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From: Presidency
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Subject: Presidency Report on the informal meeting of the EU Forest Director
Generals
Maribor, Slovenia, 7. - 10. 9. 2021

With a view to the informal videoconference of the Forestry Working Party on 17 September 2021, delegations will find in annex a Presidency Report on the informal meeting of the EU Forest Directors-General held in Maribor, Slovenia, between 7 and 10 September 2021. The report will also be submitted to the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 11-12 October 2021, under Any Other Business.

Presidency Report on the informal meeting of the EU Forest Director Generals

Maribor, Slovenia, 7. - 10. 9. 2021

Report of the EU Forest Director Generals attached below will be submitted to the Agricultural Council's attention.

The Informal Meeting of the EU Forest Director Generals, organised by the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU took place in Maribor, Slovenia from 7th to 10th of September 2021. Together 22 Member States (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Denmark, Croatia, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Hungary, Malta, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Slovakia and Slovenia as the host), the EU Commission (DG AGRI and DG ENV) and representatives of the stakeholder organisations (CEPF, EUSTAFOR, COPA-COGECA and FERN) participated and engaged in the discussion.

Participants were introduced to the main characteristics of the Slovenian forests and national forest management planning system, promoting sustainable, multifunctional and close-to-nature forest management practises, representing the three pillars for providing socio-economic and ecological forest functions.

During the plenary sessions participants learned about Slovenian participatory approach of different stakeholders in creating contents of management plans, and received information on integration of biodiversity protective measures into forest management. And heard about the importance of forests and forest ecosystem services for biodiversity, climate, rural development, soil and water protection, and source of renewable material for transition to circular bioeconomy in Slovenia.

During the field trip different speakers from the Slovenia Forest Service and the Biotechnical Faculty presented an overview of the regional historical development of forestry, as well as its current importance for the rural development, cooperation and local actions.

Opening of the meeting

The welcoming words were presented by MSc. Aleš Irgolič, State Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, and Mr Aleksander Saša Arsenovič, Mayor of the City of Maribor. Chair the meeting, MSc. Robert Režonja, Director General, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, finally introduced the participants to the Slovenian forestry.

The EU Forest Strategy

Director Bascou, Director for Sustainability and income support, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, European Commission and Director Delgado Rosa Director, Natural Capital, Directorate-General for Environment, European Commission, presented the new EU Forest Strategy for 2030, followed by a general discussion.

Participants exchanged views on whether the new EU Forest Strategy is taking into account all aspects of sustainability, encompassing all forest functions and their contribution to national, EU and global objectives.

The new EU Forest Strategy for 2030 was welcomed. It was mentioned that forests should be managed in a sustainable and multifunctional way, balancing the three dimensions of sustainability, while recognising differences in forests between and across Member States, diverse characteristics, complex historical, cultural and social structures. Participants stressed the importance of balance between all pillars of sustainability within the Strategy.

The Presidency concluded that financial incentives for forests are an important tool to further enhance biodiversity-friendly measures, climate mitigation and adaptation, rural development, and transition to a circular forest-based bioeconomy for achievement of global, EU and national goals.

Several Member States present at the meeting raised concerns regarding their competences in the field of forestry, including on a legislative proposal for a Forest Observation, Reporting and Data Collection framework, and Strategic Plans for Forests. The Director Generals also emphasized the importance of early and consistent involvement of Member States experts in all forest related activities, and the involvement of Standing Forestry Committee. They pointed out the lack of involvement in the past and advocated for the need of the future cooperation, including in the process of defining the terms, definitions and all other activities mentioned in the EU Forest Strategy for 2030. Several delegations stressed the importance of the existing international process, such as FOREST EUROPE and the need to establish a link with the Council Conclusions from April 2019 and November 2020.

Member States expressed support to the Slovenian Presidency to prepare the Council Conclusions on the new EU Forest Strategy.

Importance and role of forests for rural development

Director Bascou, Director for Sustainability and income support, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, European Commission presented the Common Agricultural Policy with the focus on the role of the Rural Development Programmes for forests and their role in maintaining and developing rural areas.

Mr Uroš Rozman, presented the Partnership for Pohorje, the initiative of the 19 municipalities, a good practices of how a local initiative promoting sustainable development, protection of nature and ensuring a holistic management approach to rural development.

Participants presented their experiences with the Rural Development Plans and forest related interventions that promote multifunctional sustainable forest management, support rural development and enable transition to a forest-based bioeconomy.

The plenary session concluded with the closing remarks by the Chair.