



SOL's comments on the debate on ratification of Ghana's interim EPA in the EU Parliament

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These comments are made on Marc Maes's transmission of the debate of 30 November 2016 in the EU Parliament which ratified in plenary the Ghanaian Interim EPA on December 1st

On Wednesday 30 November the EPP rapporteur sent an e-mail to all MEPs with the following message.

Dear colleagues,

I hear that there are many members considering to vote against giving consent to the EU-Ghana Stepping Stone Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) in the votes tomorrow. Colleagues calling for the EP to vote against the EPA do so with concerns for citizens of Ghana. As the rapporteur for this consent, let me remind you that our role is to represent the citizens of the European Union.

Ghana is a democracy and the position of the elected representatives in the Parliament of Ghana is crystal clear. Their parliament, across political lines, unanimously voted in favour of this agreement, because they believe that this agreement will benefit the people of Ghana. Should you have any doubt about this fact, let me refer to the attached letter sent by the Foreign minister of Ghana, H.E. Hanna Tetteh. Let me quote from her letter:

"We believe that when it comes to determining the matter of what is in our best national interest, as the elected representatives of the people of Ghana, the Parliament of the Republic of Ghana has both the legitimacy and the mandate to make that determination and not any other third party, irrespective of however well-intentioned such a third party may be" and "I think it would be inappropriate for anyone to suggest that we do not have the capacity to assess what is in the best interest of our country".

[Of course but the Ghanaian MEPs and Government have been misled by the European Commission's fraudulent behaviour which did not circulate several assessment reports concluding on the negative impacts of the EPA for the whole WA including for Ghana and did not apply Article 16 of the WA EPA and Article 17 of Ghana's iEPA on the MFN clause, compelling the EU to "grant the West Africa Party (and Ghanaian Party) any more favourable tariff treatment that it grants to a third Party if the European Union Party becomes party to a preferential agreement with the third Party in question after the signing of this Agreement". That is to grant the same duty-free access to the EU for the most important Ghanaian exports – canned tuna; cocoa paste, butter and powder; pineapples; unwrought aluminium – as it has done in its tariff offers to Canada in CETA, to the US in TTIP and to the 3 Andean Countries and 6 Central American countries (except for unwrought aluminium where they pay only 1% on code 76011000 instead of the MFN 3% that Ghana would have to pay under GSP or GSP+ and only 2% on code 76012020 and 76012080 instead of the MFN 6% that Ghana would have to pay under GSP or GSP+). As for bananas Ghana should not have to pay the MNF duty of 127 €/t under GSP or GSP+ but at most the duties that the Andean and Central American countries are paying after their FTAs with the EU: from 111 €/t in 2015 to 75 €/t from 2020 on (see the details in SOL's paper: "*The signing of the EPAs and interim EPAs was extorted by the European Commission's fraudulent behaviour*" (<http://www.sol-asso.fr/analyses-politiques-agricoles-jacques-b/>)).

There are suggestions on alternative trade regimes but they are WTO incompatible and Ghana will face high tariffs when exporting to the EU, something that would severely hurt their local economy.

[Clearly neither the EU GSP+ nor a WTO waiver to renew a preferential trade with Sub-Saharan countries as the US has got first in 2000 and then in 2015 for ten more years for AGOA, with the EU formal consent of the EU Council and Parliament, are WTO incompatible]

>>> In response I wrote the following to our Flemish MEP's on Thursday 1 December:

Dear MEP

Yesterday you received a mail from your colleague Christofer Fjellner with regard to the vote on the Ghana interim EPA that will take in plenary today. In this mail he asks you to vote yes.

May we ask you to cast a vote of protest instead, against the pressure that the European Commission has used to obtain trade agreements from the ACP countries in general and Ghana in particular.

