The EU’s role in protecting and restoring the world’s forests

2019/2156(INI) - 23/07/2020 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety adopted an own-initiative report by Stanislav POLÁK (EPP, CZ) on the EU’s role in protecting and restoring the world’s forests.

Forests are essential contributors to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Conversely, deforestation, in particular tropical deforestation, is an important contributor to climate change. Between 1990 and 2016, 1.3 million square kilometres of the world’s forests was lost, with destructive effects on biodiversity, climate, people and the economy.

While welcoming the Commission communication ‘Stepping up EU Action to Protect and Restore the World’s Forests’, Members considered that there is a need for far-reaching, ambitious and concerted action, underpinned by political and societal will, to protect and restore the world’s forests. According to Members, the EU and its Member States should be more ambitious in their actions to meet their commitments and address the urgency of deforestation and forest degradation worldwide.

Proposed action

The Commission is called on to:

- step up its efforts to address deforestation holistically through a coherent policy framework, while ensuring the conservation of ecosystems;

- propose a single definition of the concept of a deforestation-free supply chain which Members consider is central to addressing the problem of commodities contributing to deforestation;

- work with the private sector and other development actors to assess new disaster risk finance and insurance solutions for catastrophic events affecting forests;

- take into account the rights of indigenous nations and local communities, including women, in the protection of forests and involve them in the design, adoption, implementation and enforcement of forest protection measures, whether at EU or national level;

- fundamentally reform EU bio-energy policies, namely by revising the Renewable Energy Directive;

- present a proposal for an EU legal framework based on due diligence to ensure sustainable and deforestation-free supply chains for products and commodities placed on the EU market;

- ensure effective measures for the sustainable production and use of wood fuels in view, inter alia, of the high level of imports of wood pellets into the EU and the potential risks that these imports pose to forests in third countries.

The Commission and the Member States are called on to:

- include binding targets for the protection and restoration of forest ecosystems, especially primary forests, as part of the EU’s future forest strategy;

- ensure full transparency and public participation in forest and land use-related measures in order to prevent deforestation and forest degradation, promote forest protection and sustainable forest management, and support the protection and restoration of natural forests, at regional and global levels;

- stress the importance of establishing a platform for multi-stakeholder and Member State dialogue on deforestation, forest degradation and ways of sustainably increasing the world's forest cover in order to build alliances, enter into joint commitments, halt deforestation, and exchange experiences and information;

- step up their support for environmental and forest defenders in the EU and worldwide;

- carry out without delay studies on certification and verification schemes in the forest sector and for wood-based products and on certification schemes for non-deforestation commodities;

- propose specific measures to strengthen the political and regulatory framework supporting the protection and restoration of forests and sustainable forest management at global level, and to provide guidance and specific measures on sustainable land-use planning;

- harmonise data and improve the availability of information and data obtained through existing and new monitoring and assessment tools relating to the world's and the EU's forests.

Illegal logging

Members stressed that illegal logging is an ongoing practice not only in third countries, but also in the EU. They called on the Commission to establish a European forest surveying and preservation system based on a monitoring system using GNSS (Galileo and Copernicus) and ground networks in order to monitor the activity from logging from the point of harvesting to the entry and exit points of timber processing companies.

Increased cooperation

The report called on the EU to strengthen international cooperation by increasing efforts in key international forums, including the WTO and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) with a view, *inter alia*, to harmonising the terminology, concepts and statistics in use and to ensuring the coherence of the policies and measures adopted. The EU should also provide support to partner countries to implement actions that will help them comply with any measures the EU may set up to address imported deforestation and calls for cooperation to be stepped up and for the necessary and effective measures to be taken to prevent trade in goods related to deforestation and forest degradation from being diverted to other regions of the world.

Financial measures

Horizon 2020 has already financed significant research and innovation in the transition towards more sustainable land-use practices and supply chains in order to halt deforestation and forest degradation. However, Members called for increased funding to enable Horizon Europe to continue providing support in these areas. An EU technical and financial mechanism which would catalyse funding to support partners' efforts to sustainably use, protect and restore forests, improve sustainable, deforestation-free agricultural production, and address mining activities with adverse impacts on forests, under the upcoming Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) should be supported.