



EP(18)18

Brussels, 27 February 2018

EU fishing industry determined to preserve and strengthen the partnership with Morocco despite European Court of Justice ruling

- Press release -

The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) has ruled today that the Fisheries Agreement concluded between the EU and Morocco is valid in so far as it is not applicable to Western Sahara and to its adjacent waters. Considering that around 94% of the catches under the Fisheries Agreement takes place in these waters, this judicial decision clearly disregards the importance of the agreement for the fisheries sector. The EU fishing fleet is nonetheless resolved to continue to strengthen the cooperation and business relations with our strategic neighbour country since the Fisheries Agreement proved to bring about socio-economic benefits for both parties, particularly for the local population in Western Sahara. In this respect, Europêche calls on both parties to negotiate a new Fisheries Agreement.

Over the past few weeks, both the European and Moroccan fishing industries have been stressing the socio-economic importance for both parties of the current fishing protocol between the European Union and the Kingdom of Morocco. The current agreement is in force since July 2014 and will expire on 14 July 2018 and negotiations for a renewal of the agreement were scheduled, pending the outcome of the CJEU ruling.

Europêche recalls that according to the UN legal service (Correll doctrine), exploitation of the resources of a non-self-governing territory such as the Western Sahara is not contrary to International Law, provided it is done for the benefit of its population. This interpretation was further underpinned by the Legal Service of the European Parliament, which back in 2009 observed that if it could not be said that the Fisheries Agreement is, as such, contrary to the principles of international law; the implementation of the SFPA would determine if the principles of international law concerning the rights of the people of Western Sahara will or will not be respected.

The reality shows that these principles have indeed been fully respected, since thanks to the Fisheries Agreement the EU contributed €30 million per year, of which €16 million corresponds to fishing access rights and €14 million to sectoral support. 66% of the latter financial envelope (€9.24 million) has been allocated to the Western Sahara regions Dakhla-Oued Eddahab and Laâyoune-Sakia-El Hamra. On top of this, there is as well the contribution of the ship-owners in terms of license fees which amounts to €10 million.

According to Javier Garat, President of Europêche: *“The current EU-Morocco Fisheries Agreement not only guarantees respect for international law and human rights, but has also been beneficial for both parties. This agreement has contributed to improve the sustainable management of fish resources in these rich fishing grounds and is crucial for the activity of up to 126 European vessels, 700 fishermen and 3.500 workers ashore. In terms of food security, the agreement allows to catch 83,000 tonnes per year, worth €80 million, which represents 5.6% of the total catches in the area. As reported by the European Commission, local*

communities in Western Sahara have been clearly benefiting from the EU fishing activities, landings and investments. We are committed to continue creating wealth and employment under the future fisheries agreement.”

Europêche represents the fisheries sector in Europe. Currently, the Association comprises 10 national organisations of fishing enterprises from the following 8 EU Member States: DE, ES, FR, IT, MT, NL, LV, PL.

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