

EU Deforestation Regulation, timber theft and illegal logging in Czech judicial practice

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Abstract: This study evaluates the potential of the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) to reduce timber theft and illegal logging through an analysis of Czech judicial practice. A qualitative content analysis of publicly available court decisions concerning illegal harvesting, timber theft and related forms of forest crime was conducted. The identified crime mechanisms were subsequently assessed against EUDR requirements concerning geolocation, due diligence, risk assessment and supply-chain traceability. The results show that illegal harvesting is a multi-stage process involving the selection of vulnerable forest properties, creation of apparent legality, timber harvesting, concealment of origin and subsequent commercialisation. Economic gain was not derived from the physical acquisition of timber itself but from its successful integration into formal market channels. The identified mechanisms closely resemble processes commonly described as timber laundering. The analysis suggests that EUDR may increase barriers to the legalisation and commercialisation of illegally obtained timber through geolocation requirements, enhanced documentation and due diligence obligations. However, the regulation does not directly address vulnerabilities enabling unauthorised harvesting itself, such as limited owner supervision and information asymmetries. The findings indicate that the principal contribution of EUDR lies in increasing supply-chain transparency and reducing opportunities for the economic utilisation of illegally obtained timber.

Keywords: commodity provenance; document fraud; environmental criminology; forest governance; ownership vulnerability; regulatory compliance

Forests represent an important component of natural capital and provide the resource base for the production of a renewable raw material of considerable economic importance. However, their societal value extends far beyond timber production, as forests contribute to carbon sequestration, water regulation, soil protection, biodiversity conservation, and the provision of other ecosystem services (FAO 2024; Forest Europe 2026; Fang et al. 2026). At the same time, forest ecosystems are exposed to a range of anthropogenic pressures, including

land-use change, agricultural expansion, forestry activities, fires, and urbanisation (Curtis et al. 2018; Asamoah et al. 2026). Illegal logging and the associated timber trade represent an additional major challenge, with environmental, economic, social, and institutional consequences (INTERPOL 2026; Lawson, MacFaul 2010; Kleinschmit et al. 2016; Nellemann et al. 2016).

Illegal logging encompasses a wide range of activities, from harvesting without appropriate authorisation and exceeding permitted harvesting

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volumes to document falsification, corruption, manipulation of information on timber volume and origin, and the integration of illegally obtained timber into legal trade flows (INTERPOL 2026; Thompson, Magrath 2021; Nellemann et al. 2016; Kleinschmit et al. 2016). The economic benefits of such activities generally arise not from harvesting itself, but from the subsequent transport, trade, and sale of timber. Consequently, research and regulatory attention have increasingly shifted from the act of harvesting itself towards the legality and transparency of timber supply chains (Thompson, Magrath 2021; Tacconi et al. 2019). Legal protection of forests is intended to safeguard the full range of forest functions. In the Czech Republic, criminal liability may also apply to forest damage. In addition to the general offences defined in Sections 293 and 294 of Act No. 40/2009 Coll., the Criminal Code contains a specific offence concerning forest damage under Section 295 (Act No. 40/2009 Coll., Criminal Code, as amended; Jančářová et al. 2015).

Illegal logging has traditionally been associated primarily with tropical producer countries and countries with lower institutional capacity. This has contributed to the development of international initiatives addressing the legality of traded timber, including Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT), Voluntary Partnership Agreements, and subsequently the EU Timber Regulation (EUTR) (Maryudi 2016; Overdevest, Zeitlin 2018; Polo Villanueva et al. 2023). Experience with these instruments has shown that their effectiveness depends not only on regulation itself but also on the quality of implementation, law enforcement, and the ability to link documentary requirements to actual timber flows (Sotirov et al. 2017, 2022; Polo Villanueva et al. 2023). However, illegal forestry activities are not confined to countries outside the European Union. Evidence from the Carpathian region and the Western Balkans confirms that unauthorised harvesting, manipulation of harvesting authorisations, and weaknesses in enforcement also occur in the European context (Iordăchescu, Vasile 2023; Radosavljević et al. 2024).

The need to verify timber origin has contributed to the development of timber traceability systems, which enable timber flows to be tracked from the harvesting site through transport and processing to subsequent commercial transactions (Köthke 2025; Kaulen et al. 2023; Tonouéwa et al. 2024; Wenker et al. 2024). Such systems may rely either

on maintaining material identity throughout the supply chain or on retrospective verification of origin using biological, chemical, or physical characteristics of wood (Dormontt et al. 2015; Tonouéwa et al. 2024). Advances in digital technologies have further expanded the possibilities for tracking timber through identification, database, and geolocation systems (Taylor et al. 2020; Pichler et al. 2022; Kaulen et al. 2023). These tools create an information trail linking the physical movement of timber with digital records, but they do not in themselves guarantee the accuracy of the input data. As noted by He and Turner (2022), Dormontt et al. (2015), and Stopfer et al. (2024), even technologically advanced systems may reproduce incorrect information when erroneous data are introduced during the initial identification of the material.

