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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council
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To: Delegations

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Subject: Council conclusions on Perspectives for the EU forest-related policies and EU forest strategy post 2020
- Council Conclusions (10 November 2020)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council Conclusions on Perspectives for the EU forest-related policies and EU forest strategy post 2020, approved by written procedure by the Council of the European Union on 10 November 2020.

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

on Perspectives for the EU forest-related policies and EU forest strategy post 2020

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. **RECALLING** the latest Council discussions on a EU forest strategy post 2020, the Council Conclusions of 15 April 2019¹ and the exchange of views of Ministers at the AGRIFISH Council on 14 October 2019 stressing the need for a strengthened post 2020 EU forest strategy²;
2. **UNDERLINING** the international commitments of the European Union (EU) and its Member States to the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Agreement, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UN Strategic Plan for Forests with the Global Objectives on Forests as global framework for forest-related policies;
3. **FURTHER UNDERLINING** the relevance of the Common Agriculture Policy post 2020, the European Green Deal, including the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the Communication on Stepping Up EU Action to Protect and Restore the World's Forests as well as the expected global biodiversity framework to be adopted at the CBD COP15 as an evolving context for EU's forest-related policies;
4. **RECOGNIZING** the principles, resolutions and decisions of the FOREST EUROPE ministerial process as well as its continuous work on defining, monitoring and reporting on sustainable forest management;

¹ 8609/19

² 12921/19

5. **RECALLING** the findings of the IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land and the IPBES Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services;

URGENCY and KEY PRINCIPLES

6. **REITERATES** its **CALL ON** the Commission for ensuring consistency and coherence of EU forest-related policies after 2020 and, as a matter of urgency, the need for a new balanced and strengthened post 2020 EU Forest Strategy, developed together with Member States and stakeholders, supporting and complementing forest policy at national and subnational level, and **STRESSES**:
- a) the importance of the contribution of healthy and resilient forests, forest ecosystems and the forest-based sectors to the timely achievement of the SDGs, as well as for the implementation of the European Green Deal;
 - b) the continued support for a holistic approach, addressing in a balanced way the three dimensions of sustainability, and taking into account the diversity and different characteristics of European forests in their ecologic, economic and social dimensions as well as the complexity of ownership patterns;
 - c) the need for a clear vision, objectives and strategic orientations, as well as a concrete action plan, to be developed together with Member States, for EU forests beyond 2020 and a robust review framework, to track the implementation and progress of the EU Forest Strategy, building on national data and information, while avoiding unnecessary additional administrative burdens;

- d) 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, the EU Farm-to-Fork Strategy, the upcoming EU Adaptation Strategy, the EU Climate and Energy framework and upcoming EU Climate Law, the EU Bioeconomy Strategy, the CAP Strategic Plans, the EU taxonomy for sustainable activities and relevant international agreements, such as the three Rio Conventions and the UN Strategic Plan for Forests, as well as of EU forest-related positions in international processes;
- e) the importance of sustainable forest management and the multifunctional role of forests, as defined and agreed upon by the EU and its Member States notably in the framework of FOREST EUROPE Resolutions H1 and L1, as continued overall guiding principles;
- f) the wide range of expertise and instruments available in the private and public forest sector and research organisations of EU Member States to advance sustainable forest management and the multifunctional role of forests;
- g) that, although the EU has a variety of forest-related policies, the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU makes no reference to a common EU forest policy, the responsibility for forests lies with the Member States and all forest-related decisions and policies in the EU must respect the principle of subsidiarity and Member States' competence in this field;
- h) the important role of the Standing Forestry Committee as well as the Civil Dialogue Group on Forestry and Cork, as the main fora for exchange of information and providing opinions, advice and expertise to the Commission on the various policies and initiatives relevant to forests and the forest-based sector and the need to further actively promote interaction between these two and other advisory groups;

