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Free Trade Agreements and human rights the EU's double standards

In its meeting today, the European Parliament's Development Committee rejected the Interim Economic Partnership Agreement between Eastern and Southern African States and the EU. This vote is a clear signal against the EU's trade policy at the expense of ACP countries' development agenda.



In her [opinion report](#), Judith Sargentini considers that time should be given to African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries to decide according to their own development agenda, the pace and the sector that they decide to liberalise, without jeopardising their development. Unfortunately, the Conservative EPP group and the majority of EP members, particularly in the International Trade Committee, do not share this view. The European Union has been pushing for the signing of Economic Partnership Agreements ([EPAs](#)) with 6 ACP regions for the past 4 years. Many ACP countries, particularly those in Africa, continue to resist against the trade liberalisation agreements, which they consider to have a detrimental impact on their economic development, as they cannot compete with EU products in local and international markets. Only the Caribbean region so far has signed a comprehensive EPA with the EU. The EU attempt to sign a trade liberalisation agreement with all ACP regions failed. Currently, the Commission is putting pressure on individual countries, such as Zimbabwe and Madagascar, to sign EPAs. Zimbabwe is expected to liberalise 79.9% of its trade and Madagascar about 37% as a start, which represents a 42% annual fiscal revenue loss. In a time of budgetary constraints and financial crisis, it is unthinkable that the EU will compensate Madagascar's fiscal revenue loss. Judith Sargentini is questioning why Madagascar, a [Least Developed Country](#) should be forced to sign an interim EPA while currently benefiting from an [Everything But Arms](#) trade agreement, which is more favourable. Furthermore, the EU's apparent policy of double standards on Human rights is also questionable when it comes to trade agreements. In the case

of Belarus, the EU has refused to ratify both the Partnership Cooperation Agreement and the Interim Agreement, concluded in 1995 due to human rights violations in this country. On the other hand, the EU pushes to sign trade agreements with countries such as Madagascar and Zimbabwe, who have been under sanctions for human rights violations recently. Madagascar is on the roadmap to ending the crisis, and is just on the verge of having sanctions lifted, while Zimbabwe faces a similar fate if the democratic reforms continue to progress.

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Responsible MEPs



Judith Sargentini

Member

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