

Resolution on the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA), 2006

2008/2579(RSP) - 24/09/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 23 September 2008, the European Parliament adopted by 616 votes to 9 with 10 abstentions, a resolution tabled by the Committee on International Trade on the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA). It welcomes the conclusion of the ITTA, 2006 given that failure to reach agreement would have sent a damaging signal about the international community's commitment to promoting the protection and sustainable use of tropical forests. Parliament considers, nevertheless, that the outcome falls well short of what is required to address the loss of these forests. Members point out that deforestation occurs at a rate of about 13 million hectares per year, including 6 million hectares of primary forests, and is estimated to have accounted for 20% of greenhouse gas emissions in the 1990s. Less than 5% of tropical forests are managed sustainably. Parliament noted that the inhabitants of timber producing countries should not be expected to bear the costs of preserving what is a global resource.

Need for more joined up policies: Parliament called for a significant increase the financial resources available to enhance the conservation and ecologically responsible use of tropical forests, to support actions aimed at strengthening environmental governance and capacity-building and to promote economically viable alternatives to destructive logging, mining and agricultural practices. It is equally important to enhance the capacity of national parliaments and civil society, including local communities and indigenous people, to participate in decision-making. Public procurement policies should require timber to be derived from legal sources. Parliament insists that the Commission and Member States should also work to ensure that Export Credit Agencies, the Cotonou Investment Facility and other International Lending Institutions which fund projects with EU public money use the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent before financially supporting any projects in forest areas. Labelling initiatives are potentially usefully supplements to international agreements, provided the label is underpinned by independent verification.

Members are concerned that voluntary agreements will be insufficient to verify that timber products placed on the EU market are from legal sources. The EU should begin to adopt legally binding standards accompanied by instruments for sanctioning non-compliance.

The Commission must ensure, through its bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, good governance of timber resources. The proposed trade agreement with the countries of South East Asia is of particular importance in this respect.

Features of a more effective agreement: an effective agreement should have, as its primary objectives, the need to ensure the protection and sustainable management of tropical forests and the restoration of forest areas that have been degraded. Trade in tropical timber should only be encouraged to the extent that it is compatible with those prior objectives. The Commission is asked to develop appropriate financing mechanisms for countries that decide to give priority to the longer-term objective of promoting sustainable forests rather than maximising short-term income and to investigate the possibility of reorganising the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO) voting system so as to reward timber-producing countries that give priority to the conservation of forest resources. Parliamentarians and civil society must be involved in policy formulation and there must be provisions for independent audits of the sustainability of members' forestry management policies and their impact on indigenous people.

Conclusions: Parliament considers that the agreement requires the assent of Parliament under Article 300 (3), second subparagraph, of the EC Treaty and believes that the Council and Commission should welcome the enhanced legitimacy and public acceptability that would result from greater parliamentary involvement. The Commission is asked to provide annual reports on the implementation of the ITTA, 2006 as well as on measures to minimise the negative impacts from trade on tropical forests, including the consequences of Free Trade Agreements and bilateral agreements under the FLEGT programme.

Lastly, Parliament calls on the Commission to report regularly to Parliament on the progress of future negotiations for a successor agreement to the ITTA, 2006 so that the outcome of such negotiations commands broad support.