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

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The European Parliament adopted by 543 votes to 47, with 109 abstentions, a resolution on the EU’s role in protecting and restoring the world’s forests.

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's Communication ‘Stepping up EU Action to Protect and Restore the World’s Forests’, Parliament argued that 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.

High standards and binding targets

Parliament stressed the need to recognise the EU's competences in the field of forest protection and the role of forests in increasing resilience to the negative effects of climate change. It called on the Commission and the Member States to:

- ensure, in line with the European Green Deal and the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy, the highest standards of environmental protection and greater consistency between the task of protecting and restoring forests both within the EU and in its external action;

- intensify its efforts to combat deforestation in a comprehensive manner through a coherent policy framework, while ensuring the conservation of ecosystems;

- include binding targets for the protection and restoration of forest ecosystems, in particular primary forests, in the future EU Forest Strategy;

- propose specific measures to strengthen the policy and regulatory framework for the protection and restoration of forests and globally sustainable forest management and develop specific guidelines and measures for sustainable land management.

Supply chains

Parliament voted for an ambitious single definition of the concept of a deforestation-free supply chain to address the problem of commodities contributing to deforestation.

The Commission was invited to present a proposal for an EU legal framework based on due diligence to ensure sustainable and deforestation-free supply chains for products and raw materials placed on the EU market. Such a framework should be enforceable and in line with international standards and obligations, apply to the whole supply chain and be accompanied by a robust enforcement mechanism with effective, proportionate and dissuasive penalties.

Recognising furthermore the threats and human rights violations they face, Parliament also invited the Commission to take into account the rights of indigenous nations and local communities, including women, in the protection of forests and to involve them in the design, adoption, implementation and enforcement of forest protection measures, whether at EU or national level.

Members also urged the private sector to be more proactive in combating deforestation in its supply chains and investments and considered it essential to redirect both private and public financial flows in relevant industrial sectors towards activities that do not cause deforestation.

Trade agreements

Parliament recommended that the Commission better assess the impact of existing trade agreements on deforestation and ensure that more ambitious provisions on forest protection, biodiversity and sustainable forestry are included in the trade and sustainable development chapters of all free trade and investment agreements.

Members also insisted that the external dimension of the European Green Deal should be further strengthened through alliances and partnerships aimed at addressing global challenges like climate change and biodiversity while facilitating the socio-economic development of partner countries.

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

Parliament 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).

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 called 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.

Parliament supported the creation of an EU technical and financial mechanism that would catalyse funding to support partners' efforts to sustainably use, protect and restore forests and improve sustainable agricultural production under the next Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI).

Lastly, it supported the establishment of a platform for dialogue between stakeholders and Member States on deforestation in order to build alliances, enter into joint commitments, halt deforestation, and exchange experiences and information.