighting in *normal italics* is an indication for the relevant departments showing parts of the legislative text for which a correction is proposed, to assist preparation of the final text (for instance, obvious errors or omissions in a given language version). These suggested corrections are subject to the agreement of the departments concerned.

CONTENTS

	Page
PROCEDURAL PAGE	4
LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL	5
DRAFT LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION.....	10
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT	11
OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON BUDGETS	15
OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION	19

PROCEDURAL PAGE

By letter of 28 January 2002 the Council consulted Parliament, pursuant to Article 37 in conjunction with Article 300, paragraph 2 and 3 of the EC Treaty on the proposal for a Council regulation on the conclusion of the Protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and the financial contribution provided for by the Agreement between the European Community and the Gabonese Republic on fishing off the coast of Gabon for the period 3 December 2001 to 2 December 2005 (COM(2001) 765 – 2001/0301(CNS)).

At the sitting of 4 February 2002 the President of Parliament announced that she had referred this proposal to the Committee on Fisheries as the committee responsible and the Committee on Budgets and the Committee on Development and Cooperation for their opinions (C5-0040/2002).

The Committee on Fisheries had appointed Albert Jan Maat rapporteur at its meeting of 9 October 2001.

It considered the Commission proposal and the draft report at its meetings of 19 November 2001, 24 January and 20 February 2002.

At the last meeting it adopted the draft legislative resolution by 14 votes to 2.

The following were present for the vote: Rosa Miguélez Ramos, acting chairman; Brigitte Langenhagen and Hugues Martin, vice-chairmen ; Albert Jan Maat, rapporteur ; Elspeth Attwooll, Niels Busk, Arlindo Cunha, Nigel Paul Farage, Ilda Figueiredo, Ian Stewart Hudghton, Salvador Jové Peres, Heinz Kindermann, Carlos Lage, Giorgio Lisi, James Nicholson, Juan Ojeda Sanz (for Struan Stevenson), Manuel Pérez Álvarez, Bernard Poignant, Dominique F.C. Souchet (for Michael John Holmes), Catherine Stihler, Daniel Varela Suanzes-Carpegna and Herman Vermeer.

The opinions of the Committee on Budgets and the Committee on Development and Cooperation are attached.

The report was tabled on 21 February 2002.

The deadline for tabling amendments will be indicated in the draft agenda for the relevant part-session.

LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL

Proposal for a Council regulation on the conclusion of the Protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and the financial contribution provided for by the Agreement between the European Community and the Gabonese Republic on fishing off the coast of Gabon for the period 3 December 2001 to 2 December 2005 (COM(2001) 765 – C5-0040/2002 – 2001/0301(CNS))

The proposal is amended as follows:

Text proposed by the Commission¹

Amendments by Parliament

Amendment 1
Recital 2 a (new)

(2a) It is important to improve the information supplied to the European Parliament and whereas the Commission should inform Parliament annually in writing of the state of implementation of the Agreement.

Justification

Such information is necessary to enable Parliament to carry out its duties properly in conformity with the consultation procedure.

Amendment 2
Recital 2 b (new)

(2b) The costs of all fisheries agreements –northern and southern- should be borne in a balanced fashion jointly by shipowners and the Community, however, it should be kept in mind that part of the money should be considered as EU contribution to a commercial agreement and also as development aid.

¹ OJ C not yet published.

Justification

Careful use of the European taxpayers' money requires that the cost of the agreements be borne in a balanced manner jointly by the Community and shipowners. The correct balance could be established on the basis of the profits yielded by the relevant agreement. It is therefore necessary to consider moving towards splitting the costs 50-50 from now on.

Amendment 3
Recital 2 c (new)

(2c) The fishing activities of the Community fleet must not go against the interests or the development of the local fisheries sector.

Justification

The interests of the local fishing industry must not be harmed and the local fisheries sector must have scope to develop. Ideally, agreements of this type should therefore provide for a twelve-mile limit. However, the new agreement makes it possible to fish for demersal varieties in the 6-12 mile zone, which is not consistent with the Community's responsibility with regard to the local fisheries sector.