Within the European Union, timber traceability has long been closely linked to the regulation of timber legality. The EU Timber Regulation (EUTR) prohibited the placing of illegally harvested timber on the Union market and introduced due diligence obligations for operators (European Union 2010). Although the EUTR represented an important shift towards greater regulatory responsibility of businesses, subsequent assessments revealed differences among Member States in implementation, the scope of controls, and the practical application of due diligence systems (European Commission 2021; Giurca, Jonsson 2015; Sotirov et al. 2017, 2022). These experiences contributed to the adoption of Regulation (EU) 2023/1115 on deforestation-free products (EUDR), which extends the original legality concept by requiring relevant products also to be deforestation-free and introduces substantially more detailed requirements for identifying commodity origin (European Union 2023; Köthke 2025; Köthke et al. 2023; Hlaváčková et al. 2025).

For timber, particularly important provisions include the requirement to provide geolocation data for production plots and to collect information on the product, its quantity, suppliers, customers, and compliance with the relevant legislation of the country of production (European Union 2023; European Commission 2026a, b). The system also requires risk assessment and, where necessary, risk mitigation, thereby incorporating commodity origin into a formalised data structure linking a product to a specific place of production. Nevertheless, a distinction must be made between trace-

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ability of the declared origin and proof of the actual origin of timber. Neither geolocation nor digital records alone guarantee that the declared source corresponds to the actual source, particularly where incorrect information has been introduced at the beginning of the supply chain (Aguzzoni et al. 2025; França et al. 2025). Similarly, certification systems cannot automatically substitute for regulatory due diligence because they do not cover all EUDR requirements and constitute only a supporting source of information for risk assessment (Cosimo et al. 2024). The EUDR therefore places primary responsibility for verifying timber origin and legality on operators and their ability to demonstrate the credibility of a particular supply chain.

Existing research on the EUDR has focused primarily on its implications for international trade, its relationship with the previous EUTR regime, changes in operator behaviour, impacts on producers in third countries, and issues of equity and the distributional effects of the new regulation (Apeti, N'Doua 2023; Berning, Sotirov 2024; Köthke et al. 2023; Muradian et al. 2025; McDermott et al. 2025). Potential impacts on trade flows and the functioning of global commodity chains have also been identified, particularly where regulation is not accompanied by broader international cooperation (Johnston et al. 2025). Consequently, the prevailing research focus has been on the capacity of the EUDR to reduce deforestation and strengthen the legality of international trade in regulated commodities.

Considerably less attention has been paid to the potential implications of the EUDR for forest crime within EU Member States themselves. Although the EUDR is not a criminal-law instrument and its primary purpose is not to protect forest owners against timber theft, some of its mechanisms may affect the economic conditions under which illegally obtained timber is subsequently commercialised. Unauthorised harvesting requires not only the physical acquisition of timber but also the creation of a credible identity of origin that enables it to enter a legal supply chain. Geolocation-based traceability, mandatory documentation, and due diligence requirements may therefore create additional barriers to the legalisation and commercial exploitation of stolen timber. At the same time, the EUDR cannot be expected to prevent timber theft itself or eliminate all opportunities for circumvention. Its effectiveness will depend on the quality of implementation, control mechanisms, and the capac-

ity to verify the accuracy of declared information (Maryudi 2016; Thompson, Magrath 2021; Tacconi et al. 2019; Taylor et al. 2020; Pichler et al. 2022; Kaulen et al. 2023; Polo Villanueva et al. 2023).

This reveals an important research gap. Existing literature predominantly examines the EUDR as an instrument for preventing deforestation, regulating international trade, and establishing corporate due diligence obligations. However, systematic analysis linking specific mechanisms of domestic forest crime documented in judicial practice with individual EUDR control mechanisms and assessing the stages of criminal and subsequent commercial activity at which the regulation may create preventive barriers remains lacking.

Accordingly, this study aims to identify and analyse the main mechanisms of unauthorised harvesting, timber theft, and the subsequent legalisation of stolen timber documented in Czech judicial practice, and to assess the extent to which EUDR requirements concerning geolocation, traceability, due diligence, and proof of legality may restrict the entry of such timber into legal supply chains. The study also assesses residual risks and identifies forms of forest crime for which the preventive potential of the EUDR remains limited.

