



TEXTS ADOPTED

P9_TA(2023)0035

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

European Parliament non-legislative resolution of 14 February 2023 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 (09272/2022 - C9-0432/2022 - 2022/0142M(NLE))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission proposal for a Council decision of 10 May 2022 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 (COM(2022)0200),
- having regard to 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 (09272/2022),
- having regard to the draft 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 (09271/2022),
- 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), first subparagraph, point (a)(v), and Article 218(7) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (C9-0432/2022),
- 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 the Agreement adopted at the 21st Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21) in Paris on 12 December 2015 (the Paris Agreement),
- having regard to the UN Sustainable Development Goals,
- having regard to its resolution of 16 September 2020 on the EU's role in protecting and restoring the world's forests⁴,
- 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 the Commission communication of 21 May 2003 entitled 'Forest law enforcement, governance and trade (FLEGT): proposal for an EU action plan' (COM(2003)0251) and the 2018-2022 work plan for its implementation,
- having regard to the Commission proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 November 2021 on the making available on the Union market as well as export from the Union of certain commodities and products associated with deforestation and forest degradation and repealing Regulation (EU) No 995/2010 (COM(2021)0706) (deforestation regulation),
- having regard to its position of 14 February 2023⁶ on the draft Council decision,
- having regard to Rule 105(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Development,

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.

⁵ OJ C 404, 6.10.2021, p. 175.

⁶ Texts adopted of that date, P9_TA(2023)0034.

- having regard to the report of the Committee on International Trade (A9-0018/2023),
- A. whereas in November 2018, the EU and Guyana concluded negotiations on a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT); whereas on 10 March 2022, Guyana and the EU agreed on an updated joint implementation framework – a detailed roadmap for implementing the VPA, which aims to improve forest governance and provide oversight for the trade in legal timber;
- B. whereas approximately 84 % of Guyana’s land is covered by forests; whereas this equates to around 18 million acres; whereas Guyana has the second highest forest carbon stock per capita in the world and is estimated to have 21,8 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide stored in its forests; whereas around 13 % of Guyana’s forests are formally designated as Amerindian village lands; whereas the Guianan moist forest ecoregion covers most of Guyana;
- C. whereas since 1996, conservation efforts have been made and the annual deforestation rate in Guyana has been very low, averaging around 0,06 % ;
- D. whereas Guyana has one of the highest levels of biodiversity in the world; whereas Guyana’s forests are estimated to be home to around 8 000 plant species and over 1 000 species of terrestrial vertebrates; whereas approximately 5 % of all plant species are considered endemic to Guyana;
- E. whereas illegal mining and illegal logging remain a concern in Guyana, as both practices damage the country’s forests; whereas most of the deforestation in Guyana is attributed to fires (50 %) and mining (41 %), be it legal or illegal; whereas although deforestation caused by conversion for agriculture only accounts for around 5 %, it is nevertheless a concern;
- F. whereas the main economic activities in Guyana are agriculture, bauxite and gold mining, timber, mineral mining and fishing; whereas Guyana’s forest industry is estimated to contribute to less than 2 % of its GDP, a figure expected to decrease further with the petroleum sector having been rapidly increasing since 2015, when large oil reserves were discovered in Guyana’s territorial waters;
- G. whereas the forest sector significantly contributes to the economic growth of Guyana, employing about 20 000 people, mainly in rural areas; whereas Guyana’s forests contribute to 2 % of the GDP and to 6 % of total job creation; whereas the VPA would increase the potential of the forestry sector by creating new jobs and contributing to the country’s sustainable economic growth;
- H. whereas the volume of timber traded between Guyana and the EU is

modest, with just 8 % of timber exports from Guyana going to Europe in 2018 and only around half of those going to the EU; whereas Guyana's biggest overall trading partner is the US, with Singapore as the second; whereas its largest export market for timber is the Asia-Pacific region; whereas the VPA would open up more opportunities for Guyana to export to the EU and new markets, which would increase its development opportunities;

- I. whereas Guyana ratified the Paris Agreement in May 2016 and had made a number of commitments relating to sustainable forestry in its revised nationally determined contribution, such as the conservation of an additional 2 million hectares of forests;
- J. whereas Guyana needs to overcome challenges in order to improve the well-being of its citizens, such as fighting poverty, inequality and discrimination, particularly against LGBTI people and indigenous peoples, as well as combating corruption and racial and ethnic polarisation and violence, which remain persistent concerns;
- K. whereas Guyana has expressed a commitment to make funding available to support the implementation of the VPA; whereas the EU, Norway and the UK have also committed to providing additional funding for this purpose;
- L. whereas the objective of the VPA is to ensure that all shipments of timber and timber products from Guyana destined for the EU market will comply with the Guyana Timber Legality Assurance System (GTLAS) and thereby qualify for an FLEGT licence; whereas domestic timber and timber destined for all export markets will also need to comply with the GTLAS;
- M. whereas the VPA covers the five obligatory timber products under the FLEGT Regulation – logs, sawn timber, railway sleepers, plywood and veneer – as well as processed timber, pickets and poles, and joinery and carpentry;
- N. whereas according to the Commission proposal for the deforestation regulation, FLEGT-licensed timber imported to the EU will automatically live up to the legality requirement;
- O. whereas the VPA provides for a Joint Monitoring and Review Committee, which will be responsible for its implementation and monitoring;
- P. 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, in particular civil society organisations, workers' organisations and indigenous communities, as well as support for economic integration and respect for the

international Sustainable Development Goals;