In his mail Fjellner made reference to a letter from the Ghanaian minister of Foreign Affairs Hanna Tetteh in which she stresses that the Ghana iEPA has been endorsed unanimously by the Ghana government and parliament and that this sovereign choice should be respected. She also stressed throughout her letter that ratifying the iEPA is the best way to secure the continuity of the current exports to the EU and that it puts Ghana on the same footing as its competitors Ivory Coast. She mentions threats of relocation to Ivory Coast to underline that point.

In her letter she also mentions that ratifying the iEPA has been suggested by the European Commission which has told Ghana that necessary steps toward ratification had to be taken in order to avoid the loss of preferential market access to the EU.

In this sense the letter underlines the effect of the pressure put by the European Commission and the export sector and it confirms the preservation of the current exports to the EU as the main consideration for ratifying the EPA. Precisely this has been the drama of the EPAs of the past 15 years. Under pressure from the EU many ACP-countries have chosen to avoid immediate short term pains while leaving concerns about potential long term negative effects of import competition, competition on regional markets, fiscal revenue losses and complications for regional integration for later.

It was EU Chief Negotiator Sandra Gallina who at the INTA meeting of 31 August was the first to ask respect for the "sovereign choice" of the 5 ACP countries that had yielded to the threat of the loss of preferences over the summer.

In the given circumstances ACP countries, including Ghana, have made the choice that they considered in their best immediate interests. But this does not mean that the European Commission does not deserve criticism for having put ACP countries in these circumstances, as well as for having put LDC countries in a situation where they have accepted reciprocal trade liberalization in order to save regional integration and the preferential market access of their non-LDC neighbours. The European Commission could have offered alternatives but chose not to do so. It could have given internal consultation processes more time but chose to unilaterally impose a deadline. The European Parliament did not even get a chance to reject or alter the deadline, as the effects of it had already materialised.

A "No vote" today is not a vote against the sovereign choice of Ghana, but a vote of protest against the way in which the European Commission has been handling the EPA negotiations for 15 years and the threats that she has uttered so many times.

[As I wrote in my quoted last paper, Article 49 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties states: "If a State has been induced to conclude a treaty by the fraudulent conduct of another negotiating State, the State may invoke the fraud as invalidating its consent to be bound by the treaty" (http://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/1_1_1969.pdf).]

>>> Helmut Scholz, the GUE shadow rapporteur send the following response to Fjellner to all MEPs:

Dear Christofer, Dear all,

I am afraid, the information you have provided is misleading.

Firstly, it is against European interest to give consent to this very old EPA text, as successful West African regional integration is absolutely in our European interest. This outdated agreement with Ghana, however, is detrimental to regional integration. It was negotiated before the negotiations with West Africa as a region were concluded, and it lacks behind in many aspects. Furthermore, it was negotiated before the common external tariff agreement of the region entered into force on 01. January 2015, and provides divergent tariffs instead. Applying this old EPA would mean to break the rules Ghana has agreed in the meantime with its own region.

Secondly, rejecting consent would mean that Ghana can keep access to the EU market under the Market Access Regulation, as it has done its best to ratify an EPA. Just like Kenya.

Thirdly, the proposed alternative to this EPA, GSP plus, is certainly not against WTO rules, as you very well know as our rapporteur for the most recent review of the EU's GSP architecture.

Dear colleagues, I would hence like to take this opportunity to encourage you all to join MEPs from across the board of political groups and reject consent to a bad and outdated free trade agreement, that is not in the interest of EU citizens nor West African citizens.

>>>>> Here are the short speeches that were delivered in the plenary assembly of the European Parliament the day before the Ghana iEPA vote.

The Trade Commissioner and the Rapporteur play the “This was Ghana’s choice card” (while we know they were holding a gun against its head).

Christofer Fjellner, rapporteur (in favour) . – Mr President, this trade deal with Ghana is very important. It is especially important for Ghana. In 2015, Ghanaian exports to the European Union accounted for EUR 2.4 billion. 46% of Ghana’s exports was to the European Union [No, only 29.6% in 2013 (27.4% for EU28-UK), last year available on ITC TradeMap, 28.8% in 2012 (25.6% for EU28-UK) and 26% in 2011 (24% for EU28-UK)].

