OPINION

of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy

for the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

on a new EU Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest-based sector (2014/2223(INI))

Rapporteur: Marek Józef Gróbarczyk
SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Industry, Research and Energy calls on the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Stresses that the responsibility for forestry rests solely with the Member States, that the principle of subsidiarity must be upheld, that the differences in regional conditions, ownership models and priorities across the Member States must be respected, and that the EU should refrain from imposing any new market restrictions for forests and wood-based products in order to ensure the ownership principles and market freedom for the participants in the forest value chain;

2. Welcomes the adoption of the new Commission Communication on a new EU Forest Strategy (COM(2013)0659), as it provides a framework for coordinated action from Member States in promoting sustainable management of forests and in fulfilling their multifunctional role from an economic, social and environmental point of view;

3. Considers, given that forests are different in nature and size, that the strategy should take into account that forests cover more than half of the territory of some Member States;

4. Stresses, given that some of the Union’s largest biomass resources are found in its most sparsely populated and remote regions, that it is imperative that the strategy also takes full account of the specificities of these more sparsely populated regions;

5. Acknowledges that the EU has a role to play in supporting national policies to achieve active, multifunctional and sustainable forest management, including the management of different forest types, and in strengthening cooperation in the face of increased cross-border threats such as forest fires, illegal logging, illegal timber import and pests; stresses the need to ensure coherence on forest-related issues across EU policies, in particular those relating to agriculture, climate, biodiversity, renewable energy, water, soil, industry and competitiveness, research and innovation, and resource efficiency; in this respect, stresses the importance of Natura 2000 sites where, thanks to their extraordinary natural resources, products and services of high environmental and cultural quality can be produced on a continuous basis;

6. Considers that the implementation of the new forestry strategy should compensate for the absence of specific provisions on forest policy in the EU Treaty, while respecting Member States’ competences in this field, and should ensure coordinated positions between EU and Member State policies on the issues related to the forestry sector at international level;

7. Stresses the important role of the Commission in ensuring early and continuous dialogue between EU and Member State experts, as well as the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders, in order to facilitate coherence in policy formulation with regard to forests;

8. Supports Member States’ commitment to implementing sustainable forest management in line with the Forest Europe criteria and indicators as one of the key elements of the current policy framework for forests in Europe;
9. Welcomes the prioritisation of the three pillars of sustainability (economic, social and environmental) as a strong basis from which to support the fundamental role of forests and resource efficiency, increase competitiveness, boost employment and strengthen the role of forestry and forest-based industries and the preservation of ecological cycles in the green economy; recognises its role in society in relation to the health of citizens;

10. Recalls that, according to the Commission, in 2009 the bioeconomy represented a market estimated to be worth over EUR 2 trillion, providing 20 million jobs and accounting for 9 % of total employment in the EU; notes that every euro invested in bioeconomy research and innovation under Horizon 2020 will generate about EUR 10 in added value; stresses that forests play a crucial role in the bioeconomy now and will continue to do so in the future;

11. Considers that the objective included in the EU Forest Strategy of enhancing the contribution of forests and the forest sector to rural development, biodiversity, sustainable growth and job creation must take full account of the economic, social, cultural and environmental goods and services provided by forests, including recreation and tourism services, and in particular the important role that well-managed forests and wood-based material play in reducing CO₂ emissions, storing carbon and moving towards a bioeconomy, which are important elements of EU climate policy;

12. Recalls that forest biomass is a very important source of renewable energy and notes that European forests currently absorb and store around 10 % of EU carbon emissions and thus contribute markedly to climate change mitigation;

13. Considers that the substitution of oil-based or heat-intensive raw materials by timber and harvested wood products should be encouraged, in line with progress in research and technology, which can positively contribute to further gains in terms of climate change mitigation as well as job creation;

14. Stresses the need to carry out a cost assessment of all EU legislation affecting the value chains of forest-based industries, with a view to cutting out all unnecessary and burdensome bureaucracy and creating an enabling framework to increase industry’s long-term competitiveness in a sustainable manner, and equally to support the principle that legislative proposals affecting the forestry sector and the value chains of forest-based industries should be thoroughly assessed by an impact assessment;

15. Considers that the EU Forest Strategy will be better implemented if supported by appropriate coordination with available or future EU funding, including the EAFRD;

16. Observes the availability of information and monitoring resources via the Copernicus programme and other space initiatives at European level, and recommends increasing the use of these resources and tools;

17. Is of the opinion that promotion of more diverse uses of wood should go hand in hand with investment in education systems for young people, and training for existing employees in the construction industry in order to increase their awareness of the opportunities created by the use of wood as well as to provide them with necessary skills;
18. Welcomes the setting up of a Forest Information System for Europe to support the sharing of data, best practices and existing knowledge on forests between the Member States; recognises that collecting data and information on the multifunctional role of forests and forest resources from the national databases will be of benefit to the sector and calls on the Commission to support its integration into a European data platform; welcomes the benefits of sharing best practices and existing knowledge on forests between the Member States, but stresses that such activity should not result in increased demand on budgetary resources;

19. Stresses that the long-term competitiveness of the forest sector will be achieved only with a skilled workforce; notes that the sector currently employs over 3 million European citizens; considers that the EU Forest Strategy should then set the conditions to enable the EU to have relevant training facilities and a workforce which is fully aware of the current challenges and threats of the forest sector, but also of the safety rules inherent in forest management;

20. Stresses the support that the EU framework programmes for research, development and innovation can provide in achieving smart and sustainable growth, higher added-value products, cleaner technology and a high degree of technology, in particular in refined biofuels and industrial building in wood, but also the automotive and textile industries, while not forgetting those traditional high-value usages that still have huge growth potential, such as using wood in construction and packaging.
RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

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<th>24.2.2015</th>
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| Result of final vote | +: 56  
|                      | -: 4   
|                      | 0: 0   |
| Substitutes present for the final vote | Cornelia Ernst, Françoise Grossetête, Benedek Jávor, Constanze Krehl, Vladimir Maňka, Marian-Jean Marinescu, Morten Messerschmidt, Clare Moody, Paul Tang, Pavel Telička |
| Substitutes under Rule 200(2) present for the final vote | Rosa D’Amato |