PROPOSALS FOR STRENGTHENED AND AMBITIOUS ACTIONS

7. With a view to strengthening the post 2020 EU Forest Strategy and forest-related policies of the EU in terms of their impact, complementary and supportive to Member States own policies, particularly with respect to maintaining, further promoting and enhancing sustainable forest management, including protection, restoration, afforestation and reforestation, **INVITES** the Commission to take the following concrete aspects into account:
- a) **TO CONSIDER** the Sustainable Development Goals as the overall guiding framework for the EU Forest Strategy post 2020, in line with the UN Strategic Plan for Forests, in order to better **PROMOTE** and **COMMUNICATE** the multifunctional role of forests and sustainable forest management as a nature-based solution for multiple contributions to several other EU strategies and sustainability-related policies and actions, thus also supporting dialogue with the civil society and forest-related stakeholders, taking due attention to the various debates on forests and forestry taking place in the society and contributing to a leading role of the EU in implementing the 2030 Agenda;
 - b) **TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT** the European Green Deal as a new policy framework at EU-level and the forest-related objectives as laid out in relevant EU strategies such as the EU Biodiversity Strategy when developing the new EU Forest Strategy and the need for the Commission to provide a thorough impact assessment for any forest-related instruments that the Commission may put forward, in line with the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Lawmaking;

c) **TO ENSURE** coherence in all forest-related matters at EU level while **ADDRESSING** in particular the following urging subjects:

- i. **ENHANCING** resilience and adaptation to climate change of existing and additionally established European forests, through sustainable forest management and its multifunctional approach and building on sound research and knowledge, evidence and monitoring, including on genetic variation, thus reducing the risks and large-scale effects of biotic and abiotic disturbances exacerbated by climate change and land abandonment, specifically maintaining and increasing their climate change mitigation potential and reflecting the impact of current damages to forests towards the EU climate objectives;
- ii. **PROMOTING** and **ENHANCING** the forests' and forest-based sector's contribution to the EU-wide bio- and circular economy, leading to more green economic infrastructure, innovative products and technologies, forest-based livelihoods, decent green jobs and viable rural areas as well as to enhanced mitigation of climate change through the use of wood from sustainable and renewable sources;

- iii. **MAINTAINING** and **ENHANCING** forest biodiversity and ecosystem services, building in a coherent manner on the forest-related objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy, and among others on the network ‘INTEGRATE’ as a good example of a Member States driven initiative, supported by the Standing Forestry Committee, in order to enhance collaborative and cross-border work, research and knowledge sharing on enhanced integration of nature conservation into sustainable forest management and developing innovative instruments like scientifically-based schemes for payments for ecosystem services, including in synergy with climate change objectives, and means to advance close-to-nature forestry.
- d) **UNDERSCORING** the relevance of rural development forestry measures of the Common Agriculture Policy for supporting implementation of sustainable forest management, including maintaining and enhancing forest biodiversity and ecosystem services, as well as of other possible EU financial instruments, reducing administrative burden in the forestry measures and in state aid generally, **TO ESTABLISH** a regular exchange and knowledge sharing platform, e.g. under the Standing Forestry Committee, among Commission, Member States and stakeholders on best practices and innovative solutions for supporting implementation of forestry measures and facilitating uptake of available funding;

- e) **RESPONDING TO** the increasing challenge to demonstrate, communicate and further develop the forest sector's sustainability and **EMPHASIZING** the relevance of cost-effective mechanisms for demonstrating the potential and benefits of sustainable forest management making best possible use of the FOREST EUROPE definition, the pan-European criteria and indicators, the pan-European operational level guidelines on sustainable forest management and of national forest data, and if possible building on National Forest Programmes or other relevant strategies, **TO DEVELOP** in close cooperation with the Member States, options for a voluntary mechanism, similar to the Voluntary National Contributions under UNFF, to be used under the new EU Forest Strategy to enhance information sharing on existing policies and actions of EU Member States on specific aspects of sustainable forest management, thus contributing to an increased transparency, raised awareness and better information base at EU level.
- f) In the light of the international commitments and contributions of the EU and its Member States on increasing forest areas worldwide and halting deforestation, preventing illegal logging and related trade and on promoting sustainable forest management, including protection, restoration, afforestation and reforestation and deforestation-free sustainable agricultural commodity supply chains, as well as the planned measures in follow-up of the Commission's Communication on Stepping-Up EUs Action to Protect and Restore the World's Forests and the related Council Conclusions³, **TO SEEK** synergies and achieve the closest possible coherence among these actions and the EU forest strategy post 2020, in order to lead by example and offer good cooperation.

³ 15151/19