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EU Trade policy must prioritise human rights, in Western Sahara and elsewhere

Press release from EFA MEP Jordi Solé

In advance of the forthcoming European Council meeting which takes place tomorrow and Friday in Brussels, MEPs have today been debating the summit's priorities with European Commission President, Ursula Von der Leyen.

One of the subjects up for discussion will be EU Trade Policy.

EFA President **Jordi Solé MEP** took part in the debate and urged EU leaders to use EU trade policy as a strategic tool to advance Europe's agenda on human rights and fundamental freedoms.

He cited the case of Western Sahara, where the European Court of Justice recently ruled against EU fisheries and agriculture agreements with Morocco as they had ignored Western Sahara's status as an occupied territory.

He called for EU institutions to learn the lessons of this case for future trade negotiations, where human rights and fundamental freedoms must be prioritised.

Speaking in the plenary, **Jordi Solé MEP** said:

"The European Council will hold amongst others a strategic discussion on EU trade policy.

"This is one of the most important tools in our hands to advance globally our agenda on human rights and fundamental freedoms, in accordance with international law.

"This is exactly the opposite to what the EU has done with its fisheries and agriculture agreements with Morocco in relation to Western Sahara. The European Court of Justice has once again ruled that these agreements were illegal, because they ignored its status an as occupied territory to be decolonised, and the Commission had failed to secure the prior consent of the Saharawi people.

"I hope that EU institutions responsible for trade relations, including the Council, finally learn the lesson: that also when it comes to trade policy, the European Union remains a community built on the rule of law.

"We will remain vigilant so that the EU does not yet again collide with internationally recognised rights - such

as the right to self-determination - because of its desire to develop and maintain close trade relations with certain partners."

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Jordi Solé

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