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EU vote victory for Western Sahara

EFA MEPs comment on EU Morocco Fisheries Agreement

A group of MEPs has welcomed the European Parliament's decision to reject a controversial agreement with Morocco.

In a key vote in Strasbourg, MEPs refused to extend the protocol to the EU Morocco Fisheries Agreement which undermines the status of occupied Western Sahara and is questionable under international law.

The agreement has allowed EU registered boats to continue fishing in Western Saharan waters, even though this territory has been under illegal occupation since the 1970s.

Legal advice from the UN suggested that Morocco had no right to sell access to Western Saharan waters without consulting the local population, or proving that such activity would be of benefit to local people.

MEPs are now calling on the European Commission to come up with a new agreement which recognises the rights of the people of Western Sahara to decide the future of their natural resources. The agreement is worth more than thirty five million euros.

MEPs from the European Free Alliance group in the European Parliament voted against the agreement and have long campaigned for self-determination for Western Sahara.

François Alfonsi MEP (PNC - Corsica) who spoke in the earlier debate in the European Parliament said:

"The rejection of this protocol is a strong signal, given the detrimental environmental effects on notably overfished areas. It also sends a strong signal to the Moroccan government - at a time when Southern Mediterranean countries are waking to democracy - that it needs to take the path of reform and democracy, particularly in respect of the Saharawi people."

SNP MEP and Fisheries Committee member **Ian Hudghton** (Scotland) said:

"Morocco has no right, under international law, to sell the natural resources of Western Sahara. It follows, therefore, that the EU should not be paying Morocco for fishing rights in the waters off Western Sahara."

EFA Group President and Plaid Cymru MEP **Jill Evans** (Wales) said:

"The European Parliament's legal services have concluded that the agreement is in violation of international law and a European Commission evaluation has concluded that the agreement is a waste of taxpayers' money. I therefore am very pleased with today's outcome."

N-VA MEP **Frieda Brepoels** (Flanders) welcomed the vote, saying:

"The European Parliament has sent a powerful signal to the European Commission which is negotiating a new agreement with Morocco. It is totally unacceptable for international law to be trampled upon any longer. The European Parliament will not accept an agreement that fails to recognise the rights of the people of Western Sahara including the right to self-determination. The resident Saharawi people should once again be able to benefit from their natural and most important sources of income."

SNP MEP **Alyn Smith** (Scotland) said:

"The people of Western Sahara are in the EU's backyard yet repeatedly the EU has not only ignored their plight but actively colluded with the plunder of their seas and other resources. This tragic dispute cannot be allowed to continue, and today's rejection of this flawed agreement at least shows that the Parliament is limbering up to put some action to our warm words. It is simply outrageous that some have suggested we should acquiesce with, and compound, this flagrant abuse of international law. The Parliament did a good bit of work today, but we still have a long way to go."

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