The consequences of voting ‘no’ to this agreement, of not ratifying this agreement, would be dramatic for Ghana. They would face a wall of EU tariffs. Even though the average tariff for Ghana would be around 8.13% – it might not sound much but it is a prohibitive tariff level; for many products in areas where Ghana has a lot of exports, the tariffs are even higher. For bananas, for example, they would have most favoured nation duties of 19.7%, and for prepared tuna 20.7%. The consequences of saying ‘no’ to this would be dramatic for Ghana.

[But all these figures would be wrong of the EU complied with the MFN clause as it should grant to Ghana (IC and Nigeria) the same duty free imports than in its FTAs with Andean and Central American countries, CETA and TTIP. The only duties that Ghana would have to pay with the GSP or GSP+ are those on bananas which would drop from €5.660 million in 2015 to €3.824 million for the EU28 imports and in fact from €2.492 million in 2015 to €1.684 million in 2020 for EU28-UK imports after the Brexit as UK has imported 55.8% of the EU28 bananas from Ghana in 2015. The duty on bananas would then drop from 13.6% in ad valorem equivalent in 2015 to 9.2% from 2020 on, far from the alleged 19.7% by Christopher Fjellner.]

And why would they face this wall of tariffs? The answer is simple: because the current trade regime the EU has with Ghana – the Market Access Regulation – is running out in 2016. That is the reason why we have to take this decision now. And then one might ask: why does the current regime run out in 2016? The answer to that is actually pretty simple: it is because we in this House decided so. With a broad majority. I remember negotiating with my good friend and colleague David Martin, on specifically that date, to say that this existing trade regime should run out in 2016. But the thing with this trade agreement is that it is actually a pretty good agreement. It is a good agreement that we present instead of the current regime. Ghana will get duty-free access to the European Union from day one. 75% of Ghanaian tariff lines will be liberalised, yes, but they will be liberalised over 15 years.

People talk about the fact that we need to have asymmetrical agreements, taking into account that they do not have the same level of development in many areas and competitiveness. I would say if this is not asymmetrical, taking that into account, I cannot imagine what would be. They get free access: from day one, 75% of their lines will be liberalised, but over 15 years. It is

worth repeating. And the tariffs removed in Ghana are mainly things like industrial machines, pumps, generators, turbines, certain vehicles, boats, aircraft, cars, certain chemicals – all of those are used as input to Ghanaian industries and not produced locally. Eliminating import duties on these products will reduce the cost of imports for local businesses and increase their competitiveness.

What we didn't liberalise is mainly agriculture, the sensitive stuff, things like chicken and other meat, tomatoes, onions, sugar, tobacco, beer, clothes, wheat, frozen fish, some industrial things like industrial plastics. We did take their needs into account.

[What is strange is that it appears that it was the EU that decided which products Ghana should exclude from liberalization, an assertion not in line with the following statement that "we should let Ghana decide what is good or bad for Ghana".]

And there are safeguards in this agreement to protect the Ghanaian side.

[Unfortunately the EPA safeguards are lower than the ECOWAS safeguards which work also for lower import prices when the EPA safeguards are only available for surges in imported quantities.]

But not only that. The reason I speak about Ghana now and what this means to Ghana is no serious actors have questioned that this will have any serious implications on the European Union and our trade policy. Those who are criticising say it is bad for Ghana, but we should let Ghana decide what is good or bad for Ghana, and Ghana is a democracy. The government and parliament have with broad majority supported this, and why should we then reject it?

Let me therefore finish by quoting the Minister of Foreign Affairs from Ghana, Hanna Tetteh, in her letter to the Committee on International Trade, where she says: 'We believe, when it comes to determine the matter of what is in our best national interest, we, as elected representatives of the people of Ghana, the Parliament of the Republic of Ghana, have both the legitimacy and the mandate to make that determination, and not to any other third party, irrespective of however well intended such third party decisions might be'. Don't act as new imperialists here. Listen and respect the people of Ghana, and let them decide if it is good for them.

