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

2020/0157M(NLE) - 27/04/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 576 votes to 54, with 69 abstentions, 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.

Almost half of the land area in Honduras is covered by forests, half of which is tropical rainforest. Honduras has lost about 12.5 % of its forest area since 2015 due mainly to a pest infestation, most likely caused by climate change, while some forest area has been lost due to fires, deforestation and illegal logging.

Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA)

Parliament welcomed the conclusion of negotiations on the EU-Honduras Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) which will:

- ensure that only legally logged timber is imported into the EU from Honduras;

- promote sustainable forest management practices and sustainable trade in legally produced timber;

- improve forest governance, law enforcement (including labour and occupational, health and safety obligations), human rights, transparency, accountability and institutional resilience in Honduras taking into account that forests are important for the Honduran economy.

Members welcomed Honduras' success in ensuring the participation of government institutions, civil society, the private sector, indigenous peoples and people of African descent, academia and communities in the development of the VPA.

Ensuring the implementation of the VPA

Parliament 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 so as to guarantee the principle of free, prior and informed consent.

Around 80% of private land in Honduras is untitled. Members are aware of the need for concrete safeguards for local and indigenous communities regarding land ownership. They stressed the importance of land use in forest governance and the need for a strategic vision in this area in view of the hazards of climate change.

They stressed that the fight against fraud and corruption along the timber supply chain must be constant, calling on the EU to strengthen the scope and enforcement of the EU Timber Regulation, including through more regular and systematic checks and investigations in EU ports.

The resolution called for supply chain management to be rolled out in the animal husbandry, coffee and palm oil sectors, as this is essential to address the root causes of deforestation.

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 resolution 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.