- Q. whereas countries all over the world that either have or aim to have regulated import markets for legal timber benefit from cooperating; whereas common international standards would be most effective to combat deforestation and promote long-term legal security for business and consumers;
1. Strongly supports the conclusion of the negotiations on the VPA on FLEGT between the EU and Guyana; acknowledges that the VPA has great significance for the country, as well as potential for boosting EU-Guyana trade relations; believes that the successful negotiation of this VPA demonstrates the importance of the Union's delegations to third countries and will ensure that only legally logged timber will be 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, protect biodiversity and help in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, while contributing to improving trade relations between Guyana and the EU;
 2. Recognises that the full implementation and enforcement of the VPA will be a long process that will require the adoption of a wide range of legislation, as well as adequate administrative capacity and expertise, to ensure its implementation and enforcement;
 3. Welcomes the high level of stakeholder participation throughout the negotiation process; stresses that the implementation and monitoring stages require genuine consultations and multi-stakeholder involvement, including the meaningful participation of civil society, business representatives, workers' organisations and local and indigenous communities in decision-making to guarantee respect of land tenure rights and the 'free, prior and informed consent' principle; recalls the need to enhance transparency and ensure the effective public disclosure of information and the timely sharing of documents with local and indigenous peoples;
 4. Calls on the Commission and the EU Delegation in Guyana 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;
 5. Welcomes the recent adoption of the joint implementation framework and calls on the Government of Guyana to follow a concrete, time-bound and measurable approach;
 6. Stresses the importance of developing partnerships and cooperation mechanisms to jointly address all aspects of forest governance,

including as regards sharing information;

7. Welcomes Guyana's efforts so far in making advances towards greater transparency and looks forward to further positive cooperation in the fight against illegal logging; stresses that poor governance and corruption in the forestry sector accelerate illegal logging and forest degradation; acknowledges Guyana's commitment to and political will as regards sound forest management; stresses that the success of the FLEGT VPA also depends on tackling fraud and corruption throughout the timber supply chain; urges the Government of Guyana to improve data collection to better implement the traceability system and to continue working to stop widespread corruption and to address other factors fuelling illegal logging and forest degradation, with particular regard to customs and other authorities who will play a pivotal role in implementing and enforcing the VPA; stresses the need to end impunity in the forest sector by protecting environmental human right defenders and whistleblowers and by ensuring effective remedies for human rights violations; welcomes, in this context, Guyana's ratification of the Escazú Agreement and stresses the need to guarantee full recognition of the land tenure rights of local communities and indigenous peoples, notably Amerindian communities, including in the context of mining;
8. Welcomes the fact that the process of negotiating the VPA has allowed sectors to identify shared goals and priorities to work towards sustainable forest management and trade cooperation, as well as offering an important opportunity for communities to allow for participative management of their forests at the local, community and regional levels, and even at national or federal level;
9. Highlights that the VPA creates a great opportunity to boost job creation in the forestry sector; stresses that forest management practices and the trade in legally produced timber should be socially and economically sustainable to guarantee that people either directly or indirectly involved can benefit from trade;
10. Calls for gender analysis to be mainstreamed into all activities and projects linked to the implementation of the VPA; calls for quantitative and qualitative gender-disaggregated analysis of land tenure, ownership of assets and financial inclusion in sectors impacted by trade; calls on the Commission to support these endeavours with technical and human resources;
11. Asks the Commission to report to Parliament regularly on the implementation of the agreement, including on the work of the Joint Monitoring and Review Committee, with a view to enabling an informed decision once the delegated act authorising the acceptance of FLEGT licences has been proposed; stresses therefore that new VPAs with additional partners should be promoted; calls on the

Commission to conduct an exhaustive assessment on the impact of the VPA and the future deforestation regulation on workers and small producers in the forest sector and other related sectors who will be affected by the increased logging controls and checks;

12. Stresses the need to address the regional dimension of illegal logging and the transport, processing and trade of illegal timber throughout the supply chain; calls for this to be included in the VPA evaluation process;
13. Believes that the EU plays an important role in improving both the supply and the demand side of timber in order to reject illegally produced timber and assist exporting countries in their efforts to combat illegal logging and corruption, which results in the destruction of their forests, climate change and human rights violations; recognises that VPAs will continue to be an important legal framework for both the EU and its partner countries under the new proposal for a deforestation regulation; underlines that this has been made possible by the good cooperation and engagement of the partner countries concerned; supports the Commission in finding additional potential partners for future FLEGT VPAs;
14. Recalls that sustainable and inclusive forest management and governance is essential to achieve the objectives set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement, notably through nationally determined contributions; recalls the importance of mining as a major driver of tropical deforestation, resulting in substantial soil erosion and contamination, increased forest fragmentation and mercury pollution of rivers and streams; notes that Guyana is expanding its oil, gas and mining industries; calls on the Government of Guyana to take further steps to curb illegal mining; notes with concern the lack of consistency between regulation of the forest sector and of the mining sector; welcomes further agreements aiming to complement the FLEGT VPA on environmental matters;
15. Stresses that the success of the entire FLEGT initiative depends on, among other things, protecting environmental human right defenders and whistleblowers, improving the ability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to conduct their activities legally and guaranteeing effective protection for the land and full recognition of the customary rights of local communities and indigenous people, particularly Amerindian communities, including the right to give or withhold their consent to any timber concession on their land as a matter of social justice; stresses that the EU should build upon the traditional knowledge of indigenous people and other local communities regarding sustainable forest management; recalls in this regard the importance of preventing any additional administrative burdens from being imposed on SMEs and of providing legal assistance to SMEs to ensure their compliance

with new international agreements, instruments and documents regarding the environment;

16. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.