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Press statement

FEDIOL's reaction to the IMCO/INTA vote on the Proposal for a regulation on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market (Forced Labour Regulation).

Brussels, 17 October 2023 – Following the vote in the IMCO and INTA committees on the Forced Labour Regulation, **FEDIOL welcomes various improvements to the Commission's Proposal and calls for further work on other critical elements.**

FEDIOL particularly **welcomes that the Commission's proposed mechanism under which competent authorities should bear the burden of proving that products have been made with forced labour**, has been largely maintained, excluding cases where forced labour is imposed by state authorities. Overall, maintaining the burden of proof in line with the European Commission's proposal will create a favourable context for all stakeholders to actively identify and address forced labour risks while adhering to well-established due process.

Furthermore, FEDIOL **appreciates the extension of deadlines for companies to respond to requests for information**, which could promote a meaningful dialogue between the competent authorities and the companies with the aim of providing the necessary documents. For companies sourcing globally, with suppliers located in different countries, and taking into account the different time zones, 30 days is more appropriate to enable a more detailed response from the companies.

Another crucial improvement is the strengthening of provisions on **engagement and collaboration with third countries to eradicate forced labour**, particularly the addition of Commission and Member State cooperation and partnership mechanisms with third countries to address the root causes of forced labour, prevent and eliminate practices of forced labour, and build the capacity of upstream economic actors to respond to the requirements under this Regulation. Such action is necessary to ensure that relevant human rights legislation is effectively enforced by governments but also to eliminate the conditions that allow forced labour to persist. We therefore count on the Council to fully endorse this approach.

Regrettably, the **regulation still lacks clear and specific evidentiary standards**. FEDIOL believes that setting precise standards is crucial for ensuring fair and transparent processes. The regulation, among other things, should clarify what is expected from companies in terms of providing the necessary documentation from the moment the investigative process starts. Precise documentation ensures legal certainty. Additionally, the legislators **should take into significant consideration that certain sectors, such as agriculture, have many specificities** and, therefore, **will require specific guidelines**, which are currently lacking.

Overall, FEDIOL believes that positive work has been achieved in the European Parliament to improve the proposed Forced Labour Regulation. However, there is still significant room for improvement with respect to the key issues mentioned above.

FEDIOL represents the interests of the **European vegetable oil and protein meal industry**. With over 180 facilities in Europe, the sector provides over 20.000 direct employments. Our members process approximately 55 million tonnes of basic products a year for the food and non-food markets. Oilseed crushing produces vegetable oils and protein meals as co-products. While vegetable oils are used for food and technical uses (pharmaceuticals, paints, detergents, biodiesel, etc.), protein meals are used to meet the increasing global demand for meat and protein. For further information, please contact Nathalie Lecocq, FEDIOL Director General, fediol@fediol.eu