

Wednesday 14 December 2016

P8\_TA(2016)0490

**EC-Uzbekistan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and bilateral trade in textiles**

**European Parliament non-legislative resolution of 14 December 2016 on the draft Council decision on the conclusion of a Protocol to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement establishing a partnership between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Uzbekistan, of the other part, amending the Agreement in order to extend the provisions of the Agreement to bilateral trade in textiles, taking account of the expiry of the bilateral textiles Agreement (16384/1/2010 — C7-0097/2011 — 2010/0323(NLE) — 2016/2226(INI))**

(2018/C 238/04)

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the draft Council decision (16384/1/2010),
  - having regard to the draft Protocol to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Uzbekistan, of the other part (16388/2010),
  - having regard to the request for consent submitted by the Council in accordance with Article 207 and Article 218(6), second subparagraph, point (a)(v), of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (C7-0097/2011),
  - having regard to its interim resolution of 15 December 2011 <sup>(1)</sup> on the draft Council decision,
  - having regard to its legislative resolution of 14 December 2016 <sup>(2)</sup> on the draft Council decision,
  - having regard to the most recent observations of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations on Uzbekistan regarding the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (Convention 105) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (Convention 182), adopted in 2015 and published in 2016 <sup>(3)</sup>,
  - having regard to Protocol No 1 on the role of National Parliaments in the European Union,
  - having regard to Protocol No 2 on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality,
  - having regard to Rule 99(1), second subparagraph of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on International Trade and the opinion of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A8-0330/2016),
- A. whereas in December 2011 the European Parliament decided to postpone its decision on consent to the EU-Uzbekistan Textiles Protocol, adopting an interim report to address allegations of the use of child and forced labour in the cotton harvest in Uzbekistan;

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ C 168 E, 14.6.2013, p. 195.

<sup>(2)</sup> Texts adopted, P8\_TA(2016)0489.

<sup>(3)</sup> Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations — Application of International Labour Standards 2016 — REPORT III (Part 1A).

**Wednesday 14 December 2016**

- B. whereas in that interim report Parliament concluded that it will only consider consent if the ILO observers have been granted access by the Uzbek authorities to undertake close and unhindered monitoring and have confirmed that concrete reforms have been implemented and have yielded substantial results in such a way that the practice of forced labour and child labour is effectively in the process of being eradicated at national, viloyat and local level;
- C. whereas Parliament has established a regular dialogue with the Commission, the EEAS, the Government of Uzbekistan, the ILO and civil society in order to monitor developments during the cotton harvest and exert pressure on all involved to achieve the end of the use of child and forced labour in Uzbekistan;
- D. whereas in 2013 the Government of Uzbekistan authorised the ILO to monitor the cotton harvest; whereas since 2013 the ILO has on several occasions undertaken monitoring, initially focused on child labour and later extended to forced labour and recruitment conditions;
- E. whereas the cooperation between the ILO and the Government of Uzbekistan has been gradually broadened, and in 2014 Uzbekistan became the first Central Asian country to agree on a Decent Work Country Programme with the ILO;
- F. whereas the most recent ILO monitoring during the 2015 cotton harvest has shown that 'the use of children in the cotton harvest has become rare, sporadic and socially unacceptable, even if ongoing vigilance is needed' <sup>(1)</sup>;
- G. whereas, according to the ILO, while awareness of forced labour in Uzbekistan is still at an early stage, surveys carried out by the ILO nonetheless indicate that most workers pick cotton voluntarily and have the possibility to refuse to do so;
- H. whereas the final ILO report on the 2016 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan will be available at the end of this year;
- I. whereas the eradication of forced and child labour in Uzbekistan is an objective but still ongoing process which requires efforts, and which needs to be further supported by the EU and the international community, including with the participation of human rights and labour rights civil society organisations;
- J. whereas the Government of Uzbekistan has adopted Action Plans to change the recruitment process for picking cotton, and has, together with employers' organizations and trade unions, promoted awareness raising and developed a feedback mechanism to prevent forced and child labour;
- K. whereas NGOs are still reporting breaches of human rights in the country, in particular in the field of the cotton harvest, where they point to massive forced mobilisation of students and public employees at cotton harvest time, as well as violations of freedom of association and expression, in particular interrogations of citizens reporting on the harvest, regular persecution and harassment of human rights defenders and civil society activists, and the blocking of international rights groups and media outlets from operating in the country;
- L. whereas the sudden death of President Islom Karimov should not have any impact on the continuity of the ongoing process of improving labour conditions in the cotton fields in Uzbekistan;
1. Stresses the importance of the action taken by the Government of Uzbekistan to authorise the ILO to monitor the cotton harvest and to engage in broad cooperation with ILO through a Decent Work Country Programme;

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<sup>(1)</sup> Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations — Application of International Labour Standards 2016 — REPORT III (Part 1A), p. 218.

