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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION

of the

Recommendation for a

COUNCIL DECISION

**authorising the opening of negotiations on behalf of the European Union for the
conclusion of a protocol to the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement with the
Government of the Republic of Liberia**

{COM(2020) 582 final} - {SWD(2020) 196 final}

The sustainable fisheries partnership agreements concluded between the European Union and third countries are based on the principles of sustainability, transparency and non-discrimination, and contribute to the establishment of a governance framework for external fisheries. The Commission is required to carry out an ex-post and ex-ante evaluation before any negotiations on a new protocol; this is a routine step in the negotiation process. This document sets out the results of the evaluation¹ of the current protocol between the EU and Liberia, which expires on 8 December 2020².

The protocol offers access to the Liberian fishing zone for 34 EU vessels targeting tuna and tuna-like species in exchange of an EU annual amount for access of EUR 357 500 for the first year, EUR 325 000 for the second, third and fourth years, and EUR 292 500 for the fifth year, and a specific EU annual amount for the support and implementation of Liberia's sectoral fisheries policy of EUR 357 500 for the first year, EUR 325 000 for the second, third and fourth years, and EUR 292 500 for the fifth year. The beneficiary shipowners, from 2 Member States, pay fees of around EUR 300 000 a year.

The Commission is satisfied with the evaluation, which examines five well-defined criteria; the results are reliable and the recommendations are relevant. The analysis presented in the SWD shows that the agreement is important for the EU, its fleet and Liberia.

The protocol is effective in allowing access to a fishing zone for industrial fleets from the EU. It ensures the sustainability of the fisheries and helps maintain the profitability of ships operating in Liberia. It contributes to the sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources in the Liberian waters. The protocol offers added value for the EU since it offers a good return on investment. The protocol is relevant, in that its objectives correspond to the needs identified. It complements the network of EU agreements in the Atlantic and gives shipowners fishing opportunities suited to their needs. For Liberia, it provides access to resources of which full use is not made locally, and promotes economic interaction. Finally, the protocol is consistent with and complements other EU initiatives.

The evaluation makes various recommendations to be taken into consideration by the Commission in the negotiations on a future protocol, including maintaining most of the conditions in the current protocol. The Commission agrees with the conclusions of the evaluation and considers renewal of the Protocol to be the best option. The recommendations are considered relevant for such a renewal. However, the Commission considers that some technical provisions should be reviewed.

Finally, it should be noted that on 23 May 2017, the Republic of Liberia was notified of the possibility of being identified as a non-cooperating third country in fighting illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing by Commission Decision 2017/C 169/12 under Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008 of 29 September 2008 establishing a Community system to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Bearing this in mind, the Commission has decided that negotiations for the conclusion of a protocol to the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Government of the Republic of Liberia, in line with Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 will only start once Commission Decision 2017/C 169/12 is reversed.

¹ Retrospective and Ex-ante evaluation study of the protocol to the Agreement on a Sustainable Fisheries Partnership between the European Union and the Republic of Liberia. Final report, March 2020 (F&S, Poseidon and Megapesca).

² The text of the agreement and protocol (OJ L 328, 12.12.2015, p. 3–43); Council Decision (EU) 2016/1062 of 24 May 2016 on the conclusion (OJ L 177, 1.7.2016, p. 1–3)