

Implementation of the common commercial policy. Annual report

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The Committee on International Trade adopted the own-initiative report by Tokia Saïfi (EPP, FR) on the annual report on the implementation of the common commercial policy.

As a reminder, the common commercial policy comprises a body of trade agreements and legislative measures to safeguard the Unions offensive and defensive trade interests. The Union is the worlds leading commercial power and the biggest single market in the world, and it is also the world's leading exporter of goods and services, sustaining 31 million jobs in Europe, 67% more than in the mid-1990s.

Changing context: Members pointed out that the international context has changed profoundly since the Trade for All strategy was published in 2015 and that new trade challenges and concrete tasks now need to be addressed. They are concerned to see the rise of some protectionist practices that are incompatible with WTO rules, around the world and reiterated support for an open, fair, balanced, sustainable, and rules-based trading system.

They noted the growing economic importance of Asia and of the USAs gradual withdrawal on the trade front, generating uncertainty for trade internationally. The Commission is called on to adapt its trade policy to address these developments and to be more responsive and responsible, while at the same time establishing a longer-term strategy.

The report emphasised that the United Kingdoms departure from the EU will have consequences for internal and external trade and called on the Commission to take immediate steps to anticipate the impact of Brexit on the Unions trade policy and to present in a timely manner an impact assessment that includes different options for future trade relations so as to ensure continuity in the implementation of EU trade policy and relations with third countries and also ways of finding a solution as regards common commitments in the WTO.

The report stressed that reciprocity must be a pillar of Union trade policy while taking into account the need for asymmetries with developing countries when it is relevant and preferential treatment provisions for least-developed nations.

Cross-cutting measures to implement a trade policy that benefits everyone: Members called for trade policy implementation to become an integral component of the Unions trade strategy. They called on the Commission to take stock of the human and financial resources currently available, with a view to improving the preparation of trade agreements for adoption by the co-legislators and the way that trade policy is implemented, and asked that a special trade policy implementation monitoring and continuous evaluation service be set up within the Commission, reporting also to Parliament.

Commissions first Report on Implementation of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs): while welcoming the publication by the Commission of the first report on implementation of FTAs, Members asked the Commission to continue publishing the report annually. It insisted that the Commission should conduct more in-depth comprehensive studies on the implementation of the Union's free trade agreements.

Members welcomed the announced introduction of implementation roadmaps for all trade agreements and called on the Commission to set out the intended objectives and specific criteria on which to base a clear evaluation, such as the state of progress on the removal of non-tariff barriers, the utilisation rate of preferences and of quotas, or the situation with regard to regulatory cooperation and the progress in terms of trade and sustainable development. They expect the implementation roadmaps to be transmitted to Parliament in parallel with the official referral and asked that the state of progress with the roadmaps be incorporated into the annual report on implementation of FTAs.

Specific Common Commercial Policy provisions for SMEs: the report called on Commission to evaluate the entire toolkit for SMEs, with a view to developing a more integrated overall approach and a real SME internationalisation strategy, supporting them in becoming exporters. Members asked for more legal and administrative support to be made available for SMEs thinking of exporting to foreign markets.

Public procurement market access and of the protection of geographical indications: Members noted that the protection of geographical indications is one of the Unions offensive points in trade agreement negotiations.

The report on implementation of FTAs showed that certain partners are not complying with provisions on the protection of geographical indications. Given that the Unions public procurement markets are the most open in the world, Members are concerned at certain partners non-compliance with EU FTAs provisions on public procurement market access, to the detriment of EU companies, and at the very limited access to public procurement markets in certain third countries. The Commission is asked to work to secure greater access to third countries public procurement markets.

Promotion of EU values: Members recalled that the common commercial policy must contribute to the promotion of the values for which the Union stands and to the pursuit of the aims listed in Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union, including the consolidation of democracy and the rule of law, respect for human rights, as well as fundamental rights and freedoms, equality, respect for human dignity and the protection of the environment and of social rights. They also reaffirmed their support for the inclusion in all future trade agreements of ambitious provisions on combating corruption within the Union's exclusive competence.

Transparency and access to information: Members took note of the Commissions work on transparency and called on the Commission to conduct negotiations as transparently as possible, fully respecting best practice as established in other negotiations.

Lastly, they called on the Commission and Member States to develop a proper strategy for communication about trade policy and about each agreement and to publish all negotiating mandates.