Cecilia Malmström, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, I would like to thank the rapporteur and the shadow rapporteurs for the work they have been doing.

This is actually the third time this year that I have had the opportunity to discuss with you in plenary the agenda of our Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with Africa. I came in February, we had a debate on an oral question on the sustainable development provisions of the EU West Africa EPA and we had a good debate in December on the SADC EPA, following which you gave your assent, so that has now entered into force and I thank you for that. We are now working with our friends in SADC countries with great enthusiasm to put that into practice and to make it to function as intended.

Throughout Africa we are moving to the implementation phase as more and more African parliaments are giving their ratification to the EPAs. The Trade for All communication recognised that fulfilling the promise of these agreements will be a major deliverable for the next few years. It is now for us and our partners to fully use trade as a tool for growth, sustainable development and employment.

In West Africa a large majority of countries have signed the regional EPA which, as you know, ultimately intends to foster and strengthen the regional integration process in that part of Africa.

We are committed to the conclusion of that EPA together with the regional organisation. But, while that process is ongoing, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire decided to keep up their economic development by preserving their access to the EU market.

They did so by reviving the best option available at the moment, an interim bilateral EPA. The interim EPA with Ghana remains compatible with our objective of achieving a regional EPA which will, of course, ultimately replace this one. We are continuing to work hard to get a West Africa EPA in place for the near future but today let us focus on the one we have on the table with Ghana.

[What does mean "*We are continuing to work hard to get a West Africa EPA in place for the near future*" when Sandra Gallina, the Head of DG trade for EPAs, concurred with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ghana on October 13, 2016 during the INTA Committee's debate on Ghana's interim EPA, that the European Commission is not prepared to renegotiate the regional EPA? That DG Trade and Ghana are not prepared to change some provisions in the regional EPA is not the best way to lead Nigeria to sign as its reluctance is based on its view that some provisions have first to be changed before it can sign. So that this "hard work" of the DG trade can only be interpreted as a series of pressures on Nigeria or even pure lies as the one made by the EU ambassador to Nigeria, Michel Arrion, saying that the EU pledged to finance the PAPED to the tune of €6.5 billion every 5 years until 2035 (<http://www.bilaterals.org/?eu-threatens-to-stop-market-access>). An empty promise since the Cotonou Agreement expires in 2020 and it is not clear whether it will be renewed and with what budget, and in any case not until 2035, since the EU's overall budget is only programmed up to 2020.]

It is a self standing, WTO compatible trade agreement of unlimited duration. It immediately guarantees Ghana's exporters duty free, quota free access to the EU market.

[Maybe but, without EPA, Ghana, as well as Ivory Coast and Nigeria, would also have duty free access to the EU, except for bananas, if the EU complied with the MFN clause to grant to them the same duty-free access granted to Andean and Central American countries and in CETA and TTIP.]

The agreement protects local development through safeguard clauses and a limited and gradual liberalisation focusing on equipment and inputs. Many provisions deal with support for Ghanaian producers to meet EU standards, which is, of course, good for farmers and for the transformation of agricultural products. The EPA also contains cooperation provisions to accompany Ghana during the implementation of the agreement.

I would also like to highlight that the EPA is anchored in the provisions of the Cotonou Agreement. This includes the essential elements and sustainable development objectives, its provisions on labour, environment, democratic principles and human rights. This is very important to remember.

When I came here in February – I think it was in Strasbourg actually – I committed to having sustainable development as a strong element of the implementation of all our EPAs. It is true that this bilateral EPA with Ghana has been negotiated with 2018 in view and it does not contain a sustainable development chapter on top of what we have in the Cotonou Agreement. But it is linked to the Cotonou Agreement and this does not mean that we are not active in this area.

