

Brussels, September 13 2021

Dear Executive Vice-President Dombrovskis,

Subject: Raging Fires and unprecedented deforestation in the Amazon should signal the end of the EU-Mercosur Treaty

You stated in April that the European Union (EU) is seeking meaningful commitments from Brazil and other Mercosur countries on climate change and deforestation by the end of 2021 to push forward the EU-Mercosur trade agreement¹. These commitments would be part of additional statements of the EU and the Mercosur countries and would aim to address concerns related to deforestation and climate change. EU countries, including France and Germany, have warned that they will refuse to ratify the EU-Mercosur agreement unless Brazil commits to rein in deforestation in the Amazon². The Austrian parliament and government already vetoed the agreement³.

And yet, there is widespread reporting of the **record-breaking levels of deforestation and forest fires** currently taking place in the Brazilian Amazon. Moreover, **unprecedented mass mobilizations of indigenous people** against the sharp rise in assaults against indigenous people⁴ are also taking place. In spite of these appalling trends, plans to ratify EU Mercosur agreement continue. This, despite many international calls from civil society⁵, citizens⁶, labour unions⁷, policymakers and academics⁸ to halt the ratification of the deal.

Recent reports and developments once again confirm that any additional “best endeavor” statements or declarations between the EU and Mercosur countries are meaningless and will fail to address the mounting problems of deforestation and climate change. It is also clear that no credible and meaningful commitments can be expected from the Brazilian government. There is no evidence of positive ‘change on the ground’. On the contrary, all reports point to worsening conditions for the Amazon and human rights with three years of President Jair Bolsonaro’s presidency coinciding with three years of record breaking deforestation rates since 2008, forest fires and increased repression of indigenous groups and civil society in Brazil. **Given these facts, it is unconscionable that EU governments and policymakers, rather than putting an immediate halt to this flawed pursuit, continue to pursue ratification with meaningless bandaids such as the proposed statements.**

Therefore, we urgently call on the European Commission not to proceed with the ratification of the EU-Mercosur trade agreement.

We call on the EU member states and the European Parliament to not approve the deal, with or without additional declarations.

We call on national parliaments to follow the Austrian example and adopt resolutions that refuse the approval of the deal.

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/eu-mercossur-trade-idUSL8N2MN6EK>

² <https://www.politico.eu/article/dombrovskis-hopes-to-save-mercossur-deal/>

³ <https://www.bilaterals.org/?austria-reaffirms-its-veto-of-the>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/23/jair-bolsonaro-could-face-charges-in-the-hague-over-amazon-rainforest>

⁵ On March 15 more than 450 organisations joined forces and launched the [Stop EU-Mercosur coalition](#)

⁶ All across Europe, citizens are worried about this deal. A [poll](#) conducted by YouGov amongst European citizens in 12 countries found that 75% of citizens want “to halt the EU Mercosur Agreement until the Amazon deforestation is stopped”

⁷ <https://www.etuc.org/en/publication/cono-surccscs-etuc-joint-statement-bi-regional-association-agreement-between-european>

⁸ <http://s2bnetwork.org/open-letter-sia/>

Latest developments in Brazil

The **destruction of the Brazilian Amazon is at its fastest pace in 10 years**. From August 2020 to July 2021, the biome saw 10,476 km² of rainforest destroyed. This cumulative is 57% superior to the deforestation registered on the previous calendar, from August 2019 to July 2020, with 6,688 km² ravaged.

The latest report from Global Forest Watch shows that Brazil leads the world in **primary forest loss, which increased by 25%** in 2020 compared to the year before. The spike is due to record-breaking fires. According to MAAP⁹, there have been nearly **double the number of major fires in the Brazilian Amazon through late August compared to the same period last year**.

We know that the Amazon is one of the world's best defenses against climate change, yet we have arrived at its tipping point.¹⁰ Its fate affects us all. We count on forests to suck up carbon dioxide that humans, companies, and countries emit through the burning of fossil fuels. The Amazon has always performed this essential function. But as scientists are now learning, wildfires and climate change itself are putting that function at risk.

