The European Forest Strategy - The Way Forward

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The European Parliament adopted by 462 votes to 176, with 59 abstentions, a resolution on the European forestry strategy: the way forward.

Members argued that the EU's internal and international commitments to, for example, the European Green Deal, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement and the creation of a zero-emission society, will be impossible to achieve without the climate benefits and other ecosystem services provided by forests and the forest-based sector.

Promoting forest management models to ensure sustainable forests

In recent decades, the EU´s forest resources have been increasing in terms of forest cover and volume. Currently, forests and other wooded areas cover around 43% of the surface of the EU, reaching at least 182 million hectares and comprising 5% of the world's total forests, thanks to afforestation and natural regeneration. Half of the Natura 2000 network is made up of forest areas (i.e. 37.5 million hectares) and that 23% of all forests in Europe are within Natura 2000 sites.

Noting that, according to the latest estimates, only 26% of forest species and 15% of forest habitats demonstrate a favourable conservation status, Parliament called on Member States to ensure that ecosystems are safeguarded and, where necessary, to develop and enhance guidelines regarding non-timber forest products.

The Commission was invited to:

- explore options to incentivise and remunerate climate, biodiversity and other ecosystem services appropriately in order to permit an economically viable forest conversion;

- take into account the need to support forest owners, including financial support, in the new EU forestry strategy. Such support shall be conditional on respect for sustainable forest management, in order to ensure continued investment in modern technologies and in environmental and climate measures that enhance the multifunctional role played by forests, with a specific financial instrument for the management of areas in the Natura 2000 network, and in the creation of decent working conditions.

Forests absorb more than 10% of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions. Members called for supporting and increasing CO2 sequestration in forests to a level that allows for sustainable management of all forest functions, in situ carbon storage, including in agroforests, in dead wood, in forest soils in wood-based products through sustainable and active forest management. They encouraged the Commission to explore different market-based mechanisms to encourage the substitution of fossil fuels with renewable raw materials that have climate benefits.

Key role of the EU post-2020 strategy for forests

The EU's upcoming post-2020 EU forest strategy shall be in line with the European Green Deal and an ambitious EU biodiversity strategy. In view of climate change, Members called for risk management measures such as strengthening Europe's resilience to disasters and early warning tools to increase prevention and preparedness for fires, storms, floods, droughts or pest infestations.

The resolution stressed, *inter alia*, the need to:

- increase resources and development efforts devoted to science-based forest fire management;

- ensure a market-based bio-economy in the EU, for example by promoting innovation and the creation of new bio-based products as part of an efficient biomass supply chain;

- encourage the use of wood, harvested wood products or forest biomass to boost sustainable production and employment;

- provide better support to forest owners when implementing preventive measures, dealing with crises and restoring affected areas, e.g. through a new European emergency mechanism.

Parliament warned that further cuts in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) budget would have a negative impact on investment in sustainable forest management. It deplored the fact that the CAP proposal for the 2021-2027 programming period makes no mention of agroforestry.

Sustainable management of the world's forests

According to Members, the EU forest strategy shall promote sustainable forest management worldwide, both through bilateral agreements and multilateral forest-related processes, focusing on measures to stop global deforestation, including by supporting legal, sustainable and deforestation-free production and supply chains that do not lead to human rights violations.

The resolution called for traceability measures for imports to better prevent illegally logged timber or timber from illegal sources from entering the EU market, which constitutes unfair competition for the European forestry sector.

Parliament called for the importing of illegally acquired timber to be included in trade agreements, with sanctions to be imposed in the event of infringements.