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DRAFT INTERIM REPORT

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) (COM(2023)0383 – C9-0000/0000 – 2023/0222R(NLE))

Committee on International Trade

Rapporteur: Karin Karlsbro

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

**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)
(COM(2023)0383 – C9-0000/0000 – 2023/0222R(NLE))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission proposal of 13 July 2023 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) (COM(2023)0383),
- having regard to the draft Council decision on the conclusion of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement between the European Union and Republic of Côte d'Ivoire on forest law enforcement, governance and trade in timber and timber products to the European Union (XXXX/2024),
- having regard to the draft 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 (XXXX/2024),
- having regard to the request for consent submitted by the Council in accordance with the first subparagraphs of Articles 207(3) and 207(4), in conjunction with Article 218(6), second subparagraph, point (a)(v) and with Article 218(7) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (C9-XXXX/2024),
- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 2173/2005 of 20 December 2005 on the establishment of a FLEGT licensing scheme for imports of timber into the European Community¹ (FLEGT Regulation),
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 995/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2010 laying down the obligations of operators who place timber and timber products on the market² (EU Timber Regulation),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 11 December 2019 on the European Green Deal (COM(2019)0640) and to Parliament's resolution of 15 January 2020 thereon³,
- having regard to its resolution of 16 September 2020 on the EU's role in protecting and restoring the world's forests⁴,

¹ OJ L 347, 30.12.2005, p. 1.

² OJ L 295, 12.11.2010, p. 23.

³ OJ C 270, 7.7.2021, p. 2.

⁴ OJ C 385, 22.9.2021, p. 10.

- having regard to its resolution of 22 October 2020 with recommendations to the Commission on an EU legal framework to halt and reverse EU-driven global deforestation⁵,
 - having regard to its legislative resolution of [XXXX]⁶ on the draft Council decision,
 - having regard to Rule 105(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Development,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on International Trade (A9-0000/2023),
- A. whereas approximately 11 % of the land area in Côte d’Ivoire is covered by forests, half of which is tropical rainforest; whereas the forest cover of Côte d’Ivoire has decreased considerably, largely due to the expansion of cash crops in the country, notably cocoa, but also rubber, coffee, cashew and palm oil plantations; whereas the forest cover loss in Côte d’Ivoire has gone from an average of 275 000 ha per year between 1990 and 2000, to 71 600 ha per year between 2015 and 2021, and 26 000 ha per year between 2019 and 2021;
- B. whereas a new forest code was introduced in 2019 to define a sustainable strategy for forest management; whereas the new forest code has not yet entered into force and the forestry sector continues to be organised according to the provisions of a previous decree from 1994;
- C. whereas in recent years, forestry as a share of the country’s economy has decreased and in 2019 it only accounted for 1 % of GDP, according to the Ministry of Water and Forests (Ministère des Eaux et Forêts); whereas the forest sector is still the fourth largest source of export revenue and a major employer, but the future of the sector has been threatened by high deforestation rates and unsustainable practices in recent decades; whereas the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) process, which emphasises legality and good governance, is helping the forest sector to increase its share, provide rural jobs and generate income for Ivorians;
- D. whereas historically, European countries were the main destination for exported timber from Côte d’Ivoire, although UN Comtrade data highlights that the share of exports to Europe has been decreasing, while the share of exports to Asia has been increasing;
- E. whereas Côte d’Ivoire is the second biggest economy in West Africa after Nigeria and the world’s largest supplier of cocoa; whereas the EU is the leading customer of Ivorian cocoa (67 % of Ivorian cocoa exports go to the EU);
- F. whereas Côte d’Ivoire made an official request to the EU for information on the FLEGT process in January 2010; whereas the two parties launched VPA negotiations in June 2013 and concluded negotiations in October 2022;
- G. whereas the objective of the VPA is to ensure that all shipments of timber and timber

⁵ OJ C 404, 6.10.2021, p. 175

⁶ Texts adopted of that date, P9_TA(0000)0000.