We are committed to engaging in a dialogue on sustainable development in the EPA Joint Committee that will be created by this Agreement. The same goes for involving civil society.

There are provisions in the EPA that give us a hook for putting this into place. For example it is foreseen that civil society organisations can participate as observers in the EPA Joint Committee, and I can guarantee you that Ghana is very committed to doing this.

Ghana is one of the thriving democracies in the region. They have a well developed civil society in place. That is not always the case in the region, but in Ghana it is. The Foreign Affairs Minister, Hanna Tetteh, made it clear when she came to the Committee on International Trade and she said to you – and I spoke to her as well – that they have already started to engage civil society and they are committed to sustainable development at the highest level.

This is about companies and about people. A substantial part of Ghana's trade is done with the EU. Ghana's exports to the EU amounted to EUR 2.6 billion last year. On cocoa and bananas they are heavily dependent on us, and non-traditional exports, such as processed tuna, depend on the EU market even more. Those exports contribute to building local value chains which involve SMEs and create jobs, directly and indirectly. So this provides a solid environment for local and foreign investors, which should not be underestimated because when European investors settle in Ghana, they increase the share of formal employment, which ensures more protection for Ghanaian workers as well.

Finally, I believe that the successful implementation of the EPAs with Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and other African countries will be the best proof that our trade responds to the many challenges faced with our partners. It is also the best way to convince remaining partners to opt for the regional EPA, demonstrating on the ground the benefits of deepening trade relationships with us. **I hope there will be strong support for this when you vote on it tomorrow in the plenary. [note from Marc: which she did not get!!]**

Jaroslav Wałęsa, on behalf of the PPE Group (in favour) . – Madam President, first of all I would like to congratulate the rapporteur on his great work and I would like to support his recommendation to give consent to this agreement, which opens up the door to its provisional application. West Africa is our largest trade partner in sub-Saharan Africa. At the same time, the European Union contributes to economic growth and development in the region and is the main export market for West African agriculture and fisheries products.

The deal on the Stepping Stone Economic Partnership Agreement with Ghana and Ivory Coast ensures a contractual safety net warranting a duty-free quota, free access to the EU market, and asymmetric gradual opening of Ghana's market to EU goods until the regional agreement comes into force. Moreover, the interim agreement includes provisions on development cooperation, trade defence and trade facilitation measures including sanitary and phytosanitary measures.

Furthermore I wish to call for swift implementation of this economic partnership agreement. If it comes into place without excessive delay, any discrepancies in tariff liberalisation schedules and tariff lines would be solved without any need for additional adaptation to the regional processes, which is highly advisable.

Jude Kirton-Darling, on behalf of the S&D Group (against). – Madam President, in the words of our rapporteur Christofer Fjellner's draft report, this agreement with Ghana is incomplete and outdated. We are only compelled to consider it because the Commission has failed to deliver a sustainable strategy for West Africa. To build a real economic partnership with Ghana and the rest of West Africa, we need far more than traditional trade liberalisation

and old-fashioned power politics. The content of this agreement is poor, the methods employed to conclude it are far worse.

We have a duty to be coherent with our global sustainable development goals, and this agreement is not about value-based trade. On the contrary, it undermines our values by not even mentioning them in the core of the agreement. Finally, there are alternatives available to ensure market access for Ghanaian exporters, and no reason for us to rush through an interim solution, which could become very quickly a permanent bad deal for the EU and Ghana.

Christofer Fjellner, rapporteur, blue-card question.– Ms Kirton-Darling, if you are to quote me and my report would you be so kind as to quote me correctly the next time, and not only say that I think this agreement is insufficient, but that it is insufficient compared to the final general regional Economic Partnership Agreement. Because if you cut me like that, you actually lie.

