EUROPEAN TRANSPORT WORKERS' FEDERATION

Mr Costas Kadis
Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans
European Commission
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Brussels, 18 November 2026

Dear Commissioner,

Request for urgent measures to ensure the continuity of the European fishing fleet operations and protect employment following the expiry of the EU–Mauritania SFPA

The European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) wishes to express its deep concern about the situation arising from the expiry, on 14 November 2026, of the Protocol implementing the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania.

The absence of an agreement guaranteeing the continuation of fishing activities has forced European fishing vessels to leave these important fishing grounds used by the Community fleet, after decades of presence and operations in these waters.
This situation affects companies, workers, fishing communities and the entire economic chain linked to fishing activities.

We believe that the European Union cannot limit its responsibility to continuing diplomatic negotiations. Immediate measures are needed to ensure that the consequences of this interruption do not fall exclusively on companies and, in particular, on workers in the sector.

For all these reasons, we call on the European Commission to:

1. Urgently restore access to the fishing grounds

We ask the Commission to intensify negotiations with the Mauritanian authorities, while exploring a provisional protocol that would allow European vessels to resume operations with legal certainty. The legal options for extending or renewing the existing cooperation framework should also be examined, with priority given to restoring fishing opportunities for vessels that have historically operated in these fishing grounds.

2. Activate extraordinary aid for temporary cessation of activities

We ask the Commission to take the necessary steps to facilitate access to support from the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), exploring applicability of Article 21(2)(d) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (which allows EMFAF support for temporary cessation of fishing when "the application of a sustainable fisheries partnership agreement (SFPA) or protocol" is interrupted due to force majeure), where the relevant eligibility conditions are met.

This support should cover both fishing vessel owners **and affected workers**, including the costs

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arising from the cessation of activities and its social consequences for crews.
We also ask the Commission to examine the possibility of introducing additional exceptional measures if the existing instruments prove insufficient.

3. Protect employment and crews

Public aid must help safeguard jobs, preventing dismissals, the loss of employment rights and situations in which workers (regardless whether they are EU or non-EU) are left without social protection.
Particular attention should be paid to:

- Guaranteeing workers' income during the cessation period;
- Maintaining the rights arising from employment contracts;
- Taking measures to facilitate the return of crews to work once operations resume.

4. Temporary alternatives for fishing activity.

We ask the Commission to coordinate with the Member States and third countries to identify alternative fishing opportunities, provided that resources are available, scientific assessments are favourable and an appropriate legal framework exists.
These alternatives should prevent the fleet from being forced to abandon its activities permanently or change its flag in order to continue operating, taking into account the possible social consequences this could entail.

5. Protect fair competition and European standards

The interruption of the European presence in Mauritania must not create a vacuum that is filled by fleets operating without the same environmental, social and labour requirements imposed on European vessels.
The Union's external fisheries policy must defend a level playing field and the effective implementation of the international standards of the ILO, IMO and FAO.

6. European monitoring group

We ask for the establishment of a monitoring group involving the European Commission, the Member States concerned and European social partners in the fisheries sector.
The Commission should share with this group regular updates on the negotiations, support measures and the employment situation of crews.

The European fleet needs stability, legal certainty and prospects for the future. Its workers need job security, social protection and decent working conditions.
We therefore request an urgent response from the European Commission and the adoption of a roadmap for concrete action.

Yours sincerely,

Livia Spera
General Secretary

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