On this basis, three research questions are formulated: *RQ₁*: What recurring mechanisms of unauthorised harvesting, timber theft, and concealment of timber origin can be identified in Czech judicial practice? *RQ₂*: Which EUDR requirements may counteract the identified mechanisms, and at what stage of the criminal activity or subsequent commercialisation may they operate? *RQ₃*: Which forms of forest crime and methods of legalising stolen timber may remain beyond the effective reach of the regulatory system? By linking cases identified in Czech judicial practice with the new European traceability framework, the study extends the existing EUDR debate by examining its largely unexplored potential as a secondary instrument for preventing the commercialisation of illegally obtained timber.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Judicial data and analytical framework.

The study employed a qualitative research design combining the analysis of judicial decisions with an assessment of the regulatory mechanisms established by Regulation (EU) 2023/1115 of the

European Parliament and of the Council on deforestation-free products (EUDR). The aim was to identify mechanisms of unauthorised harvesting and timber theft documented in Czech judicial practice and subsequently assess their relationship with EUDR requirements.

The primary empirical material consisted of publicly available decisions of Czech criminal courts concerning unauthorised forest harvesting, timber theft, and related forms of forest crime, as listed in the Judicial decisions section. The decisions were identified through the ASPI legal information system and supplemented by decisions available in the databases of the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court of the Czech Republic.

The search was conducted in November 2025 using the ASPI legal information system, version 2025, with combinations of Czech terms referring to unauthorised timber harvesting and timber theft (e.g. '*nelegální těžba*EUTR*EUDR*'), forest property and stands (e.g. '*odcizení dřevní hmoty*poškození lesa*'), and fraudulent or falsified documentation (e.g. '*restný čin*padělání veřejné listiny*'). The search identified relevant decisions of the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court of the Czech Republic. As decisions of lower courts are not systematically published in the available legal information systems, subsequent requests for anonymised versions of the relevant judicial decisions were submitted to the Regional Court in Brno, the Regional Court in Ostrava, and the High Court in Olomouc pursuant to Act No. 106/1999 Coll., on Free Access to Information. Complete anonymised texts of the criminal decisions from the relevant judicial instances were thus available for analysis.

The search terms were used both individually and in combination using the database search functions. The initial search identified 11 potentially relevant judicial decisions. Case information and, where necessary, the full texts of the decisions were subsequently screened for relevance. Decisions were included if they concerned unauthorised harvesting, theft of harvested timber, concealment or misrepresentation of timber origin, or the use of false documentation in connection with harvesting or timber disposal. Administrative offences, decisions without a direct relationship to the mechanisms under investigation, and decisions providing no additional relevant factual or legal information concerning judicial proceedings already included in the sample were excluded. Following screening, seven judicial decisions representing six distinct cases were retained for qualitative analysis. Decisions from different levels of judicial review relating to the same case were retained where they provided additional factual or legal information; however, at the case level, they were treated as a single case.

The core analytical sample comprised the judicial decisions listed in Table 1. As some decisions represented different stages of judicial review of the same case, the analysis was conducted at two levels. The case level captured the factual mechanism of the criminal activity, whereas the decision level examined the legal reasoning and its potential development across judicial instances. This approach prevented multiple counting of the same underlying case.

The study did not aim to quantify the prevalence of timber theft or unauthorised harvesting in the Czech Republic, but rather to identify recurring mechanisms of criminal activity documented

Table 1. Core judicial decisions included in the case-law analysis

Court	Decision	Date	Analytical relevance
Regional Court in Ostrava	68 To 49/2018-1439	26 July 2018	additional judicial evidence on illegal harvesting, ownership verification and timber disposal mechanisms
Regional Court in Brno	53 T 7/2017-2905	21 March 2019	factual reconstruction of organised illegal harvesting, falsified documentation, timber disposal and damage assessment
High Court in Olomouc	1 To 43/2019-3225	12 September 2019	appellate assessment of criminal liability, attempted theft and damage valuation
Supreme Court of the Czech Republic	3 Tdo 447/2020-3467	3 June 2020	review of criminal-law qualification and attempted theft
Constitutional Court of the Czech Republic	II. ÚS 2816/20	1 December 2020	constitutional review of criminal-law conclusions

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in judicial practice. The analysis therefore focused on the nature and structure of individual cases rather than their statistical representativeness.

Qualitative content analysis. The judicial decisions were examined using qualitative content analysis combining deductive and inductive approaches. The main analytical categories were derived from the research questions and the structure of the forest-based supply chain, whereas specific mechanisms were identified directly from the judicial decisions analysed.

The analysis focused particularly on mechanisms related to the selection of target forest properties, creation of apparent legality, organisation of harvesting, timber transport and commercialisation, concealment of timber origin, evidentiary aspects, and damage assessment. The unit of analysis was not limited to the judicial decision as a whole but also included individual factual passages describing the preparation, execution, and subsequent economic utilisation of unlawfully obtained timber. This approach made it possible to reconstruct the criminal activity as a sequential process extending from the identification of a suitable forest property to the economic exploitation of harvested timber.

The coding framework used in the analysis is presented in Table 2.

Throughout the interpretation, the factual findings of the courts were strictly distinguished from the subsequent analytical interpretation by the authors. A mechanism was considered empirically

documented only when it was described in the factual findings of a judicial decision or explicitly accepted by the court.

Assessment of EUDR relevance. The second group of sources analysed consisted of legislation governing the placing of timber on the European Union market. The principal legal instrument examined was Regulation (EU) 2023/1115 (EUDR), including subsequent legislative amendments applicable at the time of the study.

The identified mechanisms were compared with EUDR requirements concerning legality, due diligence, geolocation, risk assessment, and supply-chain traceability.

The analysis was based on the premise that the EUDR is neither an instrument for the physical protection of forest property nor a criminal-law instrument. The assessment therefore focused exclusively on its potential to create informational, documentary, and control barriers to the entry of illegally obtained timber into formal supply chains.

As the cases analysed predated the full application of the EUDR, an *ex ante* regulatory assessment was applied. Historically identified mechanisms of unauthorised harvesting were compared with the requirements that would apply to comparable commercial operations under the new regulatory framework.

This resulted in an analytical framework linking the crime mechanisms identified in judicial practice with the corresponding EUDR control mechanisms (Figure 1).

Table 2. Coding framework for the qualitative case-law analysis

Analytical dimension	Main question	Examples of coded indicators
Target selection	How was the forest property selected?	absent owner; unknown owner; inheritance proceedings; limited owner supervision
Apparent legality	How was the legitimacy of harvesting created?	false contract; forged power of attorney; false administrative document; fictitious harvesting notification
Harvesting	How was timber physically obtained?	contracted forestry workers; misleading contractors; organised harvesting
Transport	How was timber removed from the site?	loading; forwarding; road transport; roadside storage
Commercialisation	How was economic value realised?	sale to sawmill; wholesaler; invoice; intermediary company
Concealment of origin	How was the actual origin obscured?	shell company; fictitious supplier; false documentation; substitution of declared source
Evidence	What evidence was decisive?	documents; witness testimony; expert opinion; volume identification
Damage	How was loss quantified?	standing timber value; roadside timber value; harvesting and forwarding costs

