



2019/2156(INI)

3.6.2020

OPINION

of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

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

on The EU's role in protecting and restoring the world's forests
(2019/2156(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion (*): Juozas Olekas

(*) Associated committee – Rule 57 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 into its motion for a resolution:

1. Stresses that, while farmers are at the heart of providing our basic agricultural and food needs, their work is dependent on natural resources such as soil, water and forests; notes that recognising the multifunctionality of forests is crucial in order to properly manage our global forest heritage; emphasises that the economic, social and environmental aspects – ranging from the traditional production of wood and other products, to ecosystem services, biodiversity and other environmental benefits such as carbon absorption and storage, which prevent soil erosion and improved air and water quality – are all linked and interdependent; stresses that such aspects require a holistic and coherent approach when it comes to protecting, restoring and managing forests and tackling the problem of deforestation;
2. Recalls that many farmers are aware of forests as an integral and necessary part of the landscape for their relevant ecological, economic and social functions, and that historically they strived to protect, use and regenerate forests, and continue to do so now; notes that certain local communities and indigenous peoples have used traditional farming techniques for centuries to preserve forests, with their special understanding of sustainable land use; emphasises that, in many parts of the world, the rights of these communities and peoples are under threat;
3. Emphasises that 30 % of the earth's surface is covered by forests and that these forests are home to 80 % of the earth's biodiversity; points out that preservation and sustainable use of forests is an active form of climate protection and is fundamental to the well-being of our society and rural areas and that tropical forests in particular have a vital role to play in the fight against climate change and must be protected accordingly; reiterates and welcomes the Commission's statement outlined in its communication of 23 July 2019 entitled 'Stepping up EU Action to Protect and Restore the World's Forests (COM(2019)0352) that old-growth and primary forests are irreplaceable; urges that this understanding should underpin policy and strategy discussions and law enforcement effectiveness in order to preserve and restore these ecosystems and their remnants in the EU and elsewhere;
4. Is deeply concerned that, despite the efforts of the EU and its Member States, the EU's commitment to halting deforestation by 2020 as part of the UN Sustainable Development Goals is unlikely to be met, and therefore strongly supports the Commission in its proposal to step up action in protecting and restoring the world's forests; highlights the fact that imports of embodied deforestation linked to crop and livestock products act as significant agricultural drivers of deforestation; underlines that, in addition to agricultural commodities, other raw materials also contribute to large-scale deforestation. and that mitigating their negative impact will require the setting aside and highest protection of large enough areas of intact forests in order to sustain the large-scale ecological processes that are crucial in order to adapt forests to climate change; emphasises, furthermore, that the existing legal provisions and implementing

rules on the environmental and social sustainability of production must be fully carried out to be effective; considers that the EU must address the level of demand for forest-risk commodities, including in agriculture, by promoting more local sourcing and supporting the use of legally and sustainably sourced feedstocks, with more focus on pasture-based grazing;

5. Stresses that the deforestation of rain forests driven by land-use change reduces the carbon sequestration potential and thereby significantly contributes to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions;
6. Points out that the four main palm oil certification schemes (RSPO14, ISCC15, MSPO16 and ISPO17) differ significantly as regards their requirements, effectiveness, uptake and transparency; highlights the fact that inconsistencies in their implementation and enforcement have been brought to light and that none of the systems cover all of the environmental and social issues addressed in the political objectives set by the EU and the UN; calls, as a matter of urgency, for certification schemes to be adjusted accordingly and for determined efforts to develop deforestation-free supply chains;
7. Recognises the importance of sound forest and agricultural management; considers, therefore, that all further actions must address issues such as preventing unsustainable land use and management practices, coping with natural disturbances and mitigating climate change, and tackling global deforestation; stresses that such issues have severe environmental and social costs, including the loss of biodiversity due to destruction and fragmentation of natural habitats (including those of endangered species), and have a negative impact on the livelihoods of local communities by disregarding their rights and interests;
8. Notes that the social and economic importance of agriculture is expanding as the world population grows and requires increased production of food and agricultural commodities while mitigating climate change; notes with concern the estimate that 14 % of the world's food is lost from harvest, slaughter and catch-up¹ and stresses the need for coherent actions to prevent food loss and food waste along the food chain and to respond rapidly to crises that could cause food shortages;
9. Draws attention to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Ministerial Katowice Declaration on Forests for the Climate adopted by the international community on 12 December 2018 , which emphasises the importance of forests and timber use for climate protection and sets those issues in the context of other international forest-related objectives and decisions; notes that, as stated in the declaration, these objectives can only be achieved by means of multifunctional active forest management, which means a management strategy that takes account of and strikes a balance between all forest-related objectives, such as carbon storage, species and soil protection, extraction of raw materials, leisure and food production;
10. Stresses the crucial role of forestry, along with farming, in the management of natural resources and land use in the EU's and the world's rural areas; recognises, in this respect, the variety in forest management, forest ownership, agroforestry and

¹ <http://www.fao.org/food-loss-and-food-waste/en/>

possibilities between the Member States;

11. Stresses the need to introduce support programmes to rehabilitate and reintegrate degraded soils that are unfit for farming into the forest or agricultural cycle;
12. Stresses the need to promote the production and use of sustainably sourced goods by encouraging zero-deforestation supply chains and prohibiting products that do not comply with EU standards or that contribute to deforestation from entering the EU market; stresses that, in order to achieve sustainably sourced goods, there is a need to introduce mandatory due diligence and legally binding sustainability criteria for forest-risk commodities, improve traceability and transparency in the supply chain and guard against phenomena that take advantage of inadequate tracing; notes, furthermore, the need to respect the commitments undertaken in the UNFCCC New York Declaration on Forests; stresses, moreover, the advantage to be gained by introducing a EU certification system to enable imports to be suspended immediately if areas of deforestation are detected by satellite imagery; notes the possibility of introducing a labelling and certification system for deforestation-free products imported into the EU and incorporating the deforestation-free aspect into EU trade deals and other multilateral agreements; notes that voluntary and other types of labelling schemes for wood and other products exist in some countries; is, however, of the opinion that a ubiquitous system would help both increase awareness and give a quantitative view of the trends globally;
13. Requests that the Commission regularly present a report covering the trends of deforestation and exploitation of high carbon stock areas, such as peatlands, in third countries;
14. Stresses the need to continue to promote the sustainable bioeconomy, the needed substitution of fossil-based materials and the consumption of sustainably sourced goods by introducing a labelling and certification system for deforestation-free products imported into the EU and incorporating the deforestation-free aspect into EU trade deals and other multilateral agreements;
15. Stresses the importance of establishing an inclusive partnership with third countries to strengthen sustainable land management and agriculture alongside good governance, particularly when it comes to land and forest tenure, as these are governmental responsibilities in combating deforestation that external stakeholders can only partly