

P-1907/10EN

Answer given by Mr De Gucht
on behalf of the Commission
(12.5.2010)

A sustainable, secure and affordable supply of raw materials is important for industrial competitiveness in the EU and the Commission is aware of the damage that measures to restrict access to raw materials can have, not only on the EU's industry but on the efficiency of the global economy at large.

The Global Europe trade policy strategy adopted in 2006 made addressing barriers to the free trade in raw materials a key priority for EU trade policy. This trade strategy on raw materials is indeed horizontal and thus should be understood as including raw hides and skins

The Commission has formulated a trade strategy based on three pillars, including (i) defining trade rules in bilateral and multilateral negotiations, (ii) when required, enforcing the rules and tackling market barriers, and (iii) raising awareness of the impact of export restrictions on global welfare through outreach towards third countries, be they developing or developed.

Within the framework of this strategy, the Commission pushes for the inclusion of rules on export restrictions in bilateral and multilateral negotiations, including for the hides and skins sector. In addition, the Commission has taken enforcement action, e.g. with the launch of a WTO panel, jointly with the USA and Mexico, on some export restrictions used by China and has tackled individual barriers to raw materials trade through the Market Access partnership. Recently, a working group on leather was created which is looking at barriers facing this sector, including export restrictions.

Given that bilateral agreements do not exist with all third parties concerned by this matter, it is not always possible to remove the export duties concerned, however where such an agreement exists and the economic interests at stake so require, the Commission has pushed the issue forcefully.

With regard to measures to limit EU exports of raw hides and skins, this is not an option which the Commission is considering as it is contrary to the Commission's own request to liberalize trade in raw materials, including raw hides and skins.