



MEPs excited at prospect of EU-US trade talks but warn of difficulties ahead

Committees Committee on International Trade [21-02-2013 - 17:10]

International Trade Committee MEPs on Thursday strongly backed moves to start talks with the US on the world's biggest-ever trade deal but warned Commissioner Karel De Gucht that hard bargaining would be needed to clinch a deal acceptable to the EU public.

"We all were very happy when President Obama announced the will to start transatlantic free trade negotiations," said Godelieve Quisthoudt-Rowohl (DE, EPP) at the start of the debate, echoed by Marietje Schaake (ALDE, NL) who agreed that this was a historic moment and believed that the House shared "the political will to find a mutually beneficial and fair deal".

Difficult questions

However, almost all the MEPs in the debate highlighted systemic differences between the EU and the US, where strong public criticism could be expected. They stressed that public support was vital for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TRIP) to become a reality.

Vital Moreira (S&D, PT), chair of the trade committee and responsible for relations with the US, said the biggest bone of contention in the talks would be animal and plant health standards. He wondered whether the EU would have to abandon its traditional precautionary approach in that area.

Other MEPs raised concerns over genetically modified crops and hormones in beef. Syed Kamall (ECR, UK) pinpointed the need to protect the EU's geographical indication system.

Paul Murphy (EUL/NGL, IRL) and Franziska Keller (Grens/EFA, DE) asked whether the EP's positions on intellectual property rights and data protection would be respected and how the EP would be involved in the negotiating process. Several MEPs voiced fears about "sneaking ACTA in through the back door".

Next steps

The European Commission plans to submit a negotiating mandate to the Council in March. A unanimous Council decision is needed to launch the talks and is expected in mid-June. Negotiations are likely to take at least two years and the deal will have to be approved by the European Parliament.

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