

EU and Honduras sign agreement to reduce illegal timber logging



Today, the EU and Republic of Honduras signed in Brussels a voluntary partnership agreement (VPA) on forest law enforcement, governance and trade in timber products to the EU. The agreement will ensure that all Honduran timber and timber products imported in the EU are legally sourced and licensed.

Honduras is the first Latin American country (and the eighth overall) to sign a voluntary partnership agreement with the EU under the Action Plan on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT). The agreement sets up a timber legality assurance system in Honduras which assesses timber logging with requirements similar to the ones set in the EU Timber Regulation; it will enable the country to issue FLEGT licences. This licensing will also support Honduras' efforts (as well as other countries' who have signed similar VPAs) to meet equivalent legal requirements of markets beyond the EU. This process enhances the EU's sustainable development and trade goals and significantly contributes to the overall objective of reducing illegal logging.

The VPA was signed by the Portuguese Ambassador Nuno Brito, European Commissioner for international partnerships Jutta Urpilainen and the Ambassador of Honduras Roberto Ochoa Madrid.

Background and next steps

The Action Plan on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) endorsed by the Council in 2003 proposes a set of measures, including support for timber-producing countries, multilateral collaboration to tackle trade in illegal timber, support for private-sector initiatives, and measures to discourage investment in activities that encourage illegal logging. The cornerstone of the Action Plan is the establishment of FLEGT partnerships between the EU and timber-producing countries, aimed at stopping illegal logging.

In 2005 the Council adopted Regulation (EC) No 2173/2005 on the establishment of a FLEGT licensing scheme for imports of timber into the European Community, a mechanism that enables verification of the legality of timber imported into the EU under the FLEGT partnerships.

Negotiations for this agreement started in 2013. The VPA will enter into force after being ratified by both the EU and Honduras and will be binding upon the parties.

Invitation letter by President Charles Michel to the members of the European Council ahead of their video conference of 25 and 26 February 2021



We will meet virtually on Thursday and Friday to continue our coordination work on the COVID-19 pandemic and advance other important strands of our common agenda.

Our fight against the COVID-19 pandemic continues. It remains challenging due to the emergence of new variants and the need to strike the right balance between restrictions and the smooth flow of goods and services in the single market.

Our priority continues to be to speed up vaccinations across the EU. This means accelerating the authorisation process of vaccines, as well as their production and delivery. It will require, for instance, looking at solutions to bring manufacturers across supply chains together in order to scale-up production in the EU. It also includes ensuring that vaccine deliveries are predictable and that pharmaceutical companies comply with their commitments.

The new variants have become the dominant strains in many Member States. This implies enhancing our sequencing capacity, and preparing the groundwork for vaccine updates.

Restrictive measures on non-essential travel may still be needed to contain the spread of the virus. Nevertheless, the flow of goods and services in the single market, as well as the role played by the green lanes, remain essential.

Further afield, demonstrating solidarity with our partners, including through COVAX, is key.

Looking beyond our immediate priorities, I believe there is merit in starting to take stock of the lessons learned from our experience so far. We will therefore discuss how to build our resilience to future health threats, whatever form they may take.

Lastly, I believe that we should continue our work to define a common approach to vaccination certificates.

I propose to dedicate our working session on Thursday to all these critical issues.

The following day, we will start with Security and Defence. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg will join us at the start of the videoconference for an exchange of views on EU-NATO cooperation. We will then discuss how to

improve our collective capacity to respond to security challenges and threats. High Representative Borrell will update us on ongoing work on the Strategic Compass. I would also like us to dedicate some time to cyber-attacks and hybrid threats which pose very real challenges to our security. Last but not least, we will discuss our relations with the Southern Neighbourhood.

Our videoconference will start on Thursday 25 February at 3pm. We will be joined by the President of the European Parliament before we turn to our working session dedicated to COVID-19 and Health. On Friday 26 February we will resume at 9am for the working session on Security and Defence and the Southern Neighbourhood. I look forward to our discussion.

[Visit the meeting page](#)

[Steven Maijoor delivers statement on GameStop at the ECON Committee](#)

ESMA Chair, Steven Maijoor, [addressed](#) today the Members of the European Parliament within the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON). He was invited together with the European Commission's Director for Financial Markets, Ugo Bassi, for an exchange of views on GameStop share trading and related phenomena.

On 17 February, ESMA released a [statement](#) to highlight to retail investors the risks connected with trading decisions based exclusively on exchanges of views, informal recommendations and sharing of trading intentions through social networks and unregulated online platforms.

[CHANGE OF TIME: Press briefing ahead of the video conference of the members of the European Council, 25-26 February 2021](#)



The press briefing ahead of the video conference of the members of the European Council of 25 and 26 February 2021 will take place via video

conference **tomorrow Wednesday 24 February 2021 at 11.00**

English and French interpretation will be available.

This briefing is “off the record”.

In order to follow the briefing and to be able to ask questions remotely, EU accredited journalists and journalists who had a EUCO accreditation from June 2019 European Council meeting or later, can register using [this link](#)

Journalists who already registered for high-level press conferences (European Councils, international summits) in 2020 or 2021 don't need to register again.

Deadline: tomorrow Wednesday 24 February, 08.30

Further instructions will be sent to all registered participants approximately half an hour before the briefing.

[Press release – Attacks on abortion rights and breaches of the rule of law in Poland](#)



The [hearing](#) is jointly organised by the [Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs](#) and the [Women's Rights and Gender Equality](#) committees. It will focus on the impact of measures and attacks on women's sexual and reproductive health and rights in Poland, such as the right to access healthcare, the right to privacy, and the right to education. The hearing will also examine how various communities still face discrimination, in conjunction with the

deteriorating situation of the rule of law.

In the first session, MEPs will exchange views with [Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli](#). The second part will feature:

- Wojciech HERMELIŃSKI, attorney, former Judge of the Constitutional Tribunal, Chair of the National Electoral Commission from 2014 to 2019,
- Marta LEMPART, Leader of the Polish Women on Strike movement, and
- Dorota BOJEMSKA, Chair of the Family Council at the Ministry of Family and Social Policy in Poland.

When: Wednesday 24 February 2021, 13.45 – 15.15

Where: European Parliament in Brussels, József Antall building (room 2Q2), and with remote participation

You can [follow the hearing live](#). Due to COVID-19 restrictions, journalists are strongly advised to follow it online.

Background

[Article 7\(1\) TEU](#) procedures as regards the rule of law in Poland have been underway since the [Commission's proposal in 2017](#) (backed by [Parliament in 2018](#)), with a focus on concerns about the independence and legitimacy of the Constitutional Tribunal.

In their resolution on the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention (November 2019), MEPs reaffirmed that "the denial of sexual and reproductive health and rights services is a form of violence against women and girls", stressing also that "the ECtHR has ruled on several occasions that restrictive abortion laws and lack of implementation violates the human rights of women". Poland's planned withdrawal from the [Istanbul Convention](#) was [criticised by the LIBE and FEMM Chairs](#) in July 2020.