

# ***Support for fisheries deal would damage EU credibility***

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Extension of Morocco agreement must be rejected. The European Parliament will vote on a symbolically and practically very important issue next week (15 December): to grant or withhold consent to the EU fisheries agreement with Morocco (“Split over controversial fishing deal with Morocco”, 17-23 November).

Since 2009, with the adoption of the Lisbon treaty, the Parliament has had new co-decision powers over a number of policy areas, including fisheries. The question now is: how will the Parliament use these new powers, and what responsibilities should be demanded from MEPs to uphold important principles?

The vote on the Morocco agreement is a clear example of a vote where the EU risks breaching a set of fundamental principles. Yet, to our surprise, the Parliament remains divided. Both the budget and development committees are recommending the agreement be rejected, but a majority of members of the fisheries committee recommend approval.

The content of the agreement is, in short, that EU taxpayers pay Morocco €36 million per year in return for access for 119 EU vessels to the fisheries resources in “waters falling within the sovereignty or jurisdiction of the Kingdom of Morocco”. There are at least three fundamental problems with this deal.

Firstly, not all the waters covered by the agreement fall within the jurisdiction of Morocco under international law. The territory of Western Sahara has never been decolonised by Spain, and has never been recognised as a legal part of Morocco. Morocco therefore has no legal right to sell its natural resources.

According to UN legal advice, it would be able to do so only if the agreement were in accordance with the benefits and wishes of the local Saharawi people. The Moroccan government has failed to show any such benefits or wishes. In fact, Morocco has avoided this question completely, neglecting to answer questions

from the European Commission, and even declining to receive a planned delegation from the Parliament's fisheries committee.

The credibility of the EU as an important global defender of international law is at stake here, even more so in light of the Arab Spring. Morocco is selling a natural resource of an occupied territory; the EU should be ashamed even to consider buying those resources.

The second principle breached in this agreement is that any exploitation of fisheries resources in a third country must be based on a surplus of fish not used by the local population. This requirement is based on the UN Law of the Sea. In Morocco's case, there is clearly no surplus. All fish stocks but one are overfished. Evaluations suggest even local fisheries need to be cut back.

The third principle is to be careful with taxpayers' money. In this agreement, each €1 invested by the EU produces just €0.65: we actually lose money. Frankly, this is nothing else than blatant disrespect for EU taxpayers' money.

According to an independent evaluation paid for by Commission, this agreement has been an ecological, economical and social failure, and benefits the EU less than any other fisheries agreement. MEPs should join us in voting against this agreement.

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<http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/imported/support-for-fisheries-deal-would-damage-eu-credibility/72887.aspx>