



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

2010/2106(INI)

8.12.2010

OPINION

of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

for the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

on the Commission Green Paper on forest protection and information in the EU: preparing forests for climate change
(2010/2106(INI))

Rapporteur (*): Rareș-Lucian Niculescu

(*): Associated committee – Rule 50 of the Rules of Procedure

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development calls on the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Welcomes the Commission's Green Paper on forest protection and information in the EU: preparing forests for climate change; underlines the close link between forestry and agriculture, both profoundly affected by this phenomenon; considers that the EU's strategy on forests should be strengthened, the objective being to improve the management and conservation of forests, that this strategy should be directed towards both forest protection and the sustainable use of timber resources, as forests are providers of solutions to climate change and the new challenges, and that the aim of such a strategy should be to attain a high level of resilience;
2. Points out that, in accordance with the subsidiarity principle, forest strategy should continue to be primarily a matter for the Member States, with additional support from the European Union; points to the need to take measures at an appropriate local, regional, Member State or EU level; stresses that such a strategy framework would enhance the coordination of national and Community measures and boost the image of the European Union in international negotiations on combating climate change;
3. Considers that the European Union should take action to support, coordinate and supplement forestry policy initiatives by the Member States, taking into account differing regional conditions, the objective being to achieve the sustainable development of forests, while helping to enhance quality of life for European citizens and to foster the development of rural areas by a coherent framework for all the economic, social, cultural and environmental goods and services provided by forests;
4. Observes that climate change will have different consequences for different European forest types, which means that adaptation and mitigation strategies must be decided on at regional or local level but, where Community action possesses clear added value, the action could be coordinated at EU level; considers that these strategies should pay attention to the different regional conditions for forestry and, especially, take different opportunities for and threats to forest environments in Northern and Southern Europe into consideration;
5. Notes that European forests account for 45% of the surface area of the European Union, that forests also account, together with the primary forest-based industries, for approximately 2.5 million jobs and a €300 billion turnover, that forests not only are essential to the environment, but also contribute to the achievement of social and economic objectives, for example by providing timber, improving the general living environment and protecting crops and rural areas which are developing, and that forests are a major source of funding not only for rural communities but also for national economies, revenue being generated by sustainable timber harvesting and activities relating to forestry, hunting, fishing, tourism and berry picking, and notes the important contribution of forests in preventing fires, as well as drought, desertification and soil erosion;

6. Points out that forestry is closely related to agriculture, given that most forest owners in Europe are also farmers; recognises, however, that forestry is an independent sector of the rural economy, especially in areas that are beyond the reach of agriculture or are particularly valuable for nature conservation and leisure activities;
7. Stresses that, since forest legislation affects millions of small forest owners, forest policies should always balance respect for the owners' property rights with the requirement to deliver public goods;
8. Considers that agriculture and forestry can be made to function as an integrated whole, that, while the aspects relating to production are essential, they are not inconsistent with the protection of forests or the other benefits deriving from them, and that it is necessary to strike the correct balance between the two sectors and ensure interaction between them, for example through the more efficient allocation of available funding; points out that forestry protection serves multiple policy objectives; notes that most of the European measures related to forestry are currently financed within the second pillar of the CAP and that therefore EU funding for agriculture must be continued on at least the same level, while a search for other instruments in this area is also necessary;
9. Points out that forests represent the main carbon sink and therefore play a crucial role in the fight against climate change; therefore considers it vitally important for the European Union to launch a common strategy to combat factors that cause forest deterioration, such as fires and air pollution;
10. Notes that agriculture and forest ecosystems are vulnerable to climate change, the manifestations of which have been increasing in number, frequency, gravity and intensity, as forest damage arising from causes such as forest fires and pests and massive and uncontrolled deforestation has been taking place in numerous regions of the world; notes, however, that according to the study 'State of Europe's Forests 2007', the area in Europe covered by forests has increased by approximately 13 million hectares over the course of the last 15 years; points out that forests play an important role in terms of watercourse regulation, water quality standards, the protection of springs, landscape preservation, maintaining soil fertility and protecting soil from erosion (especially in mountain regions) and desertification (especially in arid regions), all of which are of relevance to agriculture;
11. Points out that species diversity is vital for the maintenance and development of agriculture and that forests play a major role in meeting the challenge of safeguarding biodiversity; stresses that the biodiversity guaranteed by forest ecosystems and the ecological functions these perform are seen as part of mankind's heritage;
12. Stresses that the 1998 EU Forestry Strategy and the 2006 Forest Action Plan should be updated to include the climate change dimension and wider forest protection issues;
13. Considers that active forest management is important for its contribution to the EU2020 Strategy and its key element of creating growth and jobs, as well as the EU's energy strategy and that the great potential of forests as a renewable source of energy and provider of naturally renewable materials is currently being underexploited; accordingly welcomes the Commission's public consultation initiative regarding the role of agriculture and forestry in achieving climate-change objectives;

