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## European Parliament Approves Interim Agreement with Mexico

by LADB Staff

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In mid-May, the European Parliament overwhelmingly approved an interim agreement with Mexico to begin negotiations on a full trade accord. The Parliament approved the agreement through a voice vote, which prevented any amendments to the accord. The Parliament, based in Strasbourg, France, employed the fast-track mechanism to vote on the agreement at the request of the EU executive body, the European Commission (see SourceMex, 03/11/98). The interim accord, completed in March, establishes the parameters to negotiate a full accord. It commits both sides to work toward "progressive and bilateral" reduction of tariffs to increase access to each other's markets (see SourceMex, 12/17/97).

The foreign ministers of the 15 EU member nations are scheduled to vote on the EU-Mexico accord in late May. If the ministers approve the interim agreement as expected, negotiations on the full accord could begin in September or October. Still, Mexico's deputy trade secretary Jaime Zabłudovsky said the two sides will not rush into an agreement. "Negotiations will last as long as necessary, perhaps as long as two years," said Zabłudovsky.

### *Negotiations on full accord to include democracy clause*

The Parliament approved the interim accord despite pressure from nongovernmental organizations protesting alleged violations of human rights in Mexico, particularly in Chiapas. The vote was taken only days after the Mexican government deported 134 Italian observers for violating Mexican immigration law. The Italians defied a Mexican government order not to travel en masse to the town of Taniperlas (see SourceMex, 05/13/98).

The Parliament's decision to support the accord is not surprising, since European leaders appear more concerned with economic than political considerations. In recent months, EU member nations have raised concerns about the eroding percentage of EU exports to Mexico because of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which gives the US and Canada a strong advantage in the Mexican market. "Mexico is a key country in the context of global trade," said Parliament member Ana Miranda de Lage of Spain. "It is convenient for the EU to deepen its relations with Mexico."

At the same time, Miranda also supported the position of European and Mexican human rights organizations regarding the need for the EU to pressure Mexico to respect democracy and human rights in Chiapas state. She said the eventual approval of a full agreement with a democracy clause would be a more effective way to pressure Mexico on human rights than defeating the interim agreement.

While nongovernmental organizations did not succeed in derailing passage of the interim EU-Mexico accord, the Parliament agreed to consider a request by Mexican human rights groups that the accord include a special EU office in Mexico City to monitor human rights in Mexico. "We

welcome any effort to elevate human rights to an important role in Mexican-European relations," said a statement issued by the Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez. (Sources: Notimex, 05/13/98; El Nacional, El Economista, 05/14/98; La Jornada, Excelsior, 05/14/98, 05/15/98; El Diario de Yucatán, The News, 05/15/98; El Universal, 05/13-15/98, 05/20/98)

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