



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 16 November 2021
(OR. en)

13984/21

AGRI 549
ENV 896
FORETS 71
PROCIV 142
JUR 635
DEVGEN 200
RELEX 987
UD 279
PROBA 49
FAO 40

OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council

On: 15 November 2021

To: Delegations

No. prev. doc.: 13537/21

Subject: Council conclusions on The New EU Forest Strategy for 2030
- *Council Conclusions* (15 November 2021)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council Conclusions on "*The New EU Forest Strategy for 2030*", as approved by the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 15 November 2021.

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

on The New EU Forest Strategy for 2030

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. **RECALLING** the Council Conclusions of 10 November 2020 on *Perspectives for the EU forest-related policies and EU forest strategy post 2020¹*, of 15 April 2019 on *the progress on the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy and on a new strategic framework for forests²*, of 16 December 2019 on *Stepping Up EU Action to Protect and Restore the World's Forests³*, of 10 June 2021 on the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change⁴, of 17 December 2020 on *Making the Recovery Circular and Green*, of 29 November 2019 on the updated EU Bioeconomy Strategy⁵ and of 23 October 2020 on *the Biodiversity Strategy - the need for urgent action⁶*.
2. **RECOGNIZING** the leading role of the FOREST EUROPE ministerial process in developing dialogue, principles, criteria, indicators and definitions related to the multifunctional role of forests and their sustainable management, and **RECALLING** the FOREST EUROPE Resolutions and Declarations, signed by all EU Member States and the European Commission on behalf of the European Union, as well as the shared vision for European forests 2030 set out in the Bratislava Ministerial Declaration “The Future We Want: The Forests We Need⁷” .

1 Doc. 12695/1/20 REV 1

2 Doc. 8609/19

3 Doc. 15151/19

4 Doc. 9694/21

5 Doc 14594/19

6 Doc. 12210/20

7 The Eighth FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference, 14-15 April 2021

3. **UNDERLINING** that Member States have, according to their respective forest policies, developed and implemented national forest strategies, programs, tools, and other sustainable forest management related instruments.
4. **RECOGNIZING** that Sustainable forest management (SFM), as defined by FOREST EUROPE following the Forest Principles⁸, is a dynamic and evolving concept, providing a framework for balancing the provision and enhancement of ecological, economic and social services of forests and/or forest ecosystems to contribute to the three dimensions of sustainable development and thus promoting the multiple functions of forests.
5. **STRESSING** the importance of SFM as a nature-based solution catering multiple goals for the maintenance and appropriate enhancement of forest resources and their contribution to the global carbon cycle, the health, vitality and resilience of forest ecosystems, the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biological diversity, the forests' protective functions – especially regarding the impact of climate change- and the productive and other socio-economic functions of forests.

Holistic approach and framework for forests

6. **WELCOMES** the publication of the Communication of the Commission on the new EU Forest Strategy for 2030 and its increased ambition for the contribution of forests through their multifunctional role to the European Green Deal and to forest-related global goals and targets, including those of the 2030 Agenda. **EMPHASIZES** the fact that the forests and the forest-based sector can play an important role in the EU's transition to a sustainable, green, climate neutral and competitive circular bio-economy.

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https://web.archive.org/web/20170701164258/http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aco_nf15126-3annex3.htm

7. **RECALLS** that a comprehensive framework for the sector is needed, taking into account all three dimensions of sustainability in a balanced and holistic way, **HIGHLIGHTS** the need for coherence between the different EU forest related policies, goals and instruments directly or indirectly affecting forests and the connection with the EU's role in various international processes. **EMPHASISES** that the Communication would need a balanced vision on the different dimensions of sustainability. Regarding the implementation of the Strategy, **HIGHLIGHTS** the need to strengthen the socio-economic goals and to define the newly introduced concepts and terms in the EU Forest Strategy and to set clear steps for future cooperation of the Commission and the Member States.
8. **STRESSES** the important role of forests in the EU in the fight against biodiversity loss and climate change, including through enhanced climate mitigation and adaptation measures. **RECALLS** the ongoing work on defining, mapping and monitoring of the remaining primary and old growth forests in the EU, aiming to ensure their conservation. **REGRETS** that the aspects of desertification and of forests' hydrological function have not been sufficiently developed in the Strategy.
9. **WELCOMES** the emphasis on the promotion of sustainably produced wood-based products, especially long lived ones, and at the same time **RECALLS** that resource efficient and sustainable production and use of forest-based products, including long and short-lived ones, contribute to the climate goals, to the circular bio-economy, to a sustainable and greener post-pandemic economic recovery and to rural development. In this regard, **STRESSES** the need to further promote sustainable production, consumption and investments and to promote short and local supply chains and sustainability-oriented procurement policies along the whole value chain, especially with regard to enhancing resource efficiency and circular economy.

