



2018/0256M(NLE)

6.9.2018

DRAFT OPINION

of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

for the Committee on International Trade

on the proposal for a Council decision on the agreement in the form of an Exchange of Letters between the European Union and the Kingdom of Morocco on the amendment of Protocols 1 and 4 to the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an association between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Kingdom of Morocco, of the other part
(2018/0256M(NLE))

Rapporteur for opinion: Michel Dantin

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development calls on the Committee on International Trade, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Emphasises that the preferential treatment granted for certain Moroccan fruit and vegetable exports to the EU under the agreement of 8 March 2012 concerning reciprocal liberalisation measures on agricultural products, processed agricultural products, fish and fishery products is a particularly sensitive matter for Europe's horticulture industry, especially in southern Europe;
2. Emphasises, furthermore, that in its opinion adopted on 13 July 2011 as part of the consent procedure in Parliament relating to the agreement, the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development recommended that consent should not be given;
3. Notes that most of the concerns expressed in that opinion are, from the point of view of the European horticulture industry, still relevant today, in what is a difficult and volatile period for the industry, in particular as a result of the ongoing Russian embargo;
4. Emphasises that there are still major competitiveness issues for European producers owing to the wide divergences compared with Moroccan producers in terms of labour costs, working conditions and environmental standards;
5. Draws attention to the fact that some of the fruit and vegetables exported preferentially to the EU under the terms of the agreement in question (including tomatoes and melons) come from the territory of Western Sahara, and points out that very ambitious plans have been drawn up with a view to further developing such production and exports;
6. Regrets the legal uncertainty that has arisen since the Court of Justice judgment of 21 December 2016; is concerned that the Commission has been unable to provide reliable data on preferential imports of products from Western Sahara that may have been carried out since that date, in spite of the judgment in question; wonders what the cost has been to the EU budget of any preferences granted during the period concerned without a valid legal basis; in the absence of sufficient comparative information, is doubtful whether the Commission is able to assess the impact of the proposed new agreement properly;
7. Nevertheless welcomes the clarification that the new agreement provides, and hopes that it will be able henceforth to provide a clear, stable framework for the economic operators concerned, on both sides of the Mediterranean;
8. Is doubtful whether the distinction drawn in the new agreement between products from the Sahara and those from Morocco is relevant from a customs and trade perspective, setting the obvious political aspects aside; notes, in particular, that in the new agreement there is no allocation of the tariff rate quotas laid down in the initial agreement, and that, in terms of access to the preferences granted by the EU, it will not therefore make any difference whatsoever whether or not products are of Sahrawi origin;
9. Points out that Article 7 of Protocol 1 to the 2012 Agreement contains a safeguard

clause making it possible for appropriate steps to be taken where imports of large quantities of agricultural products classed as sensitive under the agreement cause serious market distortion and/or serious harm to the industry concerned; hopes that preferential imports into the EU of sensitive agricultural products from Morocco and Western Sahara will continue to be subject to appropriate monitoring by the Commission, and that the Commission will still be ready to activate the aforementioned clause where an established need arises;

10. Points out that the EU and Morocco have negotiated, as set out in the initial agreement concluded in 2012, an ambitious and comprehensive agreement on protecting the geographical indications and designations of origin of agricultural products, processed agricultural products, fish and fishery products that provides for the protection by Morocco of the full list of the EU's geographical indications; points out, furthermore, that the procedure for concluding the agreement, which began in 2015, was suspended following the Court's judgment of 21 December 2016; calls for that procedure to be resumed and finalised as soon as possible in conjunction with the conclusion of the agreement considered in this opinion.