Amendment 4
Article 2 a (new)

Article 2a

During the final year of the Protocol's validity and before any renewal thereof is concluded, the Commission shall submit to the European Parliament and the Council a report on the application of the Agreement and the conditions under which it was implemented. The report shall include all the information agreed at the October 1997 Fisheries Council, such as on the situation with regard to fish stocks, the apportionment of costs

between shipowners and the Community and a cost-benefit analysis. This report should also provide an overview of the monitoring of fishing by the EU fleet.

Justification

Although the Commission's evaluation report represents a big improvement compared with the previous situation when Parliament received no information whatsoever on the implementation of the Protocol, its quality would be much enhanced if were also to incorporate the aspects which the Fisheries Agreement requested at its 1997 meeting. A cost-benefit analysis must also be added to ensure accountability to the European taxpayer.

Amendment 5
Article 2 b (new)

Article 2b

The Commission shall forward to the Council and the European Parliament a copy of the report on the targeted measures which the Gabonese authorities provide on the basis of Article 5 of the Protocol.

Justification

Although it is questionable whether the authorities should be accountable to the Commission for the monies received in exchange for the fishing rights granted, Parliament wishes to receive the report on targeted measures, since one is now being drawn up and sent to the Commission.

Amendment 6
Article 2 c (new)

Article 2c

On the basis of such reports and following consultation of the European Parliament,

the Council shall grant, where appropriate, the Commission a negotiating mandate with a view to the adoption of a new protocol.

Justification

Only on the basis of these reports on the implementation of the most recent fisheries agreement is Parliament able to give its verdict on the latest agreement and is the Council able to issue a new negotiating mandate.

Amendment 7
Article 2 d (new)

Article 2d

During the negotiations, the Commission shall make sure that the level of agreed fishing rights is based on the principle of sustainable fishing and that, in addition, don't go against the interests of the local fisheries.

Justification

The Commission should make sure that the situation as regards fish stocks (species covered by the agreement) is clear from the outset of the negotiations and that Community fishing vessels catch only species in respect of which it has been demonstrated scientifically that stocks are in surplus. The new agreement with Gabon extends the fishing opportunities for demersal species without presenting any scientific data.

Amendment 8
Article 2 e (new)

Article 2e

The Commission should by 1 June 2002 demonstrate, on the basis of scientific

data, that the extension of fishing opportunities in the new protocol is compatible with the principle of sustainability.

Justification

See justification for Amendment 7.

DRAFT LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION

European Parliament legislative resolution on the proposal for a Council regulation on the conclusion of the Protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and the financial contribution provided for by the Agreement between the European Community and the Gabonese Republic on fishing off the coast of Gabon for the period 3 December 2001 to 2 December 2005 (COM(2001) 765 – C5-0040/2002 – 2001/0301(CNS))

(Consultation procedure)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission proposal to the Council (COM(2001) 765¹),
 - having been consulted by the Council pursuant to Article 37 in conjunction with Article 300 paragraph 2 and 3 of the EC Treaty (C5-0040/2002),
 - having regard to Rule 67 and Rule 97(7) of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Fisheries and the opinions of the Committee on Budgets and the Committee on Development and Cooperation (A5-0040/2002),
1. Approves the Commission proposal as amended;
 2. Calls on the Commission to alter its proposal accordingly, pursuant to Article 250(2) of the EC Treaty;
 3. Calls on the Council to notify Parliament should it intend to depart from the text approved by Parliament;
 4. Asks to be consulted again if the Council intends to amend the Commission proposal substantially;
 5. Instructs its President to forward its position to the Council and Commission.

¹ OJ C not yet published.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Introduction

This Commission proposal concerns the renewal of the 1998 fisheries agreement with the Gabonese Republic for a period of four years from 3 December 2001. The Gabonese and EU delegations signed the agreement on continued cooperation in the field of fisheries in Libreville on 20 September 2001. In accordance with Articles 1 and 3 of the Protocol, the European Union must have made an initial payment to Gabon by 30 April 2001 at the latest.

