Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
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Safeguarding democratic values in international trade

Motion for a resolution
tabled by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

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This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

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In the last decade, the number of new trade agreements has increased substantially and the next decade will likely see a similar level of expansion. At the same time, the multilateral trading system headed by the World Trade Organisation is being undermined and the level-playing field between States is distorted as a result.

The new generation of international trade and investment agreements increasingly governs and establishes norms of behaviour within and between States. Those norms go beyond commerce, affecting regulation and individual rights that transcend States.

Trade and investment agreements can be reached without the level of democratic scrutiny to which solely domestic (or European Union) norms, rules, and legislation are subject. While many States, recognising this, have sought to democratise the negotiating and ratification processes, many still lag behind. The Parliamentary Assembly should therefore call on member States' parliaments to ensure that:

– negotiations towards trade and investment agreements are subject to democratic scrutiny and input at three key stages: the setting of the negotiating mandate, the conduct of negotiations, and the conclusion of an agreement;

– the Council of Europe's core values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law are promoted through such agreements;

– essential rights and values – held individually and collectively, including sustainable development, public health, environmental and food standards, as well as scrutiny and accountability of those exercising power – are upheld;

– trade and investment agreements support implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the UN Agenda 2030.