Jude Kirton-Darling (S&D), blue-card answer. – I quoted directly from the draft report which was tabled in the Committee on International Trade (INTA). We are talking about the EU-Ghana Interim Economic Partnership Agreement and not about the Regional Economic Partnership Agreement, and those were your words in relation to the Interim Economic Partnership Agreement.

Helmut Scholz, im Namen der GUE/NGL-Fraktion. (against)– (In German, here is a revised google translation) Madam President, Madam Commissioner, you know that I acknowledge the many positive aspects of your revised trading strategy, particularly as regards the higher significance of fair trade and the enforceability of mandatory sustainability chapters know. However, the text of this old EPA, an interim EPA with Ghana, is a ghost from the old days. We prohibit the country export taxes on unprocessed raw materials. Why? West Africa has agreed on the 1 January 2015 on common external tariffs. This old EPA has other rates. Where is our respect for regional integration? After a Brexit, the imports of the EU from Ghana to 32% would be lowered. How do we offset that? Ghana was forced to the signing of an agreement, that corresponds no longer to European and African modern interests. We must make proposals that respond to the issues of the third and fourth decade of our century today - in the interest of the people of Ghana, Africa and the EU. My group will [not] therefore vote this outdated and non-regional EPA.

Adam Szejnfeld (PPE). (in favour) (Google translation from a Polish original) The agreement on economic partnership, which today we are talking about, but in the wider aspect of the agreements on trade, free trade, services, investments, these are examples of how well developed countries – rich countries, such as the Member States of the European Union-can work with other poorer countries, not only in terms of economic, economical, not only develop this kind of agreement to increase trade but also to promote the development of its partners. Ghana, as many other countries – it especially worthy of the support of the European Union. This is one of the best performing countries in Africa, not only economic, but also social, respectable – when it comes to context-civil society, for democratic principles. I hope that we will see this too soon, during the election in that State. The agreement, which we say is definitely not ideal, it is a solution, anyway, but if we take it and implement in life, will surely be a good part of the cooperation between the European Union and Ghana and West Africa in the future.

David Martin (S&D). (in favour) – Madam President, while I of course acknowledge that the interim EPA does not fully meet my Group’s requirements for a free trade agreement –

especially given the absence of a trade and sustainable development chapter – as we have just heard, we should remind ourselves that we are talking about Ghana: a vibrant, constitutional democracy, committed to implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals, sadly almost an exception in Africa. Plus, this is only an interim EPA which will be applied until the regional one, ECOWAS, comes into force. This is an agreement that the Ghanaian Government and Parliament strongly want, as they believe it is good for their people. In fact, it was ratified unanimously by the 275 Ghanaian MPs, so who are we to say this is not good for them?

The current preferential trade regime MAR is not WTO-compatible and will cease to apply sooner or later. Ghana needs a more stable framework to attract and maintain foreign investment. Ghana does not want to keep the uncertain MAR preferences, does not want to apply for the less-favourable GSP+; they want this agreement, and we should respect their choice. I want to stand by the Ghanaian people, and therefore I will vote for this agreement.

Nicola Caputo (S&D). (against)– Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I share the European Union's trade strategy aimed at helping countries in financial difficulty. The free trade agreement with Ghana, will allow the African country to have access to the European market and the stability needed for new investments and job creation. There is however to be noted, the fundamental inadequacy of activating an agreement reached in 2007, compared to the changed conditions. The absence of a regional dimension and of rules of origin, as well as an incomplete institutional framework, make this understanding a workaround, waiting to establish partnership with the whole West African region. And precisely in view of this partnership, I would like to stress the importance of the introduction of safeguard measures in order to restore the duties in the case that an increase in imports threatens to disrupt the economy of an area, such as fruit and vegetables, too often sacrificed from agreements concluded with African countries.