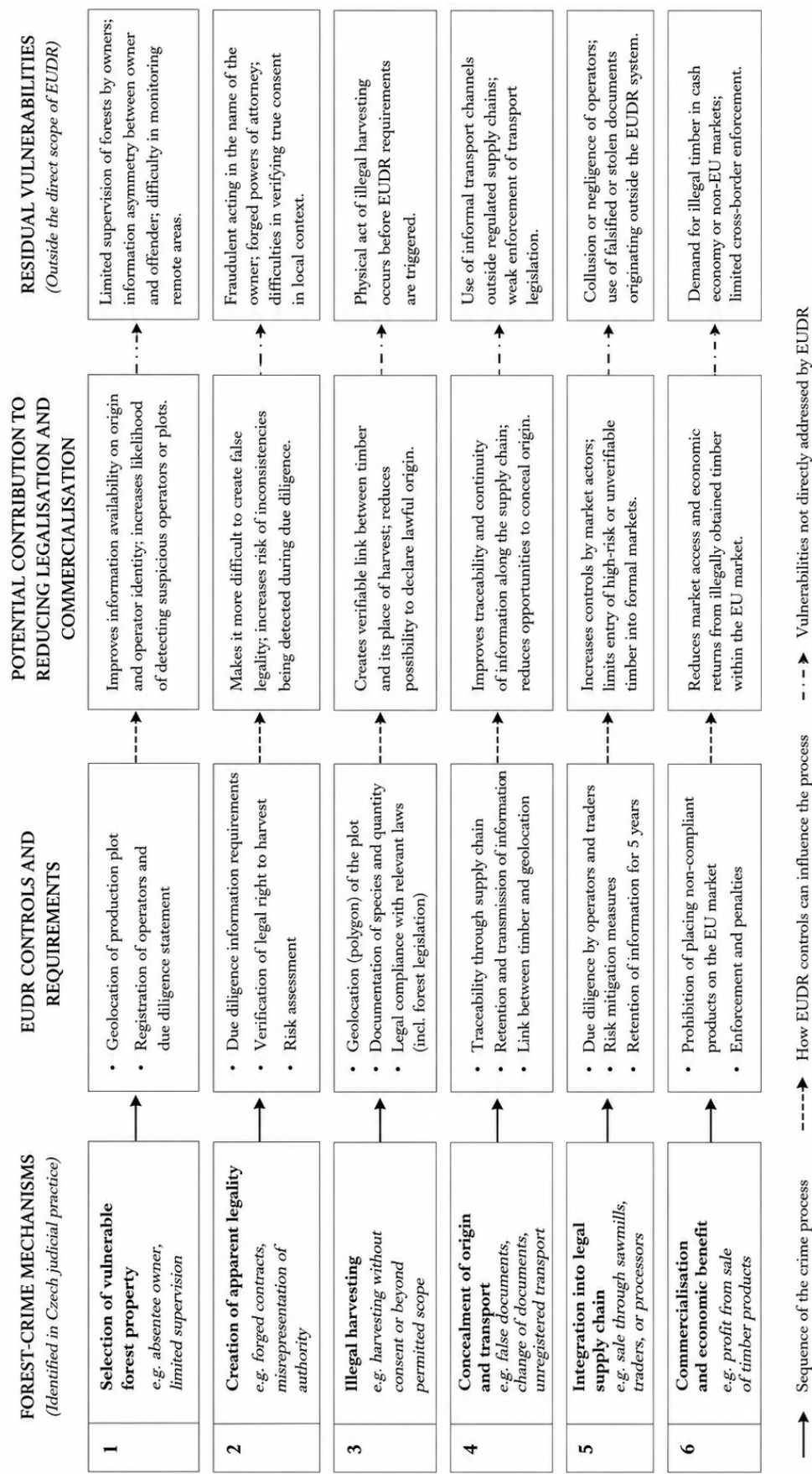


Figure 1. Analytical framework linking judicially identified forest-crime mechanisms with EUDR controls
Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the case-law analysis and Regulation (EU) 2023/1115

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For the purposes of synthesis, the identified mechanisms were classified according to the expected regulatory potential of the EUDR as having high, medium, or limited potential effect. A high potential effect was assigned where an EUDR requirement directly addresses the information or transaction on which the identified crime mechanism depends and requires its documentation or verification. A medium potential effect was assigned where the mechanism is addressed indirectly through due diligence, risk assessment, traceability, or documentation requirements, but its detection also depends on the accuracy of input data or additional verification. A limited potential effect was assigned where the mechanism occurs predominantly outside the regulatory reach of the EUDR, particularly before timber enters a regulated supply chain, or where it may occur without a transaction subject to the relevant EUDR controls. These categories indicate the expected capacity of the regulatory framework to create barriers to the identified mechanisms and should not be interpreted as empirically observed EUDR effectiveness.

Limitations of the methodology. The study is based on publicly available judicial decisions and does not include undetected cases of forest crime or cases that did not result in a judicial decision. The findings therefore cannot be interpreted as a representative estimate of the prevalence of individual forms of forest crime in the Czech Republic. The relatively small number of judicial decisions, including several decisions representing different stages of review of the same underlying case, further limits the generalisability of the findings. The results should therefore be interpreted as an exploratory identification of crime mechanisms documented in Czech judicial practice rather than as evidence of their frequency or representativeness within Czech forestry or across the EU.

A further limitation is the prospective nature of the assessment of EUDR effects. The acts analysed occurred before the full application of the regulation; consequently, the study does not assess the actual behaviour of offenders or economic operators under the EUDR regime. The findings represent an analytical assessment of regulatory potential rather than an empirical evaluation of the actual effects of the regulation.

Finally, the effectiveness of geolocation and traceability systems depends on the quality of the input data and on the capacity of competent authorities

to verify their accuracy through administrative and physical controls.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forest-crime mechanisms identified in Czech judicial practice. The analysis of judicial decisions showed that cases of unauthorised harvesting and timber theft cannot be understood as isolated acts involving merely the felling of trees on another person's property. In all analysed cases, a sequence of interconnected activities could be identified, aimed not only at obtaining timber but also at creating the conditions for its subsequent commercialisation. The criminal activity therefore constituted a multi-stage process involving the selection of target forest properties, the creation of apparent harvesting legitimacy, the execution of harvesting operations, the concealment of timber origin, and its subsequent introduction into the supply chain.

Although the factual circumstances differed among the cases, the judicial decisions revealed several common features. Offenders sought not only to obtain timber but also to minimise the risk of detection through documentation and organisational arrangements creating an appearance of legality. Harvesting operations were often carried out by persons who may not have been aware of the unlawful nature of the operation, while the principal organiser presented himself as authorised to act on behalf of the forest owner or another entitled party. The harvested timber subsequently entered standard logistics and commercial processes in much the same way as legally sourced production.

