EU/Vietnam Voluntary Partnership Agreement: forest law enforcement, governance and trade

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The Committee on International Trade adopted the report by Heidi HAUTALA (Greens/EFA, FI) on the draft Council decision on the conclusion of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam on forest law enforcement, governance and trade.

The committee recommended that the European Parliament give its consent to the conclusion of the agreement.

As a reminder, the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) - signed on 19 October 2018 - is in line with the joint commitment of the Union and Vietnam to sustainable forest management. Its objective is to provide a legal framework to ensure that all timber and timber products covered by the VPA imported from Vietnam to the European Union have been legally produced.

As indicated in the explanatory memorandum accompanying the recommendation, the signature of the VPA is therefore the beginning of a long process during which Vietnam will have to adopt whole set of legislation (the so-called Timber Legality Assurance System - TLAS) and set up the necessary administrative structures and capacity in order to implement and enforce its VPA commitments.

Vietnam has already committed to including due diligence obligations for importers of timber and timber products, hence the objective here is to ensure that Vietnamese legislation is equivalent to the EU Timber Regulation (EUTR) as much as possible, in particular by providing equivalent due diligence requirements.

Only once Vietnam has fully implemented all VPA commitments, they will be able to accede the EU FLEGT licencing scheme. This would be a major step also in terms of market access to the EU market.

Accession to FLEGT licencing is a long-term goal. It will have to be approved by means of a delegated act procedure and it will therefore be up to the European Parliament to carefully assess whether the commitments and requirements of the VPA have been met.

The trade and sustainable development chapter of the FTA contains provisions on sustainable forest management and trade in forest products and makes explicit reference to the VPA. The FTA will liberalise trade in timber products as soon as it enters into force. It will be necessary to continue to monitor the evolution of bilateral timber trade, including in the framework of the FTA TSD Chapter, in order to make sure that the additional liberalisation does not entail additional risks.