



Speaking Note

7th FLEGT conference
25.04.2012

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank the Commission for this invitation to the 7th FLEGT coordination meeting. I am very happy to have this opportunity to give you some of the European Parliament's points of view on the FLEGT action plan and on the recent Voluntary Partnership Agreements, which were negotiated by the European Commission and approved by the European Parliament.

Before going into detail, allow me to introduce myself and the role of the European Parliament within the FLEGT process especially when it comes to VPAs.

Recently - one week ago to be more precise - the European Parliament approved two VPAs. The first with Liberia, which after a long lasting civil war and the unfortunate involvement of their timber cutting and timber production, managed to get back on track and pursue the aim of sustainable and legal cutting and trade of timber and timber products.



The European Union also negotiated and concluded a VPA with the Republic of Central Africa, which endorsed new actions in relation to the national timber sector on sustainability and legality of timber and timber products.

I was in charge for these agreements for the European Parliament and recommended the Parliament to adopt both VPAs at our last plenary session in April in Strasbourg.



What role does the Parliament therefore play within the FLEGT process?

The Parliament has greater legislative powers since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009. It now decides on the vast majority of European legislation. The so called 'co-decision' procedure is enlarged to fields such as agriculture, energy policy and trade policy. When it comes to trade policy the Parliament has to give or refuse its consent on international trade agreements like VPAs negotiated by the Commission and other parties involved. Hence, the Parliament cannot amend agreements by adding or deleting certain parts or paragraphs. It can just say 'yes' or 'no' to the agreed text as a whole.

Four VPAs were approved by the Parliament under the co-decision procedure so far namely Congo and Cameroon in 2011 and Liberia and Republic of Central Africa in 2012.



From the very beginning of the FLEGT action plan, the Parliament has always welcomed measures to fight illegal logging by supporting third countries. As you are aware these measure range from supporting action to safeguards in the financing and investment fields.

This encouragement is also mentioned in the resolution adopted by the Parliament in 2011 following the approval of two out of four VPAs mentioned above.

This resolution focuses in particular on some key points of the Parliament's position on the nature of VPA agreements and their possible improvements.

I think that we all can agree on the importance of sustainability, forest biodiversity, climate protection and CO2 reduction. And it is quite clear what role VPAs and the FLEGT action plan itself can and shall play to support our aims by promoting sustainability in these fields.



Nevertheless the Commission and the partner countries involved could focus on some aspects in particular.

Participation of All Stakeholders Involved

Firstly, I want to discuss the process of participation of all stakeholders involved. Besides government ministries, the private sector and civil societies it is of utmost importance to involve indigenous people as well. The negotiation process showed that there was a strong commitment by the parties to involve as many stakeholders as possible to paint a holistic picture of needs and wishes in the regions and states concerned.

These strong commitments have to be prolonged especially during the implementation processes of the VPAs. The VPA countries and the Commission as well have to safeguard and respect the rights of indigenous people as stated in Parliament's resolution from 2011. To further understand this point, I will quote paragraph 10 of the resolution mentioned. The wording is as follows *"to establish a mechanism (...) guaranteeing in particular the reinforcement of the capacities of local stakeholders and the direct involvement of local communities and indigenous populations during the implementation phase"*.



This means that a mechanism has to be established to take all future stakeholders' views into account to guarantee a holistic and sustainable approach for further debates and considerations. This would lead to a better understanding of the actual functioning of the VPAs in place and would also help to update and modify the structures properly.



FLEGT Versus REDD+

Secondly, I would like to draw your attention to a program already in place. Some concerns regarding REDD and the compliance with FLEGT were recently raised among parliamentarians. As you all know REDD is a program to boost CO2 reduction caused by forest degradation by giving incentives when appropriate. Both REDD and FLEGT aim to help improve forest governance by pursuing different approaches. While REDD focuses mainly on reducing rates of deforestation and on the funding needed, FLEGT goes beyond that. FLEGT stands for better governance, raising awareness amongst people concerned and promoting sustainable logging and trading as well. REDD programs should therefore be closely drawn up on the basis of the FLEGT-approach. This would include fostering government reforms and lawmaking, consultations with all stakeholders involved particularly with indigenous people as well as an appropriate output for communities and societies for their efforts on sustainable resources management.

FLEGT and REDD shall be complementary and not contradicting each other.



Process of Implementation

Thirdly, we have to be aware of the implementation process itself. Commitments undertaken during the negotiations have to be fulfilled and executed. This can only be achieved by a strong cooperation between the parties involved. The Commission especially is asked to support the VPA partners by capacity building to ensure a smooth implementation process. The willingness of the VPA participants is obviously a given. But this willingness has to be strengthened properly and continuously.

Furthermore national authorities have to ensure compliance with the rules and provisions laid down in the agreement. The European Parliament is confident that the scheduled implementations of the VPAs can be executed successfully and in time if the needed capacity building is granted.



Let me reaffirm these three points briefly:

The Parliament's main recommendations regarding VPAs are a holistic consultation approach which give all stakeholders involved the possibility to address their concerns and views properly, the compliance of FLEGT and REDD. Both programs should complement instead of counteract each other and last but not least: The supervision of the implementation process itself.

To conclude, the European Parliament welcomes the efforts of the Commission and partner countries by establishing a sustainable partnership for protecting our environment and biodiversity. VPAs play an important role by developing regions and generating a solid basis for further developments in the social and economic sector.

I can assure you that the Parliament is looking forward to the upcoming negotiations with further partners.

Thank you.