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

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PURPOSE: to conclude the Voluntary Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Cooperative Republic of Guyana on forest law enforcement, governance and trade in timber products to the European Union.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Decision.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: Council may adopt the act only if Parliament has given its consent to the act.

BACKGROUND: the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan, endorsed by the Council in 2003, proposes a series of measures to stop illegal logging. The cornerstone of this action plan is the establishment of FLEGT partnerships between the EU and timber producing countries.

In 2005, the Council adopted Regulation (EC) No 2173/2005 on the establishment of a FLEGT licensing scheme for imports of timber into the European Community, which allows for the verification of the legality of timber imported into the EU under the FLEGT partnerships.

In 2005, the Council authorised the Commission to negotiate FLEGT partnership agreements with timber producing countries. The Commission started negotiations with the Cooperative Republic of Guyana in 2013.

CONTENT: the Commission proposes that the Council decide to approve, on behalf of the Union, the voluntary partnership agreement between the European Union and the Cooperative Republic of Guyana on forest law enforcement, governance and trade in timber products.

The purpose of the agreement, in line with the parties' shared commitment to the sustainable management of all types of forests, is to provide a legal framework to **ensure that all imports into the EU of timber products covered by the agreement from Guyana have been legally produced** and, in so doing, to promote trade in timber products.

The agreement also provides a basis for **dialogue and cooperation between the parties** to facilitate and promote its full implementation and to strengthen forest law enforcement and governance.

In particular, the agreement establishes a licensing regime that verifies and confirms the legality of timber products exported to the EU and third countries, as well as timber sold domestically. With respect to imported timber, Guyana is committed to ensuring that it has been harvested in accordance with the legislation of its country of origin. To this end, Guyana will adopt specific legislation based on due diligence principles.

Guyana is also committed to reviewing its forestry regulations and strengthening them where necessary. It has also defined a framework within which to monitor legal compliance and conduct independent assessments of the system. To implement these measures, the parties agreed to an ambitious timetable over six years (from entry into force).

In addition, the agreement:

- establishes a Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Committee for dialogue and cooperation between the EU and Guyana on the licensing scheme, sets out a framework for stakeholder participation, the establishment of social safeguards, accountability and transparency, and also describes how complaints are handled, how monitoring will be carried out and how reporting will take place;

- covers all timber products currently produced in, imported into and exported from Guyana, in addition to those products listed in Annex II of Regulation (EC) No 2173/2005;

- is underpinned by the principle of non-discrimination, which means that all stakeholders, whether in the forestry sector or not, will be affected. This includes those from the private sector, civil society, local and indigenous communities, as well as others who depend on forests;

- provides for the control of imports at the EU's borders, under Regulation (EC) No 2173/2005 on the FLEGT licensing scheme and Regulation (EC) No 1024/2008, which sets out the implementing rules.