According to the Commission's evaluation report, Gabon has an approximately 800 km long coastline and 1.1 million inhabitants whose average income is about US\$ 5000 per annum. The fisheries sector, which accounts for 1.4% of the country's GDP and has a fleet comprising 1100 canoes and 89 industrial vessels (for fish, shrimps and cephalopods) and employs some 20 000 people. Gabon is not self-sufficient in fish and imports about 15 000 tonnes of fish annually.

Content of the new protocol

The previous agreement related solely to catches of tuna (reference value 9000 tonnes per annum). The Union paid EUR 810 000 in financial compensation in respect of the three-year period and EUR 1 215 000 for the maintenance of fish stocks and for scientific and technical assistance. The total amount of EUR 2 025 000 equates to EUR 75 per tonne. Fishermen paid EUR 25 in the form of advances for every tonne of tuna caught.

Fishing opportunities for tuna are being increased to 10 500 tonnes per annum, for which EUR 787 500 per annum is to be paid. This equates to EUR 75 per tonne (as in the previous protocol). The shipowners' contribution also remains unchanged. Fishing opportunities for demersal species (shrimps and cephalopods) are a new feature of the protocol. The Union is to pay EUR 475 000 per annum for these. Freezer trawlers with a capacity of 1200 GRT per month, averaged over the year, may make use of these fishing opportunities.

Of the total amount of EUR 1 262 500 to be paid by the Union annually, EUR 883 750 is to be allocated to activities designed to develop the local fisheries sector. Gabon is to account in writing for the use to which the latter amount has been put.

International fisheries agreements

In October 1997, the Fisheries Council came out in favour of continuing the policy of concluding fisheries agreements. One of the reasons for this was the aim of maintaining the European fleet active in non-EU waters. At the same time, the Council stressed the need for the agreements to be cost-effective. IFREMER, a French research institute, completed a study in 1999 which established that each euro invested by the Union in the case of the southern fisheries agreements in the period 1993-97 yielded a great deal of economic activity in the European Union. As far as the apportionment of costs between the Union and shipowners is concerned, IFREMER concluded that around 20% of the cost of the rights was borne by shipowners.

The same Fisheries Council asked the Commission to draw up an evaluation just before each protocol expired. The assessments were/had to cover the state of fish stocks, the apportionment of costs between the Union and the shipowners, the expectations of the third country concerned and the impact on employment in the Union (especially in areas heavily dependent on fishing).

In a special report it produced in 2001, the European Court of Auditors gave an assessment of the Commission's management of international fisheries agreements. The Court of Auditors notes amongst other things that there is virtually no cost-benefit ratio. Payment is, for instance, made for fish that exists only on paper. The Court of Auditors also points out that the absence of clear objectives leads to confusion as to the nature of the agreements: are they commercial or is their aim to foster the development of the third country concerned? The Court of Auditors also points out that the monitoring of the implementation of fishing activities leaves a great deal to be desired.

Last year, the World Wildlife Fund published the 'Handbook for Negotiating Fishing Access Agreements', in which it sets out the criteria to be met by fisheries agreements with regard to sustainable development and the protection of fish stocks. It also sets out a number of principles which, amongst other things, must be incorporated into a fisheries management plan. An agreement must, for example, be based on scientific data on fish stocks. The local fisheries sector must also be protected, and negotiations must be transparent.

Evaluation of the previous protocol

With regard to the use made of fishing opportunities, the Commission notes in its evaluation report that, measured in terms of licences issued, only 70% or 38% of the opportunities have been utilised. No further explanation is given. With regard to catches, the Commission takes the view that they were 'good', although in 2000 only 79% of the reference value of 9000 tonnes of tuna had been accounted for and no figures were yet available for 2001.

