Commission Green Paper "On forest protection and information in the EU: preparing forests for climate change"

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The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety adopted the own-initiative report drafted by Kriton ARSENIS (S&D, EL) on the Commission Green Paper on forest protection and information in the EU: preparing forests for climate change.

Whilst the committee welcomes the Commission Green Paper, it considers that the EU strategy on forests should be strengthened with a view to improving sustainable management and conservation. It stresses that the above-mentioned EU Forestry Strategy and Forest Action Plan should be updated to include the climate-change dimension and wider forest protection issues. The Commission and the Member States are called upon to intensify efforts to achieve the environment and quality-of-life goals of the FAP, the implementation of which is currently lagging behind.

Sustainable management: Members consider that sustainable forest management (SFM) is essential to the continuing ability of EU forests to carry out economic, ecological and social functions. They call on the Commission and Member States to demonstrate their support for the Forest Europe process by making SFM implementation **mandatory** within the EU. Members advocate full implementation of active SFM in the context of long-term national forest programmes (NFPs) incorporating national and regional priorities, measurable targets and evaluation criteria and taking account of the increased threats to forests from climate change.

Research on forests: Members state that **financial resources** for research into the impact of climate change on forests need to be **increased**. Member States are called upon to: (i) set up joint long-term research programmes to improve understanding of impacts and vulnerability and to support adaptation measures in the forest sector; (ii) drive forward research into climate change and its consequences for forests; (iii) foster broader awareness of the diverse significance of forests and the importance of managing them sustainably; (iv) encourage the exchange of knowledge and experience.

CAP Pillar 2: the report points out that discussions on the future of the CAP after 2013 should take account of the fact that forests provide essential environmental functions and contribute to achievement of the social and economic objectives of rural development and national economies. Members call therefore on Member States and regions to cooperate fully with forest authorities and the wider public in the preparation of rural development programmes to ensure consistency between EU policies, taking into account that forestry may, in some cases, be an independent sector of the rural economy.

Members maintain that rural producers, producer groups and public bodies should be made eligible for forestry measures in the second pillar of the CAP. They consider that the EU should continue to provide **aid for forestation** under the national rural development programmes, while making sure that these initiatives do not interfere with the market and that forestation measures rely on local, pest-resistant and fire-resistant material and contribute to biodiversity conservation.

Civil protection and fire prevention: Members consider that forest fire prevention through landscape planning and connectivity, infrastructure and training should be firmly anchored in the EU’s forest protection, adaptation and civil protection policies.

The report draws attention to the urgent need to implement the recommendations on the prevention of natural or human-made disasters which was recently adopted by the Parliament, especially those concerning support for afforestation/reafforestation schemes giving preference to local species and mixed forests, in the interests of biodiversity and improved resistance to fires, storms and diseases.

General proposals: Members call on the Commission to proceed with the drafting of a **White Paper** on Forest Protection in the EU, taking into account the results of the public consultation on the Green Paper, the widely perceived need to be prepared for climate change. The report considers that the White Paper, in addition to confirming the contribution of forests to the economy through wood and non-wood forest products and services, should focus on maintaining and increasing European forests, as they help European societies to mitigate climate change and adapt to its effects.

Members consider that a **higher level of protection** must be ensured for high-quality habitats and protective forests with functions in countering flooding, landslides, fires, desertification, loss of biodiversity and extreme weather catastrophes. They consider adequate financial resources, knowledge exchange and the promotion of research and information to be indispensable aspects of the Commission's proposals.

The Commission is called upon to:

- carefully study, and to report to Parliament and the Council on, options for **payment for ecosystem services** that acknowledge their economic value and reward forest biodiversity conservation and the restoration of forest ecosystems;
- present a legislative proposal for **forest fire prevention**, incorporating funding for prevention plans and risk assessment, the European Forest Fires Information System (EFFIS), fire detection, infrastructure, training and education, and forest recovery after fires, including consideration of a 30-year ban on building on land where there has been a forest fire;
- submit a legislative proposal prohibiting building on land cleared by fires proven to have resulted from arson;
- present a legislative proposal on **forest information**, taking into account climate threats and the need for collection and dissemination of relevant, harmonised and comparable data on forest cover, biodiversity, biotic and abiotic threats and land use in the context of the UNFCCC, CBD and environmental accounts;
- compile and monitor **indicators** relating to the protective functions of forests such as soil retention and water capacity;
- support **research** into the influence of forests on regional weather patterns in the EU;
- develop and disseminate **best-practice guidelines** based on the principles of sustainable management to fit the needs of private and state owners as well as local communities, in order to ensure resilience to climate change;
- devise appropriate strategies for their protection, including the consideration of 'Forest Heritage Observatories'.

Lastly, in order to achieve the objectives of the EU 2020 strategy with regard to national forest action plans, Members request that each Member State or region develop a forest strategy which includes reafforestation of river banks, the capture of rainwater, agricultural activities and research results for selection of the traditional plant and tree varieties and species best adapted to drought.