

European Union defends legality of fisheries agreement with Morocco

Unofficial translation from Spanish by Western Sahara Resource Watch (WSRW)

Casablanca (Morocco), 27 May (EFE). – Today, the European Union’s ambassador in Rabat, Eneko Landáburu, defended the legality of the fisheries agreement with Morocco, although he recognized that a requested report from Rabat on the agreement’s impact on the Saharawi population will be an “important” element in its renewal. At a press conference in Rabat, Landáburu highlighted that “the legal services of the European Commission and all advices from independent institutions have shown that there is no problem with the international legality of the fisheries agreement with Morocco”.

To him, “it could be that” the legality of the fisheries agreement “is used for political reasons, because that is the normal political game, but there is no problem”. The Community’s ambassador noted that the Moroccan authorities were asked to deliver a study on the socio-economic impacts of this agreement on the population of Western Sahara, as envisioned in the agreement, but that the EU has not yet received a reply.

“It is clear that this will be an important element for the negotiation of the next agreement from (February) 2011 onwards”, he underscored. Landáburu made these declarations after meeting today, together with the other EU ambassadors headed by Spain as current EU president, with the leaders of the general confederation of Moroccan enterprises, CGEM, in Casablanca. The president of CGEM’s external trade committee, Yunes Zrikem, assured that for the Moroccan companies, “it is very clear that the economic activity in the Saharan provinces is beneficial to the local population, and contributes to the development of these provinces and the country”. “It is a debate that is completely in line with the economic and social reality of this territory”, he added. The pact between the EU and Morocco, considered to be the one of major political importance regarding fisheries, offers licenses to 119 communitarian boats, of which 100 are Spanish. In return, the EU pays Morocco 36,1 million euro’s per year; part of which is used for the national fisheries sector and the other part for development.

In relation to another ongoing negotiating process between Rabat and Brussels - Morocco’s readmission of Sub-Saharan immigrants expelled from Europe - Landáburu recognized that it concerns a “tough and complex” agreement, but recalled that understandings have been reached before with other countries in this area.

“The Moroccans ask for financial aid to be able to implement the readmission, but there are no conclusions yet”, remarked the Spanish, who 2 weeks ago linked this agreement to facilitate European visa supplies for Moroccan citizens. Landáburu also explained that talks on the liberalization of services between Morocco and the EU “have been unlocked”, after Rabat had submitted a tender which is being analyzed in Brussels and which “could receive an answer by July”. It was the first time that the European ambassadors held their regular monthly reunion in Casablanca, where they met with the Moroccan general confederation of enterprises, the governor of the region, and other regional and local officials. The Spanish ambassador labeled the day as “a success”.