Tackling the global deforestation crisis - the urgent need for EU regulation of supply chains

Following the global outcry about the Amazon fires, Fern and the Fair Trade Advocacy Office organised a European Parliament event to discuss the European Union’s (EU) response and the urgent need to regulate EU agricultural supply chains. The starting point for discussions was the recently published Commission Communication on stepping up EU action to protect and restore the world’s forests.

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) Heidi Hautala, European Parliament Vice-President and chair of the Working Group on Responsible Business Conduct (RBC), Bernd Lange, chair of the International Trade committee, Pascal Canfin, chair of the Environment committee, and Maria Arena, chair of the Human Rights subcommittee hosted the event. Panellists included representatives from the European Commission, the private sector, Brazilian Indigenous Peoples, the government of Côte d’Ivoire and civil society.
The event led to the following outcomes:

- Hosting MEPs recognised the links between deforestation and human rights and called for an EU legislation on supply chains to tackle global deforestation and for the stepping up of corporate and state accountability. Pascal Canfin said new regulation is ‘no longer a question of if but what’.

- Heidi Hautala, Bernd Lange, Maria Arena, representatives from Mars and Lush and NGO representatives made the case for an EU due diligence regulation that would require companies to ensure full transparency in their supply chains in order to monitor, address and mitigate the negative impacts of their imports on forests and human rights.

- Heidi Hautala stressed the importance of securing a harmonised EU approach instead of a patchwork of national regulations. Michelle O’Neill from Mars confirmed that one EU regulation would be easier for companies to deal with and would prevent free-riders.

- Jo Blackman from Global Witness pointed out that civil society is not supportive of labelling. In addition to a due diligence legislation, she also called for dissuasive penalty regimes in every EU Member State.

- European Commission, Côte d’Ivoire and Fern representatives insisted that the EU shouldn’t develop solutions unilaterally: strong, mutual and equal bilateral agreements with producer countries must be put in place in order to address the root causes of deforestation.

- Carla Montesi, from the Commission’s Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development, stressed that they are considering trade agreements for agricultural commodities like cocoa, inspired by the EU’s existing Voluntary Partnership Agreements to tackle illegal logging. Abou Dosso, Côte d’Ivoire’s Ambassador to the EU, added that the EU should be careful not to develop solutions unilaterally and ensure that any reflection is carried in partnership with producer countries.

- Julia Christian from Fern suggested that a mechanism to tackle low prices paid to cocoa farmers should also be considered.

- On behalf of the Brazilian Articulation of Indigenous Peoples, Nara Baré gave a gripping testimony referring to the recent brutal killing of the twenty-six-year-old Paulino Guajajara by armed illegal loggers, while protecting his territory. This illustrates how the Brazilian government fails to secure Indigenous Peoples’ lands and rights. She underlined the key role of Indigenous Peoples in protecting the world’s forests and called for an EU regulation that will ensure that all products imported to the EU respect Indigenous Peoples’ land rights. On behalf of the Commission’s Directorate General for Environment, Jorge Romero also emphasised the need to scale up action in relation to clarifying land tenure.

- Maria Arena and Bernd Lange also called for sustainable and responsible trade agreements that protect rights.

The Environment committee will now work on specific recommendations for a regulation in a new report.

For more information, read the latest NGO brief ng: “Protecting forests, natural ecosystems and human rights: a case for EU action”.

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