Assessment of the new protocol

Landing of fish

The fisheries agreements are of great importance as regards the landing of fish for consumption in the European Union, for the Union is already more than 50% dependent on imports.

Shipowners' contribution

The October 1997 Fisheries Council held that the fisheries agreements were in essence commercial agreements and that costs must be apportioned in a balanced way. However, the European Union frequently pays many times more for the fishing rights than what the shipowners contribute. In the case of this agreement, the ratio for tuna is 1:3. Given the favourable cost-benefit ratio of these agreements (according to the IFREMER report), it is clear that the cost of the fishing rights should be split, for instance on a 50-50 basis. Another reason for this is that the Union should manage the European taxpayer's money soundly. Moreover, far from all the rights that are available on paper are being used, so that one might be justified in asking whether the Community is paying too much.

Fishing rights

As far as fishing rights for demersal species are concerned, no mention is made of the reference value for the catch quantity. It seems that it is not the quantity of fish that counts, but the capacity of the vessels. Financial compensation is also based on vessel capacity. From a sustainable fishing perspective, however, account will also need to be taken of catch quantities.

Scientific basis

It is obvious that the catch quantities laid down in initial or renewed fisheries agreements should be based on scientific data. There is no mention whatsoever of such data, so that it is not clear what the new catch quantities and/or the capacity of demersal fishing vessels, have been based on. In EU waters, annual quotas are set, as far as possible, on the basis of figures from well-established research institutes, and it is unacceptable to use 'guesstimates' as a basis in this case, as it could have adverse effects on both the third country concerned (overfishing) and on the European Union (paying for non-existent fish).

Development component

Your rapporteur is a keen supporter of an effective EU development policy but questions whether such a policy is reflected in the fisheries agreements. Development measures account for a proportion of the 'commercial' amount paid for the fishing rights. It is therefore rather paternalistic to require that an account be provided of the use to which the countries concerned put their 'own' money. Whilst your rapporteur has his doubts as to whether the fisheries agreements are the right place for such development measures, he takes the view that every additional euro that can be allocated for this purpose is a welcome bonus. Furthermore, the development of the local fisheries sector could cushion the effect of declining oil revenues which currently account for two thirds of government income.

Your rapporteur considers that the Committee on Development and Cooperation should be given a greater role in assessing fisheries agreements with third countries.

Provision of information

Although Parliament is pleased that the evaluation reports have been made available, the quality of such reports would be considerably enhanced if in future, as also called for by the October 1997 Fisheries Council, the following could be added to them:

- a cost-benefit analysis (Parliament has on many occasions adopted amendments urging that this be included), including an ex-post overview of how the costs were split between the European Union and shipowners;
- an assessment of the impact on the economy and employment situation in the regions of Europe that are dependent on such fishing;
- an assessment of the extent to which the fisheries agreement meets the expectations of the third country concerned;
- an evaluation of the state of the fish stocks.

The current evaluation provides too few pointers for making a thorough final assessment of the most recent protocol.

Other aspects

It is by no means certain that fishing for shrimps and cephalopods from six miles off the coast

does not damage the local fishing industry. It would therefore have been preferable to establish a twelve-mile limit.

Given that Gabon, despite having rich fishing grounds, has to import fish, it should be concluded that a small amount of the catch should have to be landed in Gabon. Such a condition has in fact been include in other agreements.

Conclusion

Your rapporteur recommends that Parliament approve the fisheries agreement with Gabon, subject to due account being taken of the amendments tabled concerning:

1. The cost of the fishing rights must be borne in a balanced manner by the Union and shipowners, in keeping with the commercial nature of the agreements and to ensure sound management of European taxpayers' money;
2. The agreed fishing rights must be based on scientific data on fish stocks. The Commission should ensure by 1 June 2002 at the latest that this is the case;
3. Information concerning the cost-benefit ratio, the impact on the economy of EU regions dependent on the agreements, the assessment of the third country concerned and the state of the fish stocks should be added to the evaluation reports;
4. The agreement should not hinder the development of the local fisheries sector. This would have been better ensured if the activities of EU vessels were confined to outside the twelve-mile zone;
5. Additional attention to monitoring activities, given that the Gabonese authorities are not able to carry out their monitoring role adequately;
6. An evaluation of the implementation of the development measures is to be submitted to the Council and the European Parliament every two years.