Wednesday 14 December 2016

2. Welcomes the substantial progress that has been made in Uzbekistan since 2013, including the adoption of laws which prohibit the use of child labour, achieving the almost total eradication of child labour; encourages the authorities to engage further in a country-wide campaign to raise awareness in order to completely eradicate child labour;
3. Appreciates the fact that the Government of Uzbekistan is also pursuing the eradication of forced labour in cooperation with the ILO and that progress has been made; stresses, however, that subtle ways of involuntary work still exist, that this process is complex and that it requires, among other things, a reform of employment policies;
4. Is of the opinion that, because of these efforts by the Government of Uzbekistan, Parliament should give consent to the EU-Uzbekistan Textiles Protocol; is of the opinion that such consent will constitute a positive sign of encouragement to the Uzbek Government to further pursue its efforts to fully eradicate child labour and all other forms of forced labour, as well as to further strengthen cooperation with the EU;
5. Welcomes the fact that the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan joined the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) as an associate member in October 2015; stresses the role Uzbek trade unions are playing to ensure decent working conditions and protect labour rights; calls on the Uzbek Government to cooperate fully with trade unions in this direction; encourages Uzbek trade unions to step up their role in the effort fully to eradicate forced labour;
6. Is concerned about reports by independent monitors of state-led mobilisation of citizens, including the forced labour of public employees and students, in the 2016 pre-harvest work;
7. Calls on the next Uzbek president to raise a new human rights paradigm by immediately terminating the continued use of forced labour and child labour in the cotton harvest;
8. Calls on the Commission and the EEAS to provide Parliament regularly with detailed information on the situation in Uzbekistan, in particular with regard to the eradication of child and forced labour; decides to continue to monitor developments in Uzbekistan and to organise a regular dialogue with the ILO, the Commission, the EEAS and other stakeholders aimed at the total eradication of forced labour and child labour in Uzbekistan;
9. Recognises that a combination of dialogue and cooperation, as well as continued pressure on the Government of Uzbekistan from the Union, the ILO and the World Bank, will still be needed to achieve this goal; reserves the right to call on the Commission and the Council to activate Articles 2 and 95 of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement so as to take all necessary, general and specific measures if the commitment to eradicate child and forced labour is not lived up to;
10. Calls on the Commission and the EU Delegation in Tashkent to contribute through policy dialogue and assistance programmes to structural reform in Uzbekistan, including increased remuneration for cotton pickers, mechanisation, and greater budgetary transparency on revenue from the cotton harvest;
11. Shares the view that the Decent Work Country Programme should be extended beyond 2016, and should be deepened so as to consider the modernisation of the Uzbek economy and the improvement of employment policy in such areas as occupational health, safety and labour inspection, while taking gender equality into account; welcomes, in this regard, the Uzbek Governmental Decree No 909 (dated 16 November 2015) which is aimed to improve labour conditions, employment and social protection of workers in the agricultural sector in the period 2016-2018;
12. Stresses that the assistance provided by the EU over the past years, focusing on the rule of law and the judiciary, and aiming at triggering reforms and streamlining the work of the Uzbek parliament, must bring tangible results;
13. Believes that EU aid to Uzbekistan should also be aimed at weaning the country off cotton monoculture, and at decreasing its dependence on exports, by diversifying the economy, which could gradually alleviate the disastrous environmental situation with regard, in particular, to what is left of the Aral Sea and its tributaries;

**Wednesday 14 December 2016**

14. Calls on the Commission to submit as soon as possible the 'EU flagship initiative on responsible management of the supply chain in the garment sector', with a proposal for strengthening the supply chain transparency; recalls the importance of the Sustainability Compact launched in 2013 and underlines that this kind of initiative can serve as a basis for elaborating new actions in partnership with third countries with a view to meeting the objectives of improving working, health and safety conditions in the garment sector;
15. Encourages the Government of Uzbekistan to work towards the ratification and effectively implementation of all 27 GSP+ core international conventions, in order to be able to apply for GSP+ tariff preferences;
16. Highlights that in 2009 and 2010 the Council lifted the EU sanctions 'with a view to encourage the Uzbek authorities to take further substantive steps to improve the rule of law and the human rights situation on the ground', stating, furthermore, that 'the Council will closely and continuously observe the human rights situation in Uzbekistan' and that 'the depth and quality of the dialogue and cooperation will depend on Uzbek reforms';
17. Calls on the Commission and the EEAS to monitor the political transition in Uzbekistan and to provide Parliament regularly with information on this process;
18. Calls on the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR), the EEAS and the Member States to use the transition process as an opportunity to press for concrete, measurable human rights improvements over the coming months; underlines that concrete improvements should include the conditions laid out by the EU foreign ministers in 2010;
19. Points out that the textile sector, in particular cotton production, is the main area of trade between the EU and Uzbekistan; stresses, in this regard, that the EU should make full use of the extension of the PCA in order to ensure that the Uzbek authorities are engaged in a transition process, following the sudden death of the president, that leads to better governance, a strengthening of the rule of law, democratic reforms and a substantial improvement of the human rights situation;
20. Reiterates the Union's commitment to further and deepen relations with Uzbekistan, which requires respect for human rights and the rule of law; calls on the Government of Uzbekistan to create more space for independent civil society, to take more into consideration concerns of Uzbek and international NGOs, and to meet its commitments under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention against Torture;
21. Urges the Uzbek authorities to respect fully their international commitments as regards the protection of human rights; welcomes their announcement of a proposal for an amnesty on the occasion of the 24th anniversary of Uzbekistan's Constitution; urges the Uzbek authorities to include in this gesture the release from prison of all individuals imprisoned on politically motivated charges, improved treatment of persons in custody and an end to the cycle of crackdowns, arrests and convictions; encourages the Uzbek Government to step up its involvement with international institutions, including through 11 special procedures set up by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) <sup>(1)</sup>;
22. Instructs its President to forward its position to the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the government and parliament of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

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<sup>(1)</sup> The 11 special procedures are described in: [http://spinternet.ohchr.org/\\_Layouts/SpecialProceduresInternet/ViewCountryVisits.aspx?Lang=en&country=UZB](http://spinternet.ohchr.org/_Layouts/SpecialProceduresInternet/ViewCountryVisits.aspx?Lang=en&country=UZB)  
For a general overview of UNHRC special procedures, see: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/HRBodies/SP/Pages/Welcomepage.aspx>