



## Press release

Luxembourg, 22 October 2015

### Illegal Logging: “Europe should put its own house in order,” say EU Auditors

Tackling illegal logging is crucial for controlling climate change by reducing carbon emissions into the atmosphere. As a way of helping the environment protecting trees is hard to beat. The innovative Action Plan launched by the Commission in 2003 was therefore a welcome initiative. However, twelve years later the results overall are meagre, according to a new report from the European Court of Auditors.

*“Four countries (Greece, Hungary, Romania and Spain) have not yet fully implemented the EU Timber Regulation, which was introduced to prevent illegal timber entering the EU market. As the chain of control is only as strong as its weakest link in the single market, illegal timber could still be imported into the EU via these four countries. Europe, on the other hand, has promoted a licensing scheme to ensure that timber producing countries, around the world, export only legal timber. The EU should, firstly, put its own house in order and set an example in tackling illegal logging and the trade of illegally harvested timber”* stated Mr Karel Pinxten, Member of the Court of Auditors responsible for this report.

The EU Auditors examined the effectiveness of the main aspects of the EU Action Plan on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT). Under the Action Plan, 300 million euro was allocated to 35 countries between 2003 and 2013. Two countries, Indonesia and Ghana, made good strides towards full licensing for their timber. But in general, progress has been very slow and many countries have struggled to overcome the barriers to good governance. In the twelve years since the Commission introduced the Action Plan, no partner country has obtained fully-approved (FLEGT) licensing.

The lack of adequate planning by the Commission, together with the lack of clear funding priorities towards timber producing countries, were important factors contributing to this lack of progress.

The auditors recommend that the Commission should:

- set out clear objectives and the means of achieving them.
- allocate its resources in those timber producing countries where they will have the greatest impact.

*The purpose of this press release is to give the main messages of the special report adopted by the European Court of Auditors. The full report can be found at [www.eca.europa.eu](http://www.eca.europa.eu)*

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- ensure that the Timber Regulation is fully implemented in all Member States.
- introduce robust assessment and reporting procedures to keep track of the initiative.
- make use of reputable private certification bodies.

## Notes to Editors

In addition to its very harmful effects on the environment, illegal logging and the associated trade lead to a loss of biodiversity, negatively affect the livelihoods of forest dwellers, fuel corruption and undermine the rule of law. They also deprive governments of much-needed revenue.

With regards to its environmental impact, reducing illegal logging is a very efficient method of lowering carbon emissions compared to other climate policies such as the promotion of renewable energy.

The Commission proposal for an EU Action Plan on forest law enforcement, governance and trade (FLEGT), issued in 2003 to tackle the problem of illegal logging and the related trade, was therefore a welcome and very ambitious initiative. The cornerstone of the action plan is a bilateral agreement between the EU and a wood exporting country – the FLEGT voluntary partnership agreement (VPA) – committing the exporting country to trading only legally harvested timber products.

However, over the period of the Action Plan the Commission did not devise an appropriate work plan with clear objectives, milestones and a dedicated budget. Assistance was not granted to timber producing countries in accordance with clear criteria, and the impact of the aid was diluted because of the large number of countries competing for assistance. The degree of progress in the countries concerned varied considerably. But many have taken only small steps towards full licensing. Indonesia has introduced its own licensing system and hopes that it will be eligible for full FLEGT licensing in the near future. Considerable progress towards full licensing was also noted in Ghana. However, no country has yet met the conditions for full FLEGT licensing.

The EU timber regulation to prevent the importation or placing of illegal timber on the EU market was not adopted until 2010 and came into force in 2013. Implementation in Member States has been slow and at the time of the audit six countries were non-compliant. Recently Latvia and Poland have been assessed as compliant, leaving four countries which have not yet taken the necessary measures. The partial implementation of such an important measure sends a bad signal to timber exporting countries, which have intensified their efforts to harvest only legal timber. As a result, the EU risks being accused of double standards.

The Commission should take heed of the recommendations in the EU Auditors' report and the current evaluation of the FLEGT initiative in order to assess how the present approach can be modified to produce more tangible results.

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**Special Report No 13/2015: EU support to timber-producing countries under the FLEGT action plan** is currently available in English (other languages to follow shortly).