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Committee on Development

2014/0267(NLE)

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DRAFT OPINION

of the Committee on Development

for the Committee on International Trade

on the proposal for a Council decision on the conclusion of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the West African States, ECOWAS and the UEMOA, of the one part, and the European Union and its Member States, of the other part
(COM(2014)0578 – C8-0000/2014 – 2014/0267(NLE))

Rapporteur: Norbert Neuser

PA_Leg_Consent

SHORT JUSTIFICATION

The Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) is a new approach, combining trade liberalisation with the objectives of sustainable development. Trade liberalisation does, however, carry risks for developing countries. In that regard, the EPA is to be commended for containing a range of instruments in order to react to problems that might arise during its implementation, especially the possible disruption of local production, food insecurity, difficulties for infant industries or a decline in tariff revenues for the state budget. It will be important during implementation to closely follow actual developments and react quickly within the EPA institutions should such situations arise. During the implementation of the EPA special care should therefore be taken to ensure an easy triggering of the different safeguard clauses in order to render them meaningful.

The monitoring system provided for by the EPA should be designed and made operational as soon as possible - within four years after entry into force of the EPA at the latest - so as to be available *before* liberalisation in the ECOWAS states starts to show effect. The Commission/Joint Council should ensure appropriate funding and a minimisation of administrative burdens for the monitoring system, particularly the Consultative Committee, to guarantee meaningful and effective monitoring. The Commission should ensure that monitoring covers, *inter alia*, human rights issues, food security, inclusive economy, core labour standards of the International Labour Organization and environmental concerns, besides the economic effects of the EPA on local economies.

The rapporteur regards the EPA and its institutions as a valuable possibility that should be actively used by the Union and the ECOWAS states to stay in continuous dialogue. The Commission is asked to ensure that human rights, social and environmental aspects are included in the work of the Joint Council and the Joint Implementation Committee. The rapporteur appreciates that a framework for dialogue on parliamentary level is foreseen with the Joint West Africa-European Union Parliamentary Committee. It should play an active role in observing the effects, both positive and negative, of the EPA during implementation. The rapporteur underlines the importance of including not only economic, but also social partners and other non-state, civil society actors in the Consultative Committee, and of giving them a significant role in monitoring implementation. He urges the Commission as well as the ECOWAS Secretariat and Member States to include a wide range of civil society actors in the monitoring process.

The rapporteur is very much concerned by the insufficient sustainable development provisions. The EPA contains only limited and indirect references to human rights as well as social and environmental standards. The EPA can only achieve its ambitious objectives if these issues are duly taken into account during implementation.

Therefore the rapporteur demands additional institutionalised guarantees *before* Parliament gives consent.

This should primarily be in the form of a protocol to establish a specific monitoring structure dedicated to sustainable development ensuring the proper involvement of civil society organisations and trade unions. All new monitoring institutions should be tasked with specific responsibilities, such as the possibility to adopt recommendations and binding decisions, be

granted sufficient autonomous resources and pay special attention to implementing the eight core ILO Conventions, so as to ensure that domestic labour laws and practices follow the ILO Decent Work Agenda. It should be clear that non-compliance with these rights and standards will lead to consultations and eventually to suspension of the EPA.

The Committee on Development calls on the Committee on International Trade, as the committee responsible, to recommend that Parliament give its consent to the proposal for a Council decision on the conclusion of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the West African States, ECOWAS and the UEMOA, of the one part, and the European Union and its Member States, of the other part.