

EU/Côte d'Ivoire Voluntary Partnership Agreement: forest law enforcement, governance and trade in timber and timber products to the EU (FLEGT)

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PURPOSE: to conclude, on behalf of the EU, the voluntary partnership agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire on forest law enforcement, governance and trade in timber and timber products to the European Union (FLEGT).

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 action plan on forest law enforcement, governance and trade (FLEGT), endorsed by the Council in 2003, proposes a set of measures to stop illegal logging. These measures include support to timber-producing countries, multilateral collaboration to tackle trade in illegal timber, support to private-sector initiatives, and action to discourage investment in activities that encourage illegal logging.

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. This enables authorities to check the legality of timber imported into the EU under FLEGT partnerships. Also in 2005, the Council authorised the Commission to negotiate FLEGT partnership agreements with timber-producing countries.

The Commission entered into negotiations with Côte d'Ivoire in 2013. It has kept the European Parliament and stakeholders informed about the negotiations.

The Voluntary Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire on forest law enforcement, governance and trade in timber and timber products was signed, subject to its conclusion at a later date.

CONTENT: the Commission proposes that the Council should decide to approve, on behalf of the Union, the Voluntary Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire on forest law enforcement, governance and trade in timber and timber products to the European Union (FLEGT).

The objective of this Agreement, in accordance with the joint commitment of the Parties to sustainably manage all types of forests, is to provide a legal framework to **ensure that timber and timber products** defined by the FLEGT authorisation and imported into the Union from Côte d'Ivoire have been legally produced and to promote trade in said timber and timber products and implement the **principle of sustainability**.

This Agreement also provides a basis for **dialogue and cooperation** between the Parties aimed at facilitating and promoting its full implementation and at strengthening the enforcement of forest law and governance.

The Agreement:

- establishes a licensing scheme that checks and confirms the legality of timber products exported to EU and non-EU countries, as well as timber sold domestically. For imported timber, Côte d'Ivoire commits to ensure that the timber has been harvested according to the law of the country of origin;
- establishes a mechanism for dialogue and cooperation between the EU and Côte d'Ivoire on the licensing scheme, via a joint implementation committee;
- provides a detailed description of the structures underpinning the timber legality assurance system of Côte d'Ivoire;
- sets out a framework for involving stakeholders, social safeguards, and accountability and transparency;
- describes how complaints are handled and how monitoring and reporting will be carried out;
- provides for import controls at the EU's borders under Regulation (EC) No 2173/2005 on the FLEGT licensing scheme and Regulation (EC) No 1024/2008 laying down detailed measures for implementing the scheme.

The Agreement is underpinned by the principle of non-discrimination, which means that stakeholders from both within and outside the forestry sector will be involved. These include stakeholders from the private sector, civil society, and local communities.

The Agreement is relevant to the EU Biodiversity strategy 2030 because it combats illegal timber trade and promotes sustainable forest management and effective participation of local communities, which will help preserve biodiversity.