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Additional Protocol to the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an Association between the EC and Israel on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products (ACAA)

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

International Trade Committee of the European Parliament

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EU and Israel are important partners. Our relations are rich and diverse; and are valuable for both sides. We are ready to develop relations within the Euro-Mediterranean EU-Israel Association Agreement, and through continuing implementation of the EU-Israel European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan that was jointly adopted in 2005.

This is by no means a process started recently. We need to go back ten years - at a Euro-Med Trade Ministerial meeting in Toledo, to be precise. Back then, an Action Plan on Trade and Investment Facilitation was adopted. A year later, in another Action Plan, Euro-med Trade Ministers meeting in Palermo triggered detailed work on approximation of legislation for all Mediterranean partners in the field of standards, technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures. Israel is one of other countries in the region showing interest in bringing its legislation and certification facilities up to EU levels. For example, we are presently examining the possibility of accelerating preparations for ACAA negotiations with Tunisia with a view to launching talks soon.

Under the European Neighbourhood Policy, that is, in the 2005 Action Plan, the EU and Israel adopted a mutual commitment to "accelerate progress towards bilateral negotiations leading to an Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of industrial products (ACAA)". Five years later, in May 2010, the Council signed the ACAA agreement.

Again, I would like to restate the ambition to extend ACAAs to more than one country in our Southern Neighbourhood. Indeed, other Action Plans developed in 2004-2005, such as with Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, also contained similar provisions, and therefore the ACAA with Israel is not an exceptional privilege. It fits squarely within the boundaries of our existing political and commercial relations, not only with Israel but also with other countries in the region.

Discussions on a possible "upgrade" of relations started only in 2008, when the 2005 EU-Israel Action Plan was about to expire and when the negotiations on the ACAA had already been launched. Thus, the commitment to conclude an ACAA pre-dates, and is independent from, discussions on an "upgrade".

Following Operation Cast Lead, EU Member States proposed in 2009 that "the current Action Plan remain the reference document for our relations" without pursuing any process of upgrading our relations with Israel. This approach has been strictly applied and we have continued bilateral activities in the framework of the 2005 Action Plan, including the conclusion of the ACAA Protocol.

Now, before I proceed, an explanation. What is an ACAA? It is a trade agreement that seeks to eliminate technical barriers to trade in industrial products. It works like a mutual recognition agreement, whereby we agree that, in this case, Israeli pharmaceutical products are produced according to the same standards of the EU and our products are recognised as compliant with Israeli standards.

In practice, once in force, the ACAA allows all covered products to enter the respective markets of the parties without additional testing and conformity assessment procedures. What are the benefits? Economic operators on both sides gain some time in accessing respective markets and save some costs. European and Israeli consumers gain choice and a price advantage.

In a nutshell, the ACAA is no more than a technical agreement, covering technical and not tariff barriers to trade as already explained.

At present, one sector is included: good manufacturing practice (GMP) for pharmaceutical products. Israel has taken over the EU's sector-relevant technical legislation and participates in the European organisations in the sector covered by it.

All of this information is contained in the Annex to the text submitted for European Parliament consent.

The ACAA is a Protocol to the EU-Israel Association Agreement. Therefore, it has the same territorial application as Article 83 of the Association Agreement. From an EU perspective, the territory of Israel does not comprise the territories that have been placed under Israeli administration after 1967. The ACAA does not change this understanding.

As agreed with the INTA secretariat, let me take also this opportunity to highlight, in the framework of our Structured Dialogue, a number of files that will merit further attention this year. Besides our cooperation on a number of on-going files on the legislative front, I expect that the Commission will be in a position to present to you and to Council a proposal on a Market Access Scheme for Public Procurement by the end of March.

I also hope to submit a proposal soon this year regarding a retaliation instrument for WTO Dispute Settlement. If adopted, this will provide the necessary tools to ensure swift retaliation when this is necessary to safeguard the EU's interests and induce compliance by our trade partners. During the first half of this year, a proposal should also be submitted to you and the Council regarding the financial responsibility for investor-to-state disputes so as to render the EU a more credible actor on investment policy.

Throughout the year we will also be working on possible ways to modernise our Trade Defence Instruments, building on an independent study and a broad public consultation. Any resulting legislative proposal should be ready later this year or early 2013.

I look forward to continue our cooperation on our different trade files and am ready to further discuss the EU-Israel ACAA.

Thank you very much.