OPINION

of the Committee on International Trade

for the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

on the EU’s role in protecting and restoring the world’s forests
(2019/2156(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion (*): Karin Karlsbro

(*) Associated committee – Rule 57 of the Rules of Procedure
SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on International Trade calls on the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Recalls that the objective of the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) is to provide a legal framework aimed at ensuring that all timber and timber product imports from partner countries into the EU that are covered by VPAs have been produced legally; stresses that VPAs are generally intended to foster systemic changes in the forestry sector with the aim of developing sustainable management of forests, eradicating illegal logging and supporting worldwide efforts to stop deforestation and forest degradation; underlines that VPAs provide an important legal framework for both the EU and its partner countries, made possible by good cooperation and engagement on the part of the countries concerned;

2. Welcomes the progress made through FLEGT VPAs, and the increased dialogue between governments, industry and civil society in several countries resulting from the VPA process; notes that to date, seven countries have ratified VPAs with the EU (Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Ghana, Indonesia, Liberia, the Republic of the Congo and Vietnam), among which Indonesia is the first and so far the only VPA partner with FLEGT licencing, which has been operational since 2016, and that the EU has concluded negotiations and initialled VPAs with Honduras and Guyana, while negotiations are ongoing with six other countries (Côte d’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Laos, Thailand and Malaysia); stresses that VPAs constitute a very effective framework within which to establish good partnerships with those countries, and that new VPAs with additional partners should be promoted; is convinced that the EU should continue to engage with FLEGT VPA countries to ensure it remains an attractive alternative to export markets with less stringent environmental standards; acknowledges the importance of the FLEGT Regulation and the EU Timber Regulation in preventing the entry of illegally harvested timber to the EU market; calls for the EU to increase funding for FLEGT; welcomes the Commission’s upcoming fitness check of the FLEGT Regulation and the EU Timber Regulation, also as an opportunity to strengthen their enforcement and to widen their scope;

3. Emphasises the need to further improve the implementation and enforcement of the EU Timber Regulation to best preserve sustainable trade in imported and domestically produced timber and timber products; repeats its demand that imports of timber and timber products should be more thoroughly checked at the EU borders in order to ensure that the imported products do indeed comply with the criteria for entry into the EU; stresses that the Commission needs to ensure that customs controls throughout the EU follow the same standards, by means of a direct unified customs control mechanism, in coordination with Member States and in full compliance with the principle of subsidiarity;

4. Calls on the Commission, when strengthening existing policies, to ensure the coherence of the FLEGT VPAs with all its policies, including in the fields of development,
environment, agriculture and trade; calls on the Commission to negotiate timber import standards in future bilateral or multilateral trade-related agreements, in order to avoid undermining the successes achieved through the FLEGT Action Plan with timber-producing countries;

5. Calls on the Commission to step up capacity support to FLEGT VPA countries in order to accelerate the implementation of the commitments made, including combatting corruption and greenwashing, and enhancing good governance and transparency; stresses that corruption linked to illegal logging should be addressed in EU trade policy; calls on the Commission to ensure the inclusion of more ambitious and fully implemented sustainable forestry and ecosystem protection provisions in the trade and sustainable development chapters of free trade agreements, including illegal logging-related anti-corruption provisions; welcomes the fact that the Paris Agreement will be an essential element of future agreements; calls on the EU to enhance collaboration with organisations that aim to prevent global forestry crime;

6. Calls on the EU to strengthen international cooperation by increasing efforts in key international forums, including the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); calls on the Commission to investigate avenues for multi-, pluri-, or bilateral cooperation, including speeding up negotiations at the WTO on an Environmental Goods Agreement, with trade partners and other importing countries in the fight against deforestation and climate change resulting from imports, while safeguarding avenues for legal trade and strengthening sustainable land management and agriculture, as well as land tenure and good governance in third countries;

7. Notes with concern that research continues to affirm a worrying link between zoonotic diseases, such as COVID-19, and deforestation, climate change and biodiversity loss;

8. Welcomes the EU communication of 23 July 2019 on stepping up EU action to protect and restore the world’s forests; recalls that sustainable and inclusive forest management and governance is essential to the achievement of the objectives set in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement and the European Green Deal; underlines the importance of measures ensuring that demand is in line with the stated goals, as the EU is a significant importer of commodities associated with deforestation, such as soy, palm oil, eucalyptus, rubber, maize, beef, leather and cocoa, which are often drivers of global deforestation; highlights the fact that commodities like cocoa offer an early chance to make progress on such an approach, learning lessons from the FLEGT VPA process; believes that the EU needs to ensure that it only promotes global supply chains and financial flows which are sustainable and deforestation-free and which do not result in human rights violations; calls on the Commission to base any future proposals regarding forest-risk commodities on lessons learned from the FLEGT Action Plan, the EU Timber Regulation, the Conflict Mineral Regulation, the Non-Financial Reporting Directive, legislation on illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and other EU initiatives to regulate supply chains; takes note with interest of the Commission’s announcement of future proposals on due diligence throughout the supply chain for products to be put on the internal market; calls for the role of civil society, as a crucial source of information on deforestation, to be strengthened; urges the Commission, in developing any such proposals, to ensure that such commodities
and products do not cause deforestation, forest degradation, the conversion or
degradation of natural ecosystems or related human rights violations, and that they
apply to the whole supply chain and cover OECD guidelines on social responsibility
and human rights in trade, are WTO compatible, and that after careful assessment the
proposals are found to be functional and applicable to all actors on the market, including
SMEs;

9. Underlines the fact that the drivers of deforestation go beyond the forest sector per se
and relate to a wide range of issues, such as land tenure, protection of the rights of
indigenous people, agricultural policies, climate change, democracy, human rights and
political freedom; recalls that indigenous women and women farmers play a central role
in protecting forest ecosystems; calls on the Commission to step up its efforts to address
deforestation holistically through a coherent policy framework, while ensuring the
conservation of ecosystems; believes that gender equality in forestry education is a key
point in the sustainable management of forests which should be reflected in the EU
Action Plan; recalls the importance of respecting the UN’s Guiding Principles on
Business and Human Rights; supports the ongoing negotiations to create a binding UN
instrument on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to
human rights and stresses the importance of the EU being proactively involved in this
process;

10. Believes that the FLEGT licensing process complements voluntary third-party
certification, and that it is particularly beneficial for smaller operators that often struggle
to obtain certification through private sector schemes;

11. Is convinced that green public procurement policies can play an important role in
encouraging trade in legal and sustainable timber; notes, however, that most EU
Member States have mandatory purchasing policies for central government departments
and voluntary policies for local authorities that undertake the majority of public
spending; calls on the Member States to improve their statistics on the volume of wood
they purchase, including the indication of how much sustainable, legal or FLEGT-
licensed material might be included within their procurement;

12. Recalls the fact that conflict timber is already an action area in the FLEGT Action Plan
but that insufficient work has been done to address this issue; calls on the Commission
to deliver on its commitment to extend the due diligence obligations provided by the EU
Timber Regulation so as to cover conflict timber in the framework of the upcoming
review;

13. Stresses that clear commitments to the fight against deforestation are included in all new
trade agreements including Mercosur and others;

14. Calls on the Commission to make use of the new provisions of the anti-dumping
regulation concerning environment and climate policies;

15. Calls for the EU to make a stronger link between trade and development policies, inter
alia by better implementing the rules of the Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus
(GSP+) in partner countries; calls on the Commission to work with GSP+ recipients on
forestry management action plans to ensure the effective implementation of their
environmental commitments.
INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

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**FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION**

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**Key to symbols:**
+ : in favour
- : against
0 : abstention