Based on the content analysis of the judicial decisions, five principal mechanisms forming a typical model of unauthorised harvesting and subsequent laundering of timber origin were identified (Table 3). These mechanisms do not constitute separate criminal offences but represent functionally distinct stages in a process extending from the selection of a target forest property to the realisation of economic gain.

The first mechanism identified was the targeted selection of forest properties subject to limited regular supervision or a lower probability of rapid detection of unauthorised harvesting. An important factor was therefore not only the volume of available timber stock but also the information asymmetry between the offender and the forest owner. The tar-

Table 3. Typology of timber theft and illegal harvesting mechanisms identified in Czech judicial practice

Mechanism	Description	Primary objective
Targeting of forest properties	identification of forest stands with limited owner supervision or reduced probability of immediate detection	access to timber resources
Creation of apparent legality	use of false authorisations, powers of attorney, contracts or other documents creating the appearance of lawful harvesting	reduction of suspicion and operational legitimacy
Illegal harvesting	physical harvesting of timber without the consent of the forest owner or another authorised person	acquisition of timber
Concealment of timber origin	separation of the actual source of timber from the source declared in accompanying documentation	prevention of origin verification
Commercialisation of timber	sale or transfer of timber through intermediaries or formal market channels	realisation of economic gain

geting of forest properties with limited supervision is consistent with findings from studies of rural and environmental crime, according to which limited owner presence and low monitoring intensity increase opportunities for offences involving natural resources (Iordăchescu, Vasile 2023; Kleinschmit et al. 2016; Cempírek et al. 2025).

The second mechanism involved creating the appearance of lawful harvesting through documentation or a declared authorisation to manage the forest property. The analysis showed that this stage was crucial to the successful implementation of the entire operation. Documentation did not merely perform an administrative function but served as a means of legitimising harvesting activities to forestry contractors, transport operators, and business partners.

The third stage consisted of the unauthorised harvesting itself, which was often carried out using standard forestry practices and conventional technologies. From the perspective of an external observer, the activity could therefore appear to be an ordinary forestry operation, further increasing the importance of documentation and declared authorisation.

The fourth mechanism involved concealing the actual origin of the timber. Once harvested, timber becomes a relatively homogeneous commodity, and its connection to a specific forest property gradually weakens. Separating the actual origin from the declared origin therefore represented one of the key prerequisites for the subsequent laundering and commercial utilisation of the timber.

The final stage identified was the commercialisation of harvested timber. The analysis showed that economic gain does not arise from harvesting itself but from the subsequent sale or integration of timber into the supply chain. The ability to create a credible history of timber origin was therefore a necessary condition for realising the economic proceeds.

Overall, the analysed cases indicate that the principal challenge for offenders was not obtaining the timber itself, but creating an appearance of legality and subsequently integrating the timber into ordinary commercial processes. This finding is essential for assessing the EUDR because it suggests that the potential contribution of the new regulation may lie not primarily in preventing unauthorised harvesting itself, but in strengthening requirements for demonstrating timber origin and legality when timber is introduced into the supply chain.

This conclusion is consistent with the broader forest-crime literature, which describes illegal logging not as an isolated harvesting act but as a chain of interconnected activities involving planning, documentation, transport, and subsequent commercialisation (Lawson, MacFaul 2010; Thompson, Magrath 2021; Kleinschmit et al. 2016; Cempírek et al. 2025). Similar findings have been reported in studies addressing timber laundering and illegal supply chains, where economic gain depends on the successful integration of illegally obtained timber into formal market channels (Dormontt et al. 2015; Tacconi et al. 2019; Aguzzoni et al. 2025).

Vulnerabilities enabling timber laundering and commercialisation. The analysis of judicial

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decisions showed that the success of unauthorised harvesting was based primarily not on the technical feasibility of harvesting or timber transport, but on exploiting vulnerabilities in forest-property management. In all analysed cases, offenders deliberately targeted forest properties where limited owner supervision, less frequent inspections, or delayed detection of unauthorised harvesting could be expected. Similar findings have been reported in the literature on environmental and forest crime, according to which limited supervision and a low probability of immediate detection create opportunities for the unauthorised exploitation of natural resources (Iordăchescu, Vasile 2023; Kleinschmit et al. 2016; Tacconi et al. 2019).

A significant common feature of the analysed cases was the creation of apparent legality. Offenders used false or misleading contracts, powers of attorney, and other documents not only to conceal unlawful conduct but also to enable the involvement of harvesting companies, transport operators, and business partners without immediately raising suspicion. Documentation therefore represented a key instrument for presenting unauthorised harvesting as a standard economic activity.

