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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
No. Cion doc.:	10914/21 + ADD 1 - COM(2021) 572 final + ADD 2 + ADD 3
Subject:	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions New EU Forest Strategy for 2030 - Exchange of views

1. On 16 July 2021, the Commission adopted its Communication on a New Forest Strategy, which is accompanied by two staff working documents, on the 3 Billion Tree Planting Pledge for 2030 and its roadmap, and on the Stakeholder Consultation and Evidence Base*.
2. The New Forest Strategy is one of the flagship initiatives of the European Green Deal and builds on the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030. It aims to contribute to achieving the EU's biodiversity objectives, the greenhouse gas emission reduction target of at least 55% by 2030 and climate neutrality by 2050.

* 10914/21 + ADD 1- COM(2021) 572 final + ADD 2 + ADD 3.

3. In order to structure the exchange of views between Ministers on the New Forest Strategy at the meeting of the Environment Council to be held on 6 October 2021, the Presidency has prepared a background paper with two questions, as set out in the Annex to this note.
 4. The Committee of the Permanent Representatives is invited to take note of the Presidency's background paper and questions and to forward them to the Council for the exchange of views.
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Council meeting of Environment Ministers

6 October 2021

– Exchange of views –

New EU Forest Strategy for 2030

Presidency background paper with questions for Ministers

The **European Green Deal** (EGD)¹ recognises forestry and sustainable management of forests as one of the key policies and measures to tackle climate and environmental-related challenges. EGD emphasises that forest ecosystems are under increasing pressure, as a result of climate change, and that the EU's forested area needs to improve, both in quality and quantity. Key objectives to be addressed are increasing the absorption of CO₂, reducing the incidence and extent of forest fires and promoting the bio-economy, in full respect of ecological principles favourable to biodiversity.

The **EU's biodiversity strategy for 2030 – Bringing nature back into our lives**² addresses the need for increasing the quantity of forests and improving their health and resilience, and recognises the importance of forests for biodiversity, climate and water regulation, the provision of food, medicines and materials, carbon sequestration and storage, soil stabilisation and the purification of air and water. It also points out the role of forests as a natural home for recreation and learning about nature.

¹ 15051/19 + ADD 1 - COM(2019) 640 final.

² 8219/20 + ADD 1 - COM(2020) 380 final.

The Council in its **Conclusions on Biodiversity - the need for urgent action**³, stressed the need for effective action in all policy sectors relevant for biodiversity, including forestry and the sustainable management of forests. The Council also stressed the importance of healthy and resilient forest ecosystems, which fulfil multiple functions, and of the protection of remaining primary forests, including defining, mapping, and monitoring of primary and old-growth forests, aiming to ensure their conservation.

The Council in its **Conclusions on Perspectives for the EU forest-related policies and EU forest strategy post 2020**⁴, called on the Commission for ensuring consistency and coherence of EU forest-related policies after 2020 and stressed the need to strategically address increasing fragmentation of EU forest-related policies and improve their coordination and coherence, in particular with respect to the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, EU Adaptation Strategy and EU Climate law, among others.

The Council in its **Conclusions on Forging a climate-resilient Europe – the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change**⁵, recognized the importance of further integrating adaptation measures in sustainable forest management, as an example of nature-based solutions, highlighting the multifunctional role of forests, in particular in stabilising and cooling local climates, regulating hydrological cycles and contributing positively to the carbon cycle.

³ 12210/20.

⁴ 12695/1/20 REV 1.

⁵ 9694/21.

Building on the 2030 biodiversity strategy, the Commission adopted a **New EU forest strategy for 2030**⁶ (the Strategy) that recognises the central and multifunctional role of forests, and the contribution of foresters and the entire forest-based value chain for achieving a sustainable and climate neutral economy by 2050, while ensuring that all ecosystems are restored, resilient, and adequately protected. The overarching objective of the Strategy is the contribution of forestry and the forest-based sector to the goal of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 and achieving climate neutrality by 2050, which will be implemented by the measures laid out in the Fit for 55 package, adapting forests to climate change as well as halting biodiversity loss.

Aiming at **supporting the socio-economic functions of forests**, the Strategy acknowledges and aims to boost the entire sustainable forest bioeconomy that works in synergy with the EU's increased climate and biodiversity ambition. In this respect measures are envisaged for promoting sustainable forest bioeconomy for long-lived wood products, ensuring sustainable use of wood-based resources for bioenergy, promoting non-wood forest-based bioeconomy, including ecotourism, and developing skills and empowering people for a sustainable forest-based bioeconomy.

To ensure the **protection, restoration and enlargement of EU's forests** to combat climate change, reverse biodiversity loss and ensure resilient and multifunctional forest ecosystems, the Strategy includes measures for protecting the EU's last remaining primary and old-growth forests, for ensuring forest restoration and reinforced sustainable forest management for climate adaptation and forest resilience, and for reforestation and afforestation of biodiverse forests, including by planting 3 billion additional trees by 2030. The Strategy also recognises the need for financial incentives for forest owners and managers to improve the quantity and quality of EU forests.

⁶ 10914/21 + ADD 1 - COM(2021) 572 final + ADD 2 + ADD 3.

In order to ensure that the EU and the Member States will jointly be able to demonstrate that they are on the right track and that the forests can actually deliver on these multiple demands and functions, the Strategy recognises the need for **strategic forest planning** in all EU Member States at national and, where applicable, regional level. This planning should be based on **reliable monitoring and data**, transparent governance and coordinated exchange at EU level. In this regard, a **legislative proposal for a Forest Observation, Reporting and Data Collection framework** is envisaged with a view to establish an EU-wide integrated forest monitoring framework, using remote sensing technologies and geospatial data integrated with ground-based monitoring, which will improve the accuracy of monitoring.

The crucial role of **research and innovation** is emphasised in the Strategy, as well as opportunities to accelerate the application of digital innovations to forestry, rural areas and across value chains, and accelerate the uptake of forest related innovations, to promote knowledge exchange, cooperation, education and training.

The Strategy also focuses on **implementing an inclusive and coherent EU forest governance framework**, aiming at early and consistent involvement of Member States experts in all forest related activities, including in proposing definitions of primary and old growth forests, and on **strengthening the implementation and enforcement of existing EU acquis**.

The Strategy is accompanied by two Commission Staff Working Documents: “Staff Working Document on the Stakeholder Consultation and Evidence Base” and “Staff Working Document on the 3 Billion Tree Planting Pledge for 2030”.

Suggested questions for the exchange of views at the Council meeting of Environment Ministers on 6 October 2021:

1. *Does the New EU Forest Strategy for 2030 appropriately reflect the Council Conclusions on the EU Biodiversity Strategy, stressing the importance of healthy and resilient forest ecosystems, which fulfil multiple functions, and the importance of protecting the remaining primary and old-growth forests?*
 2. *Does the New EU Forest Strategy for 2030 provide a good basis for the EU to lead globally by positive example on sustainable forest management that contributes to climate and biodiversity objectives and to a stable forest-based bio-economy?*
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