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8.11.2023

DRAFT OPINION

of the Committee on Development

for the Committee on International Trade

on the proposal for a Council decision on the conclusion, on behalf of the Union, of 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)
0000/2023 – C9-0000/2023 – 2023/0222(NLE))

Rapporteur for opinion: Carlos Zorrinho

PA_Leg_Consent

SHORT JUSTIFICATION

The Commission entered into negotiations with the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire in 2013 and concluded the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) negotiations in October 2022.

Côte d'Ivoire has one of the highest deforestation rates in the world. According to the World Bank, as of 2020 only 8.9 % (2.8 million hectares) of Côte d'Ivoire land area was covered by forests, compared to 24.7% in 1990. The causes of this decline include extensive agriculture, cocoa trade, poorly controlled exploitation of forests to meet the demands for timber and wood energy and weak legal enforcement capacity of public authorities in forest governance.

Recently, the Ivorian government has committed to improving forest governance jointly with international and local actors, so as to increase forest coverage to 20% by 2030. In 2014, it launched the National Programme for the Environment and Forests, which aims to reduce deforestation and promote sustainable land use practices. Furthermore, the new Forestry Code adopted in 2019 largely improved the Ivorian forestry legislation. It added agro-forests, community forests, sacred forests to the classified list and made the legal framework more participatory, requiring the involvement of local communities in forest management and protection initiatives.

The forest industry still largely contributes to the Ivorian economy and local livelihoods. However, a large part is foreign owned and only a few out of a total of 40 exotic and local forest species processed and exported as timber are known, leading to overexploiting certain forest areas. Around 50% of Ivorian timber exports are destined to the EU.

Representatives of the government, civil society, the private sector and indigenous peoples as members of the Technical Negotiating Committee played a critical and active role in the negotiation process of the VPA with the EU, including in the design of a roadmap. The process provided a more favourable context for an inclusive implementation of forest policy and the creation of a new forest ownership regime. The Agreement aims to ensure legality in the entire timber-forestry sector and trade with the EU, while supporting the Ivorian government in a better management of its natural resources, where women now play a prominent role, and fight against illegal logging.

The VPA's successful implementation will depend on Côte d'Ivoire's sustained commitment and political will. EU assistance should be strengthened to support the VPA implementation as part of the programming review process of the EU bilateral programme for the period 2025- 2027.

The Committee on Development calls on the Committee on International Trade, as the committee responsible, to recommend approval of the proposal for a Council decision on the conclusion of 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).