The analysis further showed that timber commercialisation represented a critical stage in the identified process. Although unauthorised harvesting provided access to the timber, economic gain depended on its subsequent sale, processing, or introduction into commercial flows. Offenders therefore sought to separate the actual origin of the timber from the origin declared in the accompanying documentation. Once timber had been integrated into standard transport, storage, and trading processes, distinguishing it from legally sourced timber became increasingly difficult. This mechanism corresponds to the concept of timber laundering, whereby illegally obtained timber is progressively integrated into legal supply chains and loses its original identity (Dormontt et al. 2015; Tacconi et al. 2019).

From an economic perspective, illegally obtained timber also creates a form of unfair competition. Offenders avoid some of the costs associated with obtaining harvesting rights, negotiating with forest owners, and complying with regulatory requirements. Consequently, such timber may be placed on the market under conditions that disadvantage legally operating businesses. Similar effects have also been described in relation to international

trade in timber and forest products (Giurca, Jons-son 2015; Sotirov et al. 2017; FAO 2022).

Overall, the principal challenge for offenders was not the acquisition of timber itself, but the creation of a credible identity enabling its subsequent commercialisation. The key vulnerability therefore lay in the possibility of separating the actual origin of timber from the origin declared in documentation and subsequently integrating the illegally obtained material into ordinary commercial processes.

The mechanisms identified in the Czech cases differ, however, in their likely transferability to other institutional settings. The transferability of these findings beyond the Czech context should nevertheless be considered with caution. Some mechanisms identified in the analysed cases were closely linked to specific ownership and institutional circumstances, particularly the exploitation of absent or insufficiently informed forest owners, unresolved ownership or inheritance situations, and the fraudulent use of documents or authorisations recognised under Czech legal and administrative practice. Their frequency and specific form may therefore differ across EU Member States according to forest-ownership structures, property law, administrative procedures, and enforcement arrangements. At the same time, the broader mechanisms identified in this study – the creation of apparent legality, misrepresentation of timber origin, use of intermediaries, and subsequent integration of illegally obtained timber into formal supply chains – are not inherently specific to the Czech institutional setting. Similar vulnerabilities associated with false documentation, discrepancies between declared and actual origin, and the laundering of illegally harvested timber have been reported in the wider European and international literature (Iordăchescu, Vasile 2021; Dormontt et al. 2015; Radosavljević et al. 2024; Sotirov et al. 2022; Köthke et al. 2023). The Czech cases should therefore be interpreted as evidence of particular mechanisms rather than as representative of their prevalence across the EU. Their broader relevance lies primarily in showing how such mechanisms may interact with the common due diligence, geolocation, and traceability requirements established by the EUDR.

Potential and limitations of EUDR in addressing forest crime. From an EUDR perspective, a key vulnerability identified in the analysed

cases is the discrepancy between the actual and declared origin of timber. Compared with the regulatory environment reflected in the analysed judicial decisions, the EUDR establishes a substantially stricter framework. In comparison with the previous EUTR regime, it extends due diligence requirements, introduces mandatory geolocation of production plots, and strengthens requirements concerning traceability and documentation of the origin of relevant commodities (European Union 2023; Hlaváčková et al. 2025). Under Articles 9–12 of the Regulation, operators must collect information on products, suppliers, customers, geolocation of production plots, and compliance with relevant legislation before placing products on the market; they must subsequently conduct a risk assessment and, where necessary, adopt measures to mitigate identified risks (European Union 2023).

The most significant potential contribution of the EUDR can be identified precisely in relation to mechanisms based on creating apparent legality and concealing the actual origin of timber. The analysed cases showed that the success of the entire scheme depended on the ability to create a credible documentary identity allowing unauthorised harvesting to be presented as a standard economic activity. Similar mechanisms have been described in the literature on illegal logging and timber laundering, in which illegally obtained timber is integrated into otherwise legal supply chains through the concealment or misrepresentation of its origin (Lawson, MacFaul 2010; Thompson, McGrath 2021; Dormontt et al. 2015).

A major innovation introduced by the EUDR is the requirement to provide geolocation data for production plots. Such data establish a direct link between a product and its declared place of production and provide an additional layer of verifiable information that was not routinely included in documentation at the time of the analysed cases. Geolocation may therefore increase supply-chain transparency and auditability and make it more difficult to create fictitious information concerning timber origin (Köthke 2025; Kaulen et al. 2023; Köthke et al. 2023; Stopfer et al. 2024; Tonouéwa et al. 2024).

The preventive potential of the EUDR may be further supported by its due diligence system. Unlike the situations reflected in the analysed judicial decisions, where apparently credible docu-

mentation was often sufficient, the new system requires active risk assessment and verification of the consistency of available information. This approach is consistent with authors who regard due diligence as one of the key instruments for limiting the entry of illegally obtained forest products into legal market channels (Sotirov et al. 2022; Köthke et al. 2023; Cosimo et al. 2024; McDermott et al. 2025).