Notis Marias (ECR) (Google translation from the Greek original) (The only ECR that voted against, for protectionist reasons) Madam President, another trade liberalization agreement with an African country, this means scrapping the farmers of southern Europe and strengthening European industries course North, which will export products. The report also says that the Ghana mainly exports fruits and fish. Secondly, in Ghana there is child labour, especially in agriculture. What imports Ghana though? Ships, vehicles, therefore products which relate to the northern countries, which export. From then on the 35% of European exports to Ghana have already been liberalised. This is the real situation. And if you want European farmers to export to Ghana? Then, as the report says, the Ghana may exclude certain sensitive agricultural products. Finally, I want contracts and arrangements for immigration matters, to be bound by these countries in the field of migration, because thousands of their nationals are coming to Europe.

Maria Arena (S&D). (Google translation from the French original)(against) – Madam President, the Ghana EPA submitted to us today was agreed in 2007 and it was signed only nine years later. Why this long delay? Because of negotiations for a regional agreement. These regional negotiations include an important country, Nigeria, which is the leading economic power. Today, while we should put all our energy to go to the regional agreement, you choose to focus on interim bilateral agreements such as the one with Ghana. These interim agreements, Mrs. Jude Kirton-Darling, has said, are outdated. So rather than putting our energy into outdated agreements, as they have been presented to us today, I plead that we should not vote this interim agreement and that we are working so that the regional agreement could succeed. Let's put our energy in this regional agreement, rather than killing it with an interim agreement.

Cecilia Malmström, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, I would like to thank the Honourable Members for this debate. I believe that this interim agreement has the potential to provide growth, stability and development for Ghana.

Let us be honest, this is not something that will be of major importance to make the European economy grow. We are not doing this for the European economy. It will have marginal effects on the European economy. We are doing this to support the development, the diversification of the industry and the stability of a country like Ghana, a rare democracy in a region where that is not always the case. Ghana's commitment to the regional EPA is very strong. They want to integrate and to develop in a transparent manner. As the Foreign Minister, who we have been quoting here today, said in the letter to you, she is very committed to making this happen, and she has already started to work with the civil society organisations and will continue to jointly work with them.

There are indeed alternative options to the EPA that have been voiced, but they are not realistic. They do not provide the same advantages to Ghana as the EPA does. Some of them are not even WTO-compatible. But this agreement is something that Ghana wants. They have chosen it and they have decided on it in a parliamentary vote by their democratically elected Parliament. I am sure you have also read the letter where the Foreign Minister, Ms Tetteh, explains this very clearly.

It is true that we are working on a regional agreement but, as you know, there are some countries blocking this. Why should Ghana be blocked while we are waiting for this to happen? It will happen someday. We are working very hard on it, but we should not punish a country which wants to cooperate with us, which wants to be a close ally and which has chosen this path.

The regional EPA is a way to overcome the challenges regionally. We are working on this. It is of course up to West Africa to decide about the future, but for the moment that agreement is not available. So let us work together for a successful interim bilateral EPA with an important country which wants to engage with us and, at the same time, continue our advocacy, together with the West African regional organisation, for a regional EPA.

Christofer Fjellner, rapporteur. (in favour) – Madam President, I entered the plenary of the European Parliament, but listening to some colleagues from the S&D on my left, it sounds as if they wish to be members of the Ghanaian parliament instead, as they want to vote against it because they think it's bad for Ghana. Didn't you hear the democratically elected Foreign Minister of Ghana saying they think it is good and they want it? Don't you think that they're legitimate when taking that decision, or don't you think they really understand it? Because it has to be one of those two.

And if you win, if you manage to kill this trade agreement, forcing them to meet the tariff wall of the European Union, how can you explain to the poor farmers of Ghana that you thought you were in a better position than their elected representatives to actually choose the destiny of their future? Will you be able to look at yourselves in the mirror after doing that?

[Fair enough! But would you be pleased to look at yourself in the mirror when you will actually kill the Ghanaian poor people (not only farmers) by not complying with the MFN clause forcing the EU to grant to Ghana (and other non LDCs) the same duty free treatment given in several other EU FTAs, if they do not sign the EPA?]