

EC/Uzbekistan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement: bilateral trade in textiles. Protocol

2010/0323(NLE) - 15/11/2016 - Committee report tabled for plenary, 1st reading/single reading

The Committee on International Trade adopted the report by Maria ARENA (S&D, BE) on the draft Council decision on the conclusion of a Protocol to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement establishing a partnership between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Uzbekistan, of the other part, amending the Agreement in order to extend the provisions of the Agreement to bilateral trade in textiles, taking account of the expiry of the bilateral textiles Agreement.

The committee called on the Parliament to give its consent to the conclusion of the Protocol.

In the short justification accompanying the report, Members recalled that ratifying the textiles protocol would mean including textiles in the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) concluded between Uzbekistan and the EU in 1999.

That title foresees:

- the according of MFN status on a reciprocal basis,
- trade free of quantitative restrictions,
- the principle of free transit,
- trade at market-related prices,
- a safeguard clause,
- prohibitions or restrictions on imports, exports or goods in transit justified on grounds of public morality, public policy or public security.

Members recalled that in December 2011, Parliament adopted an interim report postponing its decision on consent pending an improvement in the human rights situation in Uzbekistan, particularly in relation to the use of child labour and forced labour in the annual cotton harvest. That interim report set out 14 recommendations.

Since its adoption, a dialogue has been established with Uzbekistan that has involved annual hearings in which a number of stakeholders have taken part, including civil society, the Uzbek authorities and European and international institutions. There has also been close cooperation between Uzbekistan and the International Labour Organization to assess the action taken to end the use of child labour and forced labour in Uzbekistan's annual cotton harvest. The ILO carried out its first cotton harvest monitoring mission in 2013, and repeated the exercise in 2014 and 2015. A monitoring mission is again planned for 2016, with particular emphasis on the issue of forced labour.

The report on the ILO's last monitoring mission, from 14 September to 31 October 2015, revealed that the practice of using child labour in cotton harvesting had been virtually eradicated.

The same conclusions could not, however, be drawn as regards forced labour.

The efforts of the Uzbek authorities should also be encouraged.

In the context of the ongoing dialogue and cooperation, the committee called for Parliament to give its consent to the textile protocol with Uzbekistan. However, if the Uzbek authorities fail to follow through on their commitment to abolish forced labour, Parliament reserves the right to ask the Commission and the Council to activate Articles 2 and 95 of the PCA, allowing general or specific measures to be taken in the event of a failure to respect human rights.