A New EU Forest Strategy for 2030 – Sustainable Forest Management in Europe

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The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development adopted the report by Ulrike MÜLLER (Renew Europe, DE) on a new EU Forest Strategy for 2030 – Sustainable Forest Management in Europe.

The EU is home to approximately 5 % of the world's total forest area, with forests accounting for 43 % of the EU's land area. Forest ownership across Europe is diverse in terms of size and ownership structure, leading to a great diversity of management models. About 60 % of the EU's forests are owned by 16 million private forest owners, of whom a significant share are small-holders, while approximately 40 % of the EU's forests are under different forms of public ownership.

Members welcomed the new EU Forest Strategy and its ambition to increase the balanced contribution of multifunctional forests to the targets of the Green Deal and its EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy, particularly the goals of creating sustainable green growth and green jobs, and of achieving a carbon-neutral, environmentally sustainable and fully circular economy within planetary boundaries and climate neutrality by 2050 at the latest.

The report stated that, in line with sustainable forest management and to increase the quality and diversity of forest ecosystems, the maintenance, protection, strengthening, restoration and sustainable use of healthy and resilient forests are fundamental goals of the EU Forest Strategy and of all actors in forestry and the forest-based value chain, using timber as a versatile, renewable raw material to maximise self-sufficiency in the EU.

Despite the continuously growing cover and volume of forests in the EU, Members stressed the urgent need to **protect and increase forest and ecosystem resilience**, including through measures to increase the capacity to adapt to climate change, and to reduce pressures where feasible, while taking into consideration the characteristics of the forest.

Varying forest management

The report acknowledged that forest management is site-specific and that varying forest conditions and forest types may require different management approaches based on different ecological needs and forestland characteristics. Rights and interests of forest sector workers, owners and other concerned actors should also be considered. Moreover, Members recognise the complexity of assessing the state of forests, as well as the **uneven availability, diversity and quality of data**, and therefore stressed the need for continuous policy and scientific dialogue and increased financing at all levels, starting from consultations with Member States, and in particular with forest managers and owners, to improve data collection on the state of forests and, where appropriate, data harmonisation.

Fostering a balanced multifunctionality

Members emphasised that wood is the only significant natural renewable resource that has the potential to replace some very energy-intensive materials, such as cement and plastics, and will be in greater demand in the future. They stressed the need **to reduce the EU's consumption** in general and welcomed the establishment of a methodology to quantify the climate benefits of wood construction.

Stressing that the increasing demand for wood as a raw material, especially wood for use as an energy source, poses major challenges in the context of political crises, such as the war in Ukraine, Members called on the Commission and the Members States to **assess dependencies on imports** of timber from Russia in the light of the legitimate sanctions following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and to develop sustainable strategies to mitigate disruptions where necessary, while avoiding at EU level the conversion of agricultural land suitable for food production.

Reforestation, afforestation and sustainable management

The report recognised that there are several co-benefits associated with reforestation and afforestation, such as water filtration, increased water availability, drought mitigation, flood control, avoided sedimentation, the creation of wildlife habitats, an increase in soil fauna, enhanced soil fertility and air filtration.

Members welcomed the reforestation and afforestation roadmap for planting at least **3 billion additional trees in the EU by 2030**. They called on the Commission and the Member States to pay special attention to planting suitable trees in areas with degraded

land and those affected by desertification and reiterated the importance of protecting primary and old-growth forests. Increasing the area of afforested land can make an effective contribution to combating climate change and to the natural regeneration of degraded forest systems, with the medium- and long-term effect of economic and social development and the creation of new jobs.

Members called on the Member States to continue their efforts to properly implement national strategies and legislation related to sustainable forest management, and to adapt them to their national, regional and local circumstances.

Members noted with great concern that large-scale and more intense wildfires are an increasing challenge across the European Union and, in particular, that the 2021 fire season in the EU was unprecedented, as some 0.5 million ha were destroyed by fire, notably in the regions of Europe facing the highest average temperature rises, such as the Mediterranean. They called for more resources for and the development of science-based fire management and capacity-building support through advisory services to tackle the effects of climate change in forests.

Enabling forests and forest managers to deliver on multiple goals

The CAP and the European agricultural fund for rural development (EAFRD) are the main sources of support for forestry measures, accounting for 90 % of EU's total finance for forestry. The report noted that between 2014 and 2020, the Member States only spent 49 % of the available funds, that the Commission has identified administrative burden, insufficient attractiveness of the premiums and a lack of advisory services as reasons for this low usage and that this should be taken into account when adapting the new CAP strategic plans. Member States should eliminate the administrative burden in order to make the use of the EAFRD for forestry measures more efficient.

Members stressed that forest owners and managers need a large amount of **flexibility** in their forest management practices, working from a strong common basis, so that they can provide all the required ecosystem services.