10. **WELCOMES** the recognition of forests as a provider of livelihoods and important ecosystem services. **HIGHLIGHTS** the need to further develop, in close cooperation between the Commission and Member States, concrete socio-economic goals in the Strategy, as part of a common implementation work programme. **EMPHASISES** the key role of forest owners and forest managers in delivering on the Strategy's objectives, including in supporting the development of rural areas to address rural depopulation and revitalization.
11. **EMPHASISES** the need to make use of available financial mechanisms and incentives, including for payments for forest ecosystem services. **INVITES** the Commission, together with Member States, to explore options for new innovative market based solutions, such as payments for ecosystem services, for climate change mitigation and adaptation and for biodiversity, including those solutions such as close-to-nature forestry and carbon farming, while limiting the administrative burden for forest owners and managers, as well as for public administrations.
12. **STRESSES** that a one-size fits all approach to forests in the EU may prove counterproductive. **EMPHASISES** the need to recognise, respect and maintain the diversity and specificities of forests and forest ecosystems, of forest coverage, management and silvicultural practices, ownership, cultural and historical developments among Member States and regions, including areas with natural constraints and the Outermost Regions.
13. **STRESSES** the importance of Member States' competence and in this regard **REITERATES** paragraph 6g of the Council Conclusions of 10 November 2020 on *Perspectives for the EU forest-related policies and EU forest strategy post 2020*⁹.

⁹ Doc. 12695/1/20 REV 1 – paragraph 6(g).

14. **REGRETS** that the new EU Forest Strategy was not developed together with the Member States and stakeholders and **EXPRESSES** willingness and readiness to cooperate with the Commission and **RECOGNIZES** that there is shared interest in working together on implementing the New EU-forest Strategy for 2030 in an integrated manner. In this regards, **STRESSES** the importance of cooperation, coordination and joint activities between Member States, the European Commission as well as other important partners in the pan- European region on forest policy related matter.
15. **NOTES** the initiative for a legislative proposal for a Forest Observation, Reporting and Data Collection framework, including Member States Strategic Plans for Forests. Furthermore, **ASKS FOR** clarifications on the added value of such plans and **RECALLS** the need to acknowledge the cost-effectiveness and to avoid duplication and additional administrative burden, the already existing comprehensive national forest programmes or strategies, developed according to internationally agreed commitments, such as the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests and the FOREST EUROPE Vienna Resolution¹⁰, and their related Member States competencies.
16. **UNDERLINES** the importance of a sound and transparent data and information base on forests as a basis for policy-making. **RECALLS** that data collection, processing, reporting and interpretation should make best and most effective use of existing national forest inventories and related international cooperation under, among others, the ENFIN network. **CALLS** on the Commission, together with the Member States and experts to analyse the currently existing discrepancies and possible gaps in forest data collection.

¹⁰ https://www.foresteuropa.org/docs/MC/MC_vienna_resolutionV1.pdf

17. **IS CONVINCED** that full advantage should be taken of existing definitions and indicators developed in international and regional processes such as FOREST EUROPE, which should be fully used for monitoring and reporting on the conditions of the forests in the EU. **INVITES** the Commission, in close cooperation with the Member States, and with the support of research networks in the European forest-science partnership, to carry out an assessment and to decide together on whether new EU level indicators, thresholds or ranges for SFM are needed and on what their added value would be. Furthermore, taking into account forests differences between countries, these thresholds or ranges must be decided and set at national level or sub-national level.
18. **WELCOMES** the Strategy's attention to the need to strengthen forests' resilience. **RECOGNISES** the negative impacts on forests from and the risks posed by natural disasters and other disturbing factors which are likely to be aggravated by climate change. **CALLS** on the Commission to work closely with Member States to strengthen the work on the risk management related to natural disasters and forest disturbing factors, especially wild fires, and on the adaption to climate change in order to develop a structured and integrated approach, taking into account effective cooperation and experience-sharing platforms with Member States' administrations and stakeholders and considering the ongoing work of FOREST EUROPE towards a forest risk knowledge mechanism.
19. **UNDERLINES** that research and innovation are important drivers in achieving the goals of the Strategy. **CALLS** for stronger cooperation on research and innovation planning and activities to boost, inter alia, the use of sustainably produced wood and other forest products in the circular bio-economy, as well as the contribution of forests to climate change mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity objectives. **WELCOMES** the establishment of the Research and Innovation partnership on forestry, while ensuring that the partnerships work is carried out in coherence with the collaborative work of existing international organisations.