Nevertheless, significant limitations remain. The EUDR does not directly address the vulnerabilities that enabled the analysed offences, particularly limited forest-owner supervision, information asymmetries, or fraudulent representation on behalf of a forest owner. The Regulation cannot prevent an offender from entering a forest or physically felling trees. Its influence begins primarily when timber becomes the subject of a commercial transaction.

A further limitation concerns the quality of input data. If false information is introduced at the beginning of the supply chain, subsequent traceability mechanisms may merely reproduce it. The effectiveness of the system therefore depends not only on the existence of geolocation data and documentation but also on the capacity to verify them independently (Dormontt et al. 2015; Stopfer et al. 2024; França et al. 2025).

In practice, independent verification of the declared timber origin could combine documentary and spatial controls. Geolocation data could be cross-checked against cadastral and forest-management records, harvesting authorisations or other available records concerning the relevant forest property, while inconsistencies could trigger on-site inspections or verification using remote-sensing and Earth-observation data. Where the origin of timber remains disputed, wood-identification methods may provide an additional forensic layer for testing claims concerning species or geographical origin (Dormontt et al. 2015; Tonouéwa et al. 2024). Such controls would be particularly relevant where formally consistent documentation may conceal a discrepancy between the declared and actual source of timber.

A more limited effect can also be expected where timber does not enter formal supply chains. The EUDR is designed to regulate formal commercial relationships, and its influence may therefore be weaker in cases involving local consumption, informal transactions, or the direct use of stolen

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timber outside organised markets (Lawson, MacFaul 2010; Tacconi et al. 2019). The actual impact of the Regulation will also depend on the quality of implementation, the enforcement capacity of competent authorities, and effective information exchange between institutions (Köthke et al. 2023; McDermott et al. 2025).

Overall, the findings suggest that the EUDR may primarily affect those stages of the identified crime mechanisms that involve the legalisation and entry of illegally obtained timber into formal supply chains. Geolocation, due diligence, risk assessment, and traceability may increase the barriers associated with timber laundering, while their potential to prevent unauthorised harvesting itself remains limited.

CONCLUSION

This study analysed the potential of the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) to contribute to reducing unauthorised harvesting and timber theft through an analysis of Czech judicial practice. Unlike most previous studies focusing on the prevention of global deforestation and the legality of international supply chains, this research addressed the comparatively underexplored issue of domestic forest crime within an EU Member State.

The analysis of judicial decisions showed that unauthorised harvesting and timber theft are not isolated acts of unlawful tree felling but rather multi-stage processes involving the selection of target forest properties, the creation of apparent legality, harvesting, concealment of the actual origin of timber, and its subsequent commercialisation. The key prerequisite for economic gain was not the acquisition of timber itself, but the ability to create a credible identity enabling its integration into ordinary commercial flows. The mechanisms identified therefore show strong similarities to processes described in the international literature as timber laundering.

The findings suggest that the principal potential contribution of the EUDR in relation to forest crime lies not in preventing unauthorised harvesting itself, but in restricting opportunities for the laundering and commercialisation of illegally obtained timber. Requirements concerning geolocation of production plots, due diligence, risk assessment, and supply-chain traceability may create

additional information and control barriers that could increase the likelihood of detecting inconsistencies between the declared and actual origin of timber.

At the same time, the study showed that the EUDR does not directly address several key vulnerabilities identified in the analysed cases, particularly limited forest-owner supervision, information asymmetries between owners and offenders, and fraudulent representation on behalf of forest owners. The potential effectiveness of the system also remains dependent on the quality of input data, the capacity to verify such information, and the practical implementation of control mechanisms.

The main contribution of this study is the identification of a previously underexplored link between the EUDR and domestic forest crime. Within the limits of the analysed Czech case-law sample, the identified mechanisms suggest that the EUDR cannot be expected to directly prevent unauthorised timber harvesting itself, but its requirements may create additional barriers to its subsequent economic exploitation by restricting opportunities to launder and commercialise illegally obtained timber through formal supply chains.

Future research should evaluate the actual effects of the EUDR following its full implementation and undertake comparative analyses across EU Member States.

The findings further suggest that the effectiveness of the EUDR in addressing forest crime may depend less on its ability to prevent the act of unauthorised harvesting itself and more on its capacity to disrupt the economic incentives that make such activities profitable. By increasing supply-chain transparency and restricting opportunities to launder illegally obtained timber, the EUDR may contribute to weakening the economic foundations of timber-related criminal activity.

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