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EU-Morocco fisheries agreement/Western Sahara

Democratic process muzzled as MEPs block referral of controversial agreement to ECJ

The European Parliament today voted against a proposal to refer the controversial EU-Morocco fisheries agreement (1) to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) to assess its compatibility with the EU treaties and international law. The initiative was launched by Catalan Green MEP Raül Romeva and would have been the first time this new power of the EP has been exercised (1). The Greens strongly condemned the outcome of the vote, with **Raül Romeva** stating:

"Today's vote represents a sorry chapter for the European Parliament, as MEPs voted to muzzle the democratic process by blocking the referral of this controversial agreement to the European Court of Justice. The consent of the European Parliament is required to conclude this agreement and, given the considerable concerns with the legality of the EU-Morocco fisheries agreement, exercising this new power of the EP to refer the agreement to the ECJ was a common sense step to take. The failure to do so reflects badly on the European Parliament and its role to defend democracy and basic rights."

"Politically, the agreement is a blot on the EU's foreign policy, but its compatibility with international law is also highly questionable. It is nothing short of scandalous that the EU is wilfully seeking to extend this agreement, under which the Moroccan government grants fishing rights to the EU fishing fleet to fish in the waters of Western Sahara, where it has no right to do so. Ultimately, the only responsible course of action for the Commission is to revise this agreement with a view to excluding the waters of Western Sahara for which the government of Morocco has no responsibility."

(1) The EU Commission is seeking to renew the EU-Morocco fisheries agreement, which would again give the EU the right to fish in Western Saharan waters despite the fact the government of Morocco has no right to trade the resources of the non-self-governing territory of Western Sahara under international law. With the previous agreement having expired in February this year, the Commission has proposed a temporary extension. The revised agreement requires the consent of the European Parliament before being concluded.

The proposal to refer the agreement to the ECJ was rejected with 221 votes in favour, 302 against and 30 abstentions.

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