products from Côte d'Ivoire destined for the EU market will comply with an Ivorian timber legality assurance system (TLAS) and thereby qualify for a FLEGT licence; whereas domestic timber and timber destined for other export markets will also need to comply with the TLAS and will be subject to the issuance of an H-Legal Certificate;

- H. whereas the TLAS is based on a legality definition, supply chain controls, verification of compliance, FLEGT licensing and an independent audit;
 - I. whereas the agreement covers the five obligatory timber products under the FLEGT Regulation – logs, sawn timber, railway sleepers, plywood and veneer – and a number of other timber products;
 - J. whereas the purpose and expected benefits of FLEGT VPAs go beyond the facilitation of trade in legal timber, as they are also designed to bring about systemic changes in forest governance, law enforcement, transparency and the inclusion of various stakeholders in the political decision-making process;
1. Welcomes the conclusion of negotiations on the VPA between the EU and Côte d'Ivoire and calls for its swift ratification by both sides so it can enter into force in XXXX;
 2. Recognises that the full implementation of the VPA will be a long-term process which will require the adoption of a whole set of legislation and adequate administrative capacity and expertise for its implementation and enforcement; recalls that FLEGT licensing can only begin once Côte d'Ivoire has demonstrated the readiness of its TLAS;
 3. Stresses that the implementation stage requires continued consultations and stakeholder involvement; calls on the Commission and the EU Delegation in Côte d'Ivoire to provide sufficient capacity-building and logistical and technical support in the framework of present and future development cooperation instruments in order to enable Côte d'Ivoire to fulfil the commitments for the implementation of its TLAS and related measures;
 4. Welcomes the recent actions taken by Côte d'Ivoire to reverse the trend of deforestation including: the adoption of the national reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries (REDD+) strategy, including the 'zero deforestation agriculture' strategic option, in 2017; the signing of the Joint Action Framework of the Cocoa and Forests Initiative; the adoption of the policy for the preservation, rehabilitation and expansion of forests; and the promulgation of the new Forest Code on 23 July 2019;
 5. Stresses that the success of the FLEGT also depends on tackling fraud and corruption throughout the timber supply chain; urges the Government of Côte d'Ivoire to work to stop widespread corruption and address other factors fuelling illegal logging and forest degradation, with particular regard to customs and other authorities that will play a pivotal role in the implementation and enforcement of the VPA;
 6. Welcomes the commitment from the Ministry of Water and Forests to take measures to effectively integrate women into the management of the country's forest resources; further stresses the importance of the inclusion of women in forest management in

future VPA negotiations; calls for gender analysis to be mainstreamed into all activities and projects linked to the implementation of the FLEGT VPA;

7. Recognises that the process of negotiating a VPA can allow sectors to identify shared goals and priorities to work towards sustainable forest management, as well as offer an important opportunity for societies to allow for participative management of their forests at local, community and regional levels and even up to national or federal level;
8. Underlines the importance of sustainable cocoa production in Côte d'Ivoire; welcomes initiatives such as the Alliance on Sustainable Cocoa, an ambitious roadmap jointly endorsed by the EU, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and the cocoa sector to improve the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of cocoa production and trade;
9. Emphasises the importance of land use in forest governance and that a strategic vision in forest governance linked to climate change issues is needed; calls on the Government of Côte d'Ivoire to ensure close coordination between the existing different initiatives in the forest sector, such as REDD+, the FLEGT VPA and nationally determined contributions;
10. Asks the Commission to regularly report to Parliament on the implementation of the agreement, including on the work of the Joint Implementation Committee;
11. Calls on the EU Member States to fully comply with and implement the EU Timber Regulation;
12. Stresses that countries all over the world which either have or aim to have regulated import markets for legal timber would benefit from cooperating and, where possible, endorsing each other's rules and systems, such as the EU's FLEGT and VPAs; emphasises that international standards would be more effective and promote long-term legal security for business and consumers;
13. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the Government and parliament of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire.