Forest-based and related industries: state of competitiveness

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The committee adopted the report by Esko SEPPÄNEN (EUL/NGL, FIN) on the Commission communication. The report welcomed the broader (as opposed to merely sectoral) approach taken by the Commission, which indicated a new thinking on industrial policy. It stressed the importance of the forest-based industry as a potential model sector in the field of sustainable development, pointing out that it contributed effectively to the binding of carbon in forests and wood products. It also noted that the EU's forest strategy must be based on the recognition of the diversity of European forests. The committee pointed out that there were a large number of small businesses in the forest-based and related sectors, which provided employment in rural areas in particular. The Commission was urged to improve internal coordination when dealing with matters relating to the forest sector and to provide R&D funding for forestry projects, especially into new ways of using forest raw materials (for example, for medical purposes) and new ways of using wood as a renewable and environmentally-friendly resource and material. The use of wood as a construction material should be encouraged. The committee also highlighted the need to improve waste management through more recycling of paper. Other points raised in the report included the need for effective action to combat environmental and social dumping with regard to timber imports and the need to bear in mind that the applicant countries had a great deal of potential in the timber-processing and related industries. In this context, the committee pointed out that any EU aid must avoid creating distortions of competition in this sector and that the EU would have to take account of the social costs of the relocation of business to those countries.