14. Calls on the Commission to propose ways of optimising the reduction of carbon emissions by means of substitution of products and construction materials whose production involves massive carbon emissions and optimising carbon sequestration by means of increased use of wood; considers that the inclusion of forests in the Community's EU ETS maximises the contribution made by the forestry sector to combating climate change, by giving forestry access to the 'carbon credit' market mechanisms;
15. Points out the need for the Commission to swiftly deal with the discrepancies between the objectives of legislation affecting forests and agriculture policy; calls for cohesion between different EU policies, especially on forestry and agriculture but also between policies on renewable energy, biodiversity, industry, research and the Europe 2020 Strategy;
16. Recalls that farmers are helping to increase forest resources by planting trees, using stratified agro-forestry systems or foresting poor-quality soil or soil unsuitable for efficient methods of farming, as well as contributing to the provision of certain protection systems and the identification of hardy species; considers that the EU should continue to provide aid for forestation under the national rural development programmes, while making sure that these initiatives do not interfere with the market;
17. Considers that forest owners should pay particular attention to the wildlife species that naturally colonise the special habitats formed by forests, as these help preserve biodiversity;
18. Considers that, given the need for effective research into the 'defence potential' of forest ecosystems, for prognostic research and for research into strategies for mitigating the effects of climate change for the entire forestry and timber sector, coordination and funding at EU level is required;
19. Considers that forests generate priceless public goods, for which the market reward has hitherto been insufficient and that the European Union should provide assistance, information and incentives to forest owners from funding instruments as a reward for their efforts to implement measures to protect the genetic diversity of forests; reaffirms its view regarding the need for adequate levels of funding for EU forestry measures, rewarding farmers and foresters for providing these public goods, including the consideration of the storage and substitution effects in the context of the use of wood; emphasises that these European incentive mechanisms should not interfere with the properly functioning market for timber products, paper, pulp and energy production;
20. Considers that the EU can support, coordinate and supplement actions taken by the Member States in order to identify best practice guidelines, so as to help ensure that forests are able to withstand the effects of climate change, and that such guidelines should be adapted to the needs of owners and local communities and based on the principles of sustainable management; stresses that excessive regulation will make timber products less competitive compared to non-renewable and energy-intensive materials, such as plastics, aluminium and concrete, and will thus make it more difficult for the EU to reach the climate targets;
21. Considers it necessary to improve and encourage associations of forest owners to practise

sustainable forest management, as this is the key tool for balancing the supply of the many goods and services that forests can provide, whilst acting as the basis for adapting to climate change, and that these associations should also boost the currently unused timber potential and strengthen forest owners' bargaining power in the timber commercial chain; considers it necessary to encourage the creation of a network of forest owner organisations in Europe in order to promote the exchange of information and best practice and to concentrate supply;

22. Considers that the EU should support sustainable forest management through funding for forestry activities of benefit to it, and that encouragement should be given to the setting-up of forest management bodies, particularly in areas characterised by small forests, and that special attention should be given in this respect to forestry undertakings, most of which are small or medium-sized and which must be encouraged to modernise and restructure in order to meet the new challenges arising from climate change, combating illegal logging, the economic crisis and international competition;
23. Highlights, likewise, the crucial role played by farmers in preventing fires; therefore considers it necessary to ensure that farming remains a viable activity in order to curb the cessation of production and depopulation of rural areas, given that this would considerably aggravate the situation with regard to fires;
24. Points out that persistent droughts, as consequences of climate change, have been responsible in recent years for the proliferation of forest fires in certain Member States; recalls its suggestions related to forest fires already expressed in its opinion on the prevention of natural and man-made disasters, especially with regard to the need for solidarity between Member States, the benefits of a European task force and a European database of economic and social disaster records, including the mapping of areas at increased risk; recalls the importance of giving priority to native-species, multi-species and mixed forests in forestation and reforestation projects; also recalls its suggestions related to a better functioning of the European Solidarity Fund and the need for greater operational capacity and coordination among the various Community instruments in the area of natural disasters;
25. Draws attention to the added difficulties faced by islands and the outermost regions in tackling fires; asks for special treatment to be provided for those regions through the various financial instruments available, including the Solidarity Fund;
26. Stresses that in order to mitigate the consequences of climate change it is necessary to introduce measures to bolster the financial stability of investment in forestry, such as insurance assistance;
27. Supports measures at EU level relating to the development of a forest monitoring system, the provision of information about forests which would help to improve forest management, and the monitoring of threats, both abiotic and biotic, on a trans-national scale.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	1.12.2010
Result of final vote	+: 32 -: 1 0: 5
Members present for the final vote	John Stuart Agnew, Richard Ashworth, Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă, Michel Dantin, Paolo De Castro, Albert Deß, Herbert Dorfmann, Lorenzo Fontana, Iratxe García Pérez, Sergio Gutiérrez Prieto, Peter Jahr, Elisabeth Jeggle, Elisabeth Köstinger, Gabriel Mato Adrover, Mairead McGuinness, James Nicholson, Rareş-Lucian Niculescu, Wojciech Michał Olejniczak, Georgios Papastamkos, Marit Paulsen, Britta Reimers, Ulrike Rodust, Alfreds Rubiks, Giancarlo Scottà, Czesław Adam Siekierski, Marc Tarabella, Janusz Wojciechowski
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Spyros Danellis, Bas Eickhout, Marian Harkin, Giovanni La Via, Véronique Mathieu, Maria do Céu Patrão Neves, Daciana Octavia Sârbu, Dimitar Stoyanov, Milan Zver
Substitute(s) under Rule 187(2) present for the final vote	Reimer Böge, Ingeborg Gräßle, Heide Rühle