



TEXTS ADOPTED

P9_TA(2024)0209

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

European Parliament resolution of 10 April 2024 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 - C9-0035/2024 - 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 (12247/2023),
- 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 (12902/2023),
- 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 (C9-0035/2024),

- 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,
- 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 Paris Climate Agreement and to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework on halting and reversing nature loss,
- having regard to the UN Sustainable Development Goals,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2023/1115 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 31 May 2023 on the making available on the Union market and the export from the Union of certain commodities and products associated with deforestation and forest degradation and repealing Regulation (EU) No 995/2010 (EU Deforestation Regulation)⁶,
- having regard to its legislative resolution of 10 April 2024⁷ on the draft Council decision,
- having regard to Rule 105(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the letter from the Committee on Development,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on International Trade (A9-0137/2024),

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 OJ L 150, 9.6.2023, p. 206.

⁷ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2024)0208.

- 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 dramatically, with a loss of 75 % of the country's forests since 1960, 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 create sustainable rural jobs, preserve biodiversity and carbon sinks, restore nature and generate income for Ivorians by following sustainable forest management practices;
- 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 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 from 1 January 2025, the supply of, among other things, cocoa and timber from Côte d'Ivoire to EU markets will be subject to compliance with the conditions laid down in the EU Deforestation Regulation;
 - J. 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;
 - K. 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 2024;
 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; calls, therefore, for the introduction of measures that can support the reduction of burdensome administrative processes; urges both partners to identify digital methods for simplifying the process, for instance, paperless solutions such as e-certificates;
 3. Highlights the high deforestation rates in Côte d'Ivoire, which are related to cocoa production in particular, and the poor control of illegal logging and trade in timber; acknowledges Côte d'Ivoire's commitment to ensuring that timber is harvested according to national law and to continuing with its regulatory reforms to complement and strengthen the legal framework, as well as its adoption of a framework to monitor compliance and carry out independent evaluations of the system;
 4. Stresses that the implementation stage requires continued consultations and stakeholder involvement, including stakeholders from both within and outside the forestry sector, in particular from local and indigenous communities; stresses, further, that the gender factor must also be taken into account in this stage; recalls, in this respect, the need to comply with the principles of free, prior and

informed consent, which should be established, among others, as a condition of the purchase or the use of customary forest lands, in compliance with international human rights laws, namely International Labour Organization Convention No 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples and the standards set out in the Food and Agriculture Organization's Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests; calls on the Commission and the EU Delegation to 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; recommends that both partners take advantage of digital opportunities where appropriate, such as traceability and block chain technologies that can facilitate the implementation and enforcement of the VPA;

5. Recalls that sustainable and inclusive forest management and governance are essential for achieving the objectives set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement;
6. 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;
7. Underlines the need to involve stakeholders in the VPA's implementation in line with the principle of non-discrimination, under which stakeholders both within and outside the forestry sector should be involved, and which also ensures that the gender factor is taken into account;
8. Acknowledges the EU's Deforestation Regulation that has now entered into force, which should complement the FLEGT and other initiatives that address illegal deforestation; urges partners to avoid duplication of these measures and streamline actions so as to maximise the benefits for businesses, citizens and the environment; insists on the need for adequate support mechanisms, in particular for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and smallholder farmers, in the implementation of the Regulation;
9. Stresses that the success of the FLEGT also depends on tackling fraud, organised crime 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, in cooperation with other authorities, which will play a pivotal role in the implementation and enforcement of the VPA; stresses the importance of protecting human rights, in particular the rights of workers, when sourcing goods and products for the EU market; calls, in this context, on local authorities to extend special protection to children;

10. Calls on the Commission to increase the funding allocation to the Forest Partnership with Côte d'Ivoire as part of the programming review process for the EU bilateral programme for 2025-2027 in order to assist in the VPA's implementation, and to complement this with the necessary technical support to facilitate Côte d'Ivoire's efforts and political commitment and attain the objectives of both parties to the VPA; calls, further, on the Commission to report periodically on the progress made on the FLEGT action plan;
11. 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 and other vulnerable groups 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; urges other Ivorian public bodies to adopt gender strategies for forest management;
12. Calls for strengthening the role and participation of the private sector in the VPA's implementation and to assist operators, in particular SMEs, in building capacity to ensure better clarity, understanding and compliance with the requirements of the VPA;
13. 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 communities to allow for participative management of their forests at local, community and regional levels, including workers' and business organisations, and even up to national or federal level;
14. Stresses the importance of forest jobs and rural employment in the economy of Côte d'Ivoire, which should be taken into account in the implementation of the VPA; considers, in this respect, that the Commission and the Côte d'Ivoire authorities should conduct an exhaustive assessment of the VPA's impact on the workers and small producers in the sector, who could be affected by the increased logging controls; asks the Commission to promote and support programmes for the reconversion of these workers and producers to other activities;
15. 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;

16. Stresses the need to address the root causes of deforestation in Côte d'Ivoire; recalls, in this respect, that Côte d'Ivoire is the world's biggest cocoa producer, and that around 40 % of its cocoa production is destined for the EU; notes with concern, however, that it only receives between 5 % and 7 % of the profit generated by this sector globally, and that as a result, although this sector provides income to one fifth of the Ivorian population, farmers can usually not make a living from their work and their production; notes, further, that it is estimated that 54,9 % of Ivorian cocoa producers and their families currently live below the poverty line; recalls that the best way to make cocoa sustainable is to ensure that companies pay a fair price for cocoa and adequate remuneration to farmers and abolish child labour in cocoa production;
17. Emphasises the importance of land use in forest governance and that a strategic vision in forest governance linked to climate change and biodiversity 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 under the Paris Agreement and national targets under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework;
18. Calls on the Commission and the European External Action Service to actively support Côte d'Ivoire in accordance with Article 30 of the EU Deforestation Regulation; emphasises that cooperation must allow for the full participation of all stakeholders, including smallholders and should include assistance on other relevant and upcoming EU legislation, such as the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive and Forced Labour Regulation;
19. Recognises that the VPA with Côte d'Ivoire, as well as those with other countries, proves that trade agreements can work, without the threat to impose sanctions, by the inclusion of different means of control and cooperation;
20. Underlines that VPAs provide an important legal framework for both the EU and its partner countries, which has been made possible with good cooperation with and commitment from the countries concerned; stresses, therefore, that new VPAs with additional partners should be promoted;
21. Asks the Commission to regularly report to Parliament on the implementation of the agreement, including on the work of the Joint Implementation Committee;

22. Calls on the EU Member States to fully comply with and implement the EU Timber Regulation and to align with the requirements of the EU Deforestation Regulation;
23. 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;
24. 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.