24 January 2002

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON BUDGETS

for the Committee on Fisheries

on the proposal for a Council regulation on the conclusion of the Protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and the financial contribution provided for by the Agreement between the European Community and the Gabonese Republic on fishing off the coast of Gabon for the period 3 December 2001 to 2 December 2005
(COM(2001) 765 – C5-0040/2002 – 2001/0301(CNS))

Draftsman: Bárbara Dührkop Dührkop

PROCEDURE

The Committee on Budgets appointed Bárbara Dührkop Dührkop draftsman at its meeting of 22 September 1999.

It considered the draft opinion at its meeting of 22 January 2002.

At the last meeting it adopted the following amendments unanimously.

The following were present for the vote: Terence Wynn, chairman; Reimer Böge, vice-chairman; Bárbara Dührkop Dührkop, vice-chairman/draftsman; Kathalijne Maria Buitenweg, Joan Colom i Naval, John Alexander Corrie (for Ioannis Averoff), Den Dover, Neena Gill, Jutta D. Haug, Ian Stewart Hudghton, Anne Elisabet Jensen, John Joseph McCartin, Jan Mulder, Juan Andrés Naranjo Escobar, Guido Podestà, Per Stenmarck, Kyösti Tapio Virrankoski, Ralf Walter and Brigitte Wenzel-Perillo.

SHORT JUSTIFICATION

1. The previous Protocol to the Fisheries Agreement between the European Economic Community and the Gabonese Republic setting out the fishing opportunities and financial contribution expired on 2 December 2001. On 20 September 2001, the two parties initialled a protocol for a period of four years (3 December 2001 to 2 December 2005). A draft Council Decision concerning the provisional application of the new Protocol pending its final entry into force is subject to a separate procedure (without consultation of the Parliament).
2. On 28 September 2001, the Commission informed the Parliament's Committee on Fisheries about the new Protocol as initialled and transmitted the text of the Protocol, but no draft

financial statement. On 13 December, the Commission adopted the Proposal for a Council Regulation on the Conclusion of the Protocol.

3. The Protocol foresees the following financial contributions through the EU budget:

in €

	2002	2003	2004	2005	Total
Commitment appropriations					
Financial compensation	378 750	378 750	378 750	378 750	1 515 000
Scientific and technical programmes	141 400	141 400	141 400	141 400	565 600
Protection and surveillance of fishing zones	220 937	220 937	220 937	220 937	883 748
Institutional support	220 937	220 937	220 937	220 937	883 748
Study grants, practical training	70 700	70 700	70 700	70 700	282 800
Contributions to international fisheries organisations	44 188	44 188	44 188	44 188	176 752
International meetings	35 350	35 350	35 350	35 350	141 400
Vocational training	53 025	53 025	53 025	53 025	212 100
Technical assistance	44 188	44 188	44 188	44 188	176 752
Health inspection and quality control	53 025	53 025	53 025	53 025	212 100
Total Commitments	1 262 500	1 262 500	1 262 500	1 262 500	5 050 000
Payment appropriations	1 262 500	1 262 500	1 262 500	1 262 500	5 050 000

4. The present Protocol represents a substantial increase in fishing opportunities for EU vessels over the previous period (10 500 GRT compared to 9 000 in the previous Protocol, with fishing opportunities for 38 tuna seiners and 26 surface longliners).
5. Under the new Protocol, the costs for the EU budget will increase from € 2 025 000 for three years (i.e. € 675 500 per year) to € 5 050 000 for four years (i.e. € 1 262 500 per year). The higher costs are justified by the need for new fishing opportunities for the EU fleet after the discontinuation of the fisheries agreement with Morocco. As a result, the Gabonese Republic was in a favourable negotiating position.
6. Of the financial compensation, 70% (€ 883 750 per year) will go towards targeted actions, which is in line with other fisheries agreements with ACP countries. The biggest amounts (€ 220 937) are allocated to programmes for the protection and surveillance of fishing zones and to institutional support to the administrative department responsible for fisheries.
7. The Commission proposal contains an article to take account of Commission Regulation (EC) No 500/2001 of 14 March 2001¹ stating that the Member States are obliged to notify the Commission of the quantities of the catches taken in the fishing zone off Gabon. This provision can help to achieve a more realistic picture of the actual catches of the EU shipping fleet. It will be useful in both directions, to identify more exactly the under-utilisation of fishing opportunities, and to discover if catches are not declared properly.

¹ OJ L 73, 15.3.2001, p. 8.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The Committee on Budgets welcomes the fact that the Protocol provides for the financial compensation for the first year to be paid before 30 April 2002. This will leave the necessary time for the consultation of Parliament before the first payment to the Gabonese Republic has to be effected.
2. The Committee on Budgets welcomes the inclusion of a suspension clause in the Protocol, which gives the possibility to suspend the fishing agreement either in the case that the Community fails to make the payments provide for in the Protocol (Article 4) or in the case that the circumstances prevent fishing activities in the Gabonese fishing zone (Article 5). Such clauses will help to avoid the difficulties which occurred in the context of other fisheries agreements when the fishing could not be carried through as provided for in the respective protocols and agreements.

AMENDMENTS

The Committee on Budgets calls on the Committee on Fisheries, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following amendments in its report:

Text proposed by the Commission¹

Amendments by Parliament

Amendment 1
Article 3b (1) (new)

1. In the course of the Protocol's application, and before the start of negotiations on its possible renewal, the Commission shall submit to the Council and European Parliament a new general assessment report including a cost benefit analysis.

Justification

Before the expiry of the previous protocol, the European Commission presented to Parliament an evaluation report on the previous protocol after initialling the new protocol. The Commission did not provide the European Parliament with information allowing a serious assessment and the presentation of an opinion by the Parliament before the start of

¹ OJ C ...

negotiations.

Amendment 2
Article 3b (2) (new)

2. The Council shall, on the basis of this report and taking account of the European Parliament's opinion thereon, authorise the Commission, where appropriate, to start negotiations with a view to the adoption of a new Protocol.

Justification

The Committee on Budgets reiterates the demand for the general assessment report to be presented by the Commission before the beginning of negotiations on the renewed Protocol. The Council shall only give the authorisation to the Commission to start negotiations on the basis of the assessment report and the opinion of the European Parliament. This position is in line with the conclusion N° D of the Working Document on European Community Fisheries Agreements (PE 289.538) approved by the Committee on Budgets on 23 May 2000. It is also in line with the position taken by the Parliament on other fisheries agreements.

19 December 2001

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION

for the Committee on Fisheries

on the proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) on the conclusion of the Protocol defining, for the period 3 December 2001 to 2 December 2005, the fishing possibilities and the financial contribution provided for by the Agreement between the European Economic Community and the Gabonese Republic on fishing off Gabon
(COM(2001) 765 – C5-0040/2002- 2001/0301(CNS))

Draftsman: Joaquim Miranda

PROCEDURE

The Committee on Development and Cooperation appointed Joaquim Miranda draftsman at its meeting of 21 November 2001.

It considered the draft opinion at its meeting of 27 November and 19 December 2001.

At the latter meeting it adopted the following conclusions unanimously.

The following were present for the vote: Joaquim Miranda, chairman and draftsman; Lone Dybkjær, Margrietus J. van den Berg and Fernando Fernández Martín vice-chairmen; Marie-Arlette Carlotti, John Alexander Corrie, Michael Gahler (for Giuseppe Brienza), Vitaliano Gemelli, Richard Howitt, Bashir Khanbhai, Karsten Knolle, Didier Rod, Francisca Sauquillo Pérez del Arco and Jürgen Zimmerling.

SHORT JUSTIFICATION

The new fisheries protocol with Gabon

The European Commission and Gabon signed (24.9.2001) a new EU-Gabon fisheries protocol for a four-year period, from 3 December 2001. This agreement, that currently enables French, Spanish and Portuguese vessels only to catch migrating fish (essentially tuna), offers vessels, new fishing possibilities for shrimps and cephalopods, without reducing the volume authorised for tuna catches. The new protocol, in force until 2 December 2005, provides for an increase in the Union's financial contribution from € 675,000 to € 1,262,500 a year. The share of these funds allocated to measures having as goal to contribute to setting up a viable fishing industry in Gabon (aid to scientific research, the monitoring of fishing activities, training and health inspection of fish products) will move from 60% to 70%.

The current protocol allows 75 European tuna vessels to fish in Gabonese waters: 42 freeze tuna seiners, (22 Spanish and 20 French) and 33 surface longliners (28 Spanish and 5 Portuguese). The new protocol slightly reduces this number to 64, according to the following key-distribution: 38 tuna seiners (18 Spanish and 20 French) and 26 surface longliners (20 Spanish and 6 Portuguese). The number of vessels authorised to fish tuna has been reduced, whereas, at the same time, the volume of tuna catches authorised will go from 9,000 tonnes to 10,500 tonnes a year. New fishing possibilities will be offered to vessels fishing shrimps and cephalopods. To limit the fishing efforts of trawlers, provision has been made for an authorised tonnage amounting to 1,200 GRT (Gross Registered Tonnes) a month, calculated on an annual basis.

The financial contribution paid by ship-owners fishing under the terms of the agreement will increase by €100 (€ 2,500 to 2,600) for tuna seiners; and for surface longliners, which currently pay between € 800 and 1,100, the contribution will be set at € 1,100 for all of them. The owners of the trawlers, which target shrimps and cephalopods, will pay 168 per GRT per year. The two parties also agreed to alter the provisions on technical measures so as to guarantee the conservation of fish stocks in the Gabonese waters.

Local fisheries sector

The fishery is not a sector of major importance in the Gabon's economy and represents only 1.4% of GDP. There are about 5.000 artisanal fishermen and a limited industrial fishery (89 vessels), landing primarily fish, shrimps and cephalopods.

Gabon has also important waterways with a total surface of 10.700 km². The actual catches are however very low, due to the low density of population in the rural zones, the gears used and the difficulties to bring the catches to the cities. The aquaculture production in Gabon remains underdeveloped.

The major part of the fish is sold in Gabon, either fresh, smoked or dried, except for the shrimps and parts of the small pelagics which are exported. The national production of fishery products is insufficient to cover the consumer needs. Therefore, Gabon imports about 15.000 tones of fish per year.

The fisheries sector is not an area of concentration in the latest national indicative programmes (7th and 8th EDF).

CONCLUSIONS

The Committee on Development and Cooperation :

1. Takes note of the assessment report of the current agreement drawn up by the Commission taking into account considerations relating to the various activities carried out under EU policy;
2. Draws attention to the importance of managing resources in accordance with the precautionary approach and accordingly recommends that assessment should be carried out at regional level, something which could be facilitated by means of regional cooperation in the conclusion of agreements;
3. Welcomes the fact that under the new Protocol with Gabon, approximately 70% of the total contribution is allocated to specific measures to strengthen fisheries management in Gabon, promote the development of the local fisheries sector and provide training; calls for these funds to be allocated in a transparent and responsible way;
4. Considers it important that arrangements and budgetary provisions in respect of EU development cooperation be made consistent with the new provisions of the Fisheries agreement ;
5. Calls on the Commission to ensure that each and every contractual clause of the Agreement is observed by vessels flying a Community flag;
6. Recommends that the Committee on Fisheries approve the proposal.