20. **AGREES** to the need for an inclusive approach and good coordination between EU forest relevant bodies. **RECOMMENDS** that the existing Standing Forestry Committee (SFC) as established by the Council Decision of 29 May 1989 setting up a Standing Forestry Committee (89/367/EEC) remains the main forum for Member States’ representatives and the Commission, to discuss and advise on forest-related topics at EU level and to strengthen its role in the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy.
21. **ENCOURAGES** full involvement of the relevant stakeholders, including forest owners and managers, in the consultations preparing the implementation and in the Strategy implementation itself. **CALLS** for a constructive dialogue and collaborative work between the Commission, Member States, and the relevant stakeholders and civil society.
22. **INVITES** the Commission to develop together with the Standing Forestry Committee an Annual Work Plan with concrete work streams, including forest resilience and climate change effects, circular bio-economy and forest biodiversity and ecosystem services, while also ensuring inputs from other Commission forest-related groups.
23. **URGES** that the added value to already existing voluntary certification schemes for SFM should be a precondition for any consideration of introducing new certification schemes. **EMPHASIZES** the importance to clarify the need for new EU “closer-to-nature” certification schemes and their demonstrable added value. **UNDERLINES** that this may cause additional administrative burden and costs, potential confusion to consumers and overlaps with existing forest certifications schemes.

24. **REITERATES** the need to step up EU action to protect and restore the world’s forests and the implementation and enforcement of relevant existing EU regulation and **LOOKS FORWARD** to receiving the fitness check on the EU Timber Regulation and the FLEGT Regulation, and the envisaged Commission's legislative proposal, as well as non-legislative measures on minimising the risk of deforestation and forest degradation associated with products placed on the EU market.
25. **STRESSES** that by successfully implementing a comprehensive EU Forest Strategy that promotes the multifunctionality of forests, thus contributing to the Global Forest Goals and multiple SDGs, the EU and its Member States can continue to play a leading role in promoting SFM and halting deforestation at global level in various international fora, such as the United Nations Forum on Forests, the FAO COFO, as well as in regional organisations and processes like FOREST EUROPE, UNECE and the FAO European Forestry Commission. **REGRETS** that the new EU Forest Strategy omits this international dimension.
26. **NOTES** that the Strategy is not clear on its impact on forests outside the EU, as well as on how to avoid that the proposed protection measures for the forests in the EU may result in a higher footprint and possible negative impacts on forests outside the EU, especially on primary forests, due to higher timber or wood imports. Therefore **REQUESTS** the Commission to consider this dimension in the Impact Assessment of the proposed measures and to propose additional mitigation measures, as appropriate.
27. **ENCOURAGES** the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and local communities in the implementation and in delivering on the Strategy objectives. **HIGHLIGHTS** in relation to the role of indigenous peoples, the importance of the UNDRIP.

28. **INVITES** the Commission to annually report to the Council on the implementation of the new EU Forest Strategy for 2030 and on the recommendations included in these Conclusions, and to present, in 2025, the findings of the review on the progress made and to involve the Council if further action is needed.
29. **HIGHLIGHTS** that afforestation is an ongoing and successful measure in several Member States, also supported by the EU Common Agriculture Policy. **WELCOMES** the Roadmap for planting 3 billion additional trees in the EU by 2030. **STRESSES** that the pledges for such additional tree planting are voluntary and that there are significant challenges of land availability in Member States, and that Member States' legal procedures for approving afforestation measures are applicable and in this regard **WELCOMES** the monitoring component of the roadmap.
30. **HIGHLIGHTS** the essential role of forests for human health and wellbeing, and the need to promote the “One Health” approach which recognises the intrinsic connection between human health, animal health and healthy nature and **REQUESTING** to look deeper into the role of forests and SFM in the One Health Approach and enhance the contribution of forests, nature areas and public parks for the wellbeing of people since the COVID 19 pandemic has also demonstrated the need for enhancing the greening of the urbanised areas.
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