

EU/Honduras Voluntary Partnership Agreement: forest law enforcement, governance and trade in timber products to the EU

2020/0157M(NLE) - 24/03/2021 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on International Trade adopted the report by Karin KARLSBRO (Renew, SE) containing a motion for a non-legislative resolution on the draft Council decision on the conclusion of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Honduras on forest law enforcement, governance and trade in timber products to the European Union.

The EU published its Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan in 2003. The plan aims to combat illegal logging around the world.

Forests are important to the Honduran economy. Almost half of Honduras' land area is covered by forests, half of which is still tropical rainforest. The problem of deforestation in Honduras needs to be addressed effectively.

Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA)

The report welcomed the conclusion of negotiations on the EU-Honduras Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) which will: (i) ensure that only legally logged timber is imported into the EU from Honduras; (ii) promote sustainable forest management practices and sustainable trade in legally produced timber; (iii) improve forest governance, law enforcement (including labour and occupational, health and safety obligations), human rights, transparency, accountability and institutional resilience in Honduras.

Members welcomed the fact that Honduras is the first country seeking to conclude a VPA that has included indigenous peoples as a separate interest group at the negotiating table.

Ensuring the implementation of the VPA

The report called for the swift ratification of the VPA by both sides so it can enter into force in 2021 and pave the way for the subsequent important steps in terms of implementation, including the setting up of licensing.

Members recognised that the full implementation of the VPA will be a long-term process which will require the adoption of a whole set of legislation and adequate administrative capacity and expertise for its implementation and enforcement. They recalled that FLEGT licencing can only begin once Honduras has demonstrated the readiness of its timber legality assurance system (TLAS).

Implementation requires genuine and continued consultations and substantial multistakeholder involvement, including the meaningful participation of civil society organisations and local and indigenous communities in decision-making so as to guarantee the principle of free, prior and informed consent.

Members are aware that concrete safeguards are needed for local and indigenous communities with regard to land ownership. They stressed the importance of land use in forest governance and the need for a strategic vision on land use in the light of climate change issues. They stressed that the fight against fraud and corruption along the timber supply chain must be constant.

Furthermore, the importance of forestry and rural employment in the Honduran economy should be taken into account in the implementation of the VPA.

EU responsibility

Members believe that the EU has a very important and responsible role to play and obligation to abide by in improving both the supply and the demand side of timber in order to reject illegally produced timber and assist exporting countries in their efforts to combat illegal logging and corruption, which results in the destruction of their forests, climate change and human rights violations.

The report stressed the need to complement this work with a forthcoming due diligence and forest-risk commodity.

The Commission and the Member States are invited to fully integrate the FLEGT agenda into the new strategic framework of the European Green Deal by encouraging its promotion at global and regional level and further strengthening international cooperation between producing and importing countries.