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

2022/0142M(NLE) - 01/02/2023 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on International Trade adopted a 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 Co-operative Republic of Guyana on forest law enforcement, governance and trade in timber products to the European Union.

In November 2018, the European Union and Guyana concluded their negotiations on a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT). On 10 March 2022, Guyana and the EU agreed on an updated Joint Implementation Framework (JIF), a detailed roadmap for the implementation of the VPA, which aims to improve forest governance and enable the monitoring of legal timber trade.

The report strongly supports the conclusion of the FLEGT VPA negotiations between the EU and Guyana. The VPA will ensure that only legally harvested timber is imported into the EU from Guyana, 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 Guyana.

The VPA will protect biodiversity (Guyana's forests are reportedly home to some 8 000 plant species and over 1 000 species of terrestrial vertebrates) and help achieve sustainable development goals, while contributing to improved trade relations between Guyana and the EU.

The report stressed that the implementation and monitoring stages require **genuine consultation and multi-stakeholder involvement**, including the meaningful participation of civil society, business representatives, workers' organisations and local and indigenous communities in decision-making. It is important to establish partnerships and cooperation mechanisms to jointly address the issue of forest governance in all its aspects, including information sharing.

Members stressed that the success of governance, trade and law enforcement in forestry is also dependent on **combating corruption and fraud** of all kinds throughout the timber supply chain. They called on the Government of Guyana to improve data collection to better implement the traceability system and to continue its efforts to stop widespread corruption and combat other factors fuelling illegal logging and forest degradation.

They also stressed the need to end impunity in the forestry sector by protecting environmental human rights defenders and whistleblowers and ensuring effective remedies for human rights violations.

The report stressed the importance of ensuring effective land protection and **full recognition of the customary rights of local communities and indigenous peoples**, including Amerindian communities, from a social justice perspective, as well as granting them the right to give or withhold consent to any timber concessions on their lands.

Members recalled the importance of **mining** as a major driver of tropical deforestation. Noting that Guyana is developing its oil, gas and mining industries, they called on the Guyanese government to take further steps to curb illegal mining.

The Commission is invited to provide **sufficient capacity-building** and logistical and technical support in the framework of present and future development cooperation instruments in order to enable Guyana to fulfil the commitments under the VPA. It is also called upon to report regularly to the European Parliament on the implementation of the agreement, to allow for an informed decision when the delegated act authorising the acceptance of FLEGT licences is proposed. Members therefore stressed that new voluntary partnership agreements with other partners should be promoted.