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(Legislative acts)

REGULATIONS

REGULATION (EU) 2023/1524 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

of 20 July 2023

on temporary trade-liberalisation measures supplementing trade concessions applicable to products from the Republic of Moldova under the Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Moldova, of the other part

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Article 207(2) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

After transmission of the draft legislative act to the national parliaments,

Acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure ⁽¹⁾,

Whereas:

- (1) The Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Moldova, of the other part ⁽²⁾ (the 'Association Agreement'), constitutes the basis of the relationship between the Union and the Republic of Moldova. In accordance with Council Decision 2014/492/EU ⁽³⁾, Title V of the Association Agreement, which relates to trade and trade-related matters, has been applied provisionally since 1 September 2014, and entered into force on 1 July 2016 following ratification by all Member States.
- (2) The Association Agreement expresses the desire of the Parties to the Association Agreement (the 'Parties') to strengthen and widen relations in an ambitious and innovative way, to facilitate and achieve gradual economic integration, and to do so in compliance with the rights and obligations arising out of the World Trade Organization membership of the Parties.
- (3) Article 143 of the Association Agreement provides for the progressive establishment of a free trade area between the Parties in accordance with Article XXIV of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade 1994 (GATT 1994). To that end, Article 147 of the Association Agreement provides for the progressive elimination of customs duties in accordance with the Schedules included in Annex XV to the Association Agreement and for the possibility of accelerating and broadening the scope of such elimination.

⁽¹⁾ Position of the European Parliament of 11 July 2023 (not yet published in the Official Journal) and decision of the Council of 20 July 2023.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 260, 30.8.2014, p. 4.

⁽³⁾ Council Decision 2014/492/EU of 16 June 2014 on the signing, on behalf of the European Union, and provisional application of the Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Moldova, of the other part (OJ L 260, 30.8.2014, p. 1).

- (4) Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which has been ongoing since 24 February 2022, has a profoundly negative impact on the ability of the Republic of Moldova to trade with the rest of the world, in particular because exports from the Republic of Moldova rely on transit via Ukrainian territory and using Ukrainian infrastructure, which are currently largely unavailable. Under such critical circumstances and to mitigate the negative effects on the Republic of Moldova's economy of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, it is necessary to accelerate the development of closer economic relations between the Union and the Republic of Moldova and to provide quick support to the Republic of Moldova's economy. It is therefore necessary and appropriate to continue to stimulate trade flows and grant concessions in the form of trade-liberalisation measures for all products, in line with the acceleration of the elimination of customs duties on trade between the Union and the Republic of Moldova.
- (5) In accordance with Article 21(3) of the Treaty on European Union, the Union is to ensure consistency between the different areas of its external action. Pursuant to Article 207(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the common commercial policy is to be conducted in the context of the principles and objectives of the Union's external action.
- (6) Regulation (EU) 2022/1279 of the European Parliament and of the Council (*) expires on 24 July 2023.
- (7) The trade-liberalisation measures established by this Regulation should take the following form: (i) the suspension of the application of the entry price system to fruit and vegetables; and (ii) the suspension of all tariff-rate quotas and import duties. Through those measures, the Union will deepen economic integration between the Republic of Moldova and the Union and temporarily provide appropriate economic support to the benefit of the Republic of Moldova and the economic operators that are affected by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.
- (8) In order to prevent fraud, the entitlement to the trade-liberalisation measures established by this Regulation should be conditional upon the Republic of Moldova having complied with all the relevant conditions for obtaining benefits under the Association Agreement, including the rules of origin of the products concerned and the procedures related thereto, as well as the Republic of Moldova's involvement in close administrative cooperation with the Union, as provided for by the Association Agreement.
- (9) The Republic of Moldova should abstain from introducing new duties or charges having equivalent effect and new quantitative restrictions or measures having equivalent effect for imports originating in the Union, from increasing existing levels of duties or charges or from introducing any other restrictions, unless clearly justified in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. In the event that the Republic of Moldova fails to comply with any of those conditions, the Commission should be empowered to suspend temporarily all or part of the trade-liberalisation measures established by this Regulation.
- (10) Article 2 of the Association Agreement provides that, among other things, respect for democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as the countering of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, related materials and their means of delivery constitute essential elements of the Association Agreement. Under the same Article, the Parties commit in particular to the following general principles: respect for the principles of the rule of law and good governance, the fight against corruption, criminal activities, organised or otherwise, including those of transnational character, and terrorism, and respect for the principles of sustainable development and effective multilateralism. It is appropriate to introduce the possibility of temporarily suspending the trade-liberalisation measures provided for in this Regulation if the Republic of Moldova fails to respect either those essential elements or those general principles.

(*) Regulation (EU) 2022/1279 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2022 on temporary trade liberalisation measures supplementing trade concessions applicable to products from the Republic of Moldova under the Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Moldova, of the other part (OJ L 195, 22.7.2022, p. 6).

- (11) In order to ensure uniform conditions for the implementation of this Regulation, implementing powers should be conferred on the Commission to temporarily suspend the trade-liberalisation measures provided for in this Regulation in cases where Union producers of like or directly competing products are adversely affected by imports under this Regulation. Those powers should be exercised in accordance with Regulation (EU) No 182/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council ⁽⁵⁾.
- (12) Subject to an assessment of three months by the Commission based on the regular monitoring of the impact of this Regulation and launched either following a duly substantiated request from a Member State or at the Commission's own initiative, it is necessary to provide for the possibility to reintroduce the customs duties otherwise applicable under the Association Agreement for imports of any products falling under the scope of this Regulation which are adversely affecting the Union market for like or directly competing products.
- (13) The Commission's annual report on the implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, which is an integral part of the Association Agreement, should include a detailed assessment of the implementation of the trade-liberalisation measures established by this Regulation.
- (14) In light of the economic situation in the Republic of Moldova and of the expiry of Regulation (EU) 2022/1279 on 24 July 2023, this Regulation should, as a matter of urgency, enter into force on 25 July 2023,

HAVE ADOPTED THIS REGULATION:

Article 1

Trade-liberalisation measures

The following trade-liberalisation measures are introduced:

- (a) all tariff-rate quotas established under Annex XV-A to the Association Agreement shall be suspended and the products covered by those quotas shall be admitted for importation into the Union from the Republic of Moldova without any customs duties;
- (b) the application of the entry price system shall be suspended for those products to which it applies as specified in Annex XV-B to the Association Agreement; no customs duties shall apply to imports of those products.

Article 2

Conditions for entitlement to the trade-liberalisation measures

The trade-liberalisation measures provided for in Article 1 shall be subject to the following conditions:

- (a) compliance by the Republic of Moldova with the rules of origin of products and the procedures related thereto, as provided for in the Association Agreement;
- (b) the Republic of Moldova abstaining from introducing new duties or charges having equivalent effect and new quantitative restrictions or measures having equivalent effect for imports originating in the Union, from increasing existing levels of duties or charges or from introducing any other restrictions, including discriminatory internal administrative measures, unless clearly justified in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine; and

⁽⁵⁾ Regulation (EU) No 182/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 laying down the rules and general principles concerning mechanisms for control by Member States of the Commission's exercise of implementing powers (OJ L 55, 28.2.2011, p. 13).

- (c) the Republic of Moldova respecting democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as the countering of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, related materials and their means of delivery, respect for the principles of the rule of law and good governance, the fight against corruption, criminal activities, organised or otherwise, including those of transnational character, and terrorism, and respecting the principles of sustainable development and effective multilateralism provided for in Articles 2, 9 and 16 of the Association Agreement.

Article 3

Temporary suspension of measures

1. Where the Commission finds that there is sufficient evidence of a failure by the Republic of Moldova to comply with the conditions set out in Article 2, it may, by means of an implementing act, suspend in whole or in part the trade-liberalisation measures provided for in this Regulation. That implementing act shall be adopted in accordance with the examination procedure referred to in Article 5(3).
2. Where a Member State requests that the Commission suspend any of the trade-liberalisation measures provided for in this Regulation on the basis of a failure by the Republic of Moldova to comply with the conditions set out in Article 2, point (b), the Commission shall provide a reasoned opinion within four months of that request on whether the Member State's claim of a failure to comply is substantiated. If the Commission concludes that the claim is substantiated, it shall initiate the procedure referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article.

Article 4

Expedited safeguard

1. Where a product originating in the Republic of Moldova is imported under conditions which adversely affect the Union market for like or directly competing products, the Commission may reintroduce the customs duties otherwise applicable under the Association Agreement on imports of that product at any time by means of an implementing act. That implementing act shall be adopted in accordance with the examination procedure referred to in Article 5(3).

The customs duties otherwise applicable under the Association Agreement may be reintroduced for as long as necessary to counteract the adverse effects on the Union market for like or directly competing products.

2. The Commission shall regularly monitor the impact of this Regulation, taking into account the information on exports, imports, prices on the Union market and Union production of the products subject to the trade-liberalisation measures under Article 1, point (a).

The Commission shall inform the Member States every two months of the results of the regular monitoring, starting from the date of entry into force of this Regulation.

3. The Commission shall carry out an assessment of the situation of the Union market for like or directly competing products with a view to reintroducing customs duties. That assessment shall be launched:
 - (a) following a duly substantiated request from a Member State including sufficient *prima facie* evidence reasonably available to that Member State pursuant to paragraph 4 of imports adversely affecting the Union market as referred to in paragraph 1; or
 - (b) on its own initiative, after it has become apparent to the Commission that there is sufficient *prima facie* evidence of imports adversely affecting the Union market as referred to in paragraph 1.

The assessment referred to in the first subparagraph shall be concluded within three months of its launch.

4. In carrying out the assessment pursuant to paragraph 3, the Commission shall take into consideration all relevant market developments, including the impact of the imports concerned on the situation of the Union market for like or directly competing products. That assessment shall include factors such as:

- (a) the rate and amount of the increase in imports from the Republic of Moldova of the product concerned in absolute and relative terms; and
- (b) the effect of the imports concerned on Union production and prices, while taking into consideration the development of imports from other sources.

This list is not exhaustive and other relevant factors may also be taken into consideration.

5. Where, as a result of the assessment referred to in paragraph 3, the Commission considers that the Union market for like or directly competing products has been adversely affected and intends to reintroduce customs duties, it shall publish a notice in the *Official Journal of the European Union* announcing the reintroduction of the customs duties otherwise applicable under the Association Agreement on imports of that product. The notice shall provide a summary of the main results of the assessment and specify the period within which interested parties may submit their views in writing. That period shall not exceed 10 days from the date of publication of the notice.

6. Where exceptional circumstances require immediate action, the Commission may, without following the procedure set out in paragraph 5 and after informing the Committee on Safeguards established by Article 3(1) of Regulation (EU) 2015/478 of the European Parliament and of the Council ⁽⁶⁾, take any preventive measure which it considers necessary.

Article 5

Committee procedure

1. The Commission shall be assisted by the Customs Code Committee established by Article 285(1) of Regulation (EU) No 952/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council ⁽⁷⁾ with regard to Article 3(1) of this Regulation. That Committee shall be a committee within the meaning of Regulation (EU) No 182/2011.
2. The Commission shall be assisted by the Committee on Safeguards established by Article 3(1) of Regulation (EU) 2015/478 with regard to Article 4(1) of this Regulation. That Committee shall be a committee within the meaning of Regulation (EU) No 182/2011.
3. Where reference is made to this paragraph, Article 5 of Regulation (EU) No 182/2011 shall apply.

Article 6

Assessment of the implementation of the trade-liberalisation measures

The Commission's annual report on the implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area shall include a detailed assessment of the implementation of the trade-liberalisation measures provided for in this Regulation and shall include, insofar as appropriate, an assessment of the social impact of those measures in the Republic of Moldova and in the Union. Information on imports of products under Article 1, point (a), shall be made available via the website of the Commission and shall be updated on a monthly basis.

Article 7

Entry into force and application

This Regulation shall enter into force on 25 July 2023.

⁽⁶⁾ Regulation (EU) 2015/478 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2015 on common rules for imports (OJ L 83, 27.3.2015, p. 16).

⁽⁷⁾ Regulation (EU) No 952/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 October 2013 laying down the Union Customs Code (OJ L 269, 10.10.2013, p. 1).

It shall apply until 24 July 2024.

This Regulation shall be binding in its entirety and directly applicable in all Member States.

Done at Brussels, 20 July 2023.

For the European Parliament

The President

R. METSOLA

For the Council

The President

P. NAVARRO RÍOS