The **Brazilian government has directly contributed to these problems through its policies**. The Bolsonaro government has consistently dismantled environmental governance, seriously compromising Brazil's ability to meet both its domestic and international climate commitments. Since June 2019, the Brazilian regime has stepped up its anti-environmental policy, rolling back enforcement, harassing civil servants, cutting environmental agencies' budgets and halting the collection of environmental fines¹¹. In June, Brazil's environmental minister, Ricardo Salles, stepped down facing a criminal investigation and allegations that he was involved in illegal logging and exports of illegal timber from the Amazon rainforest to the U.S. and Europe. The outgoing minister had acted as lead negotiator for Brazil in talks with the United States over funding to preserve the Amazon rainforest

In Congress, the Bolsonaro government and the "ruralista" **agribusiness lobby** have put more supporters in high-level key positions. These politicians have enabled the ruralistas' agenda to be pursued more aggressively, leading to increased attacks on Indigenous Peoples and their territories. In fact, **Indigenous people in Brazil are bracing for a surge in invasions** and violence on their territories after a controversial bill was approved by the lower house of Congress that could make land grabs easier and help legalize claims by land grabbers occupying public forests and Indigenous territories awaiting demarcation¹². The legislation in question is just one of a slew of state and federal bills threatening Indigenous rights, which in turn are part of a wider pattern of attacks and violence on Indigenous lands throughout the country.

In recent months thousands of indigenous peoples from all over Brazil have organized unprecedented mass mobilizations¹³ in Brasilia. They are mobilising against the federal government's and the National Congress's anti-indigenous agenda and the expected Supreme Court's historical decision to alter the rules for the preservation of Indigenous Lands in Brazil that was created by the ruralist lobby and that will define the future of indigenous lands. Indigenous

⁹ https://maaproject.org/2021/amazon_fires-august/

¹⁰ <https://www.iatp.org/documents/climate-land-use-change-and-eu-mercosur-agreement-accelerating-tipping-points>

¹¹ <https://www.oc.eco.br/en/passando-a-boiada-o-segundo-ano-de-desmonte-ambiental-sob-jair-bolsonaro/>

¹² <https://news.mongabay.com/2021/08/indigenous-brazilians-fear-surge-in-violence-as-land-grab-bill-nears-passage/>

¹³ <https://apiboficial.org/2021/08/25/the-mobilisation-continues/?lang=en>

territories store in their biomass more carbon than any other type of territory and host more than one third of all aboveground carbon of the Amazon. They are still carbon sinks¹⁴.

Against this devastating backdrop, the ratification of the EU Mercosur free trade agreement will only exacerbate the situation, leading to more meat, soy and ethanol exports to the EU. The additional land demand creates strong incentives for further deforestation for cattle pastures, and soy and sugar cane monocultures. A study, commissioned by the French government showed that deforestation for exports to the EU could increase by $\pm 25\%$. It will promote the interests of economic sectors that have been defined by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the World Biodiversity Council (IPBES) as clear drivers of the climate and biodiversity crisis.

Conclusion

We therefore strongly believe that a separate additional annex on sustainability in the EU Mercosur Agreement will not curb or stop the environmental setbacks and human rights violations that occur on the ground in Brazil. Moreover, a recent **legal study** commissioned by MISEREOR, Greenpeace and CIDSE found that **neither protocols nor interpretative declarations are enough to fix the problems of this agreement**. Therefore, if the EU wants to be coherent with the Paris Agreement and the European Green Deal and EU's Biodiversity Strategy¹⁵, it cannot proceed with the ratification of this trade agreement.

Citizens across Europe are taking action in European and South American cities to hold you accountable and ask you to take this deal off the table. Civil society and citizens are closely watching you and we will not allow you to pass an agreement that goes directly against the people and the planet. If the EU is serious about tackling climate change, upholding human rights and improving trade relations between the regions, the EU-Mercosur trade agreement must be stopped. We call on you instead to re-open negotiations based on a new mandate that puts people and the planet first and addresses the structural imbalances between our economies instead of deepening them.

Yours sincerely,



Jagoda Munic

Director Friends of the Earth Europe

¹⁴ [Wayne S. Walker et.al: The role of forest conversion, degradation, and disturbance in the carbon dynamics of Amazon indigenous territories and protected areas. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences Feb 2020, 117 \(6\) 3015-3025; DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1913321117](#)

¹⁵ EU's Biodiversity strategy for 2030 (Bringing nature back to our lives) is a core part of the European Green Deal. Chapter 4.2.2. Trade policy says that „Trade policy will actively support and be part of the ecological transition. In this spirit, the Commission will ensure full implementation and enforcement of the biodiversity provisions in all trade agreements, including through the EU Chief Trade Enforcement Officer. The Commission will better assess the impact of trade agreements on biodiversity, with follow-up action to strengthen the biodiversity provisions of existing and new agreements if relevant. The Commission will also present in 2021 a legislative proposal and other measures to avoid or minimise the placing of products associated with deforestation or forest degradation on the EU market, and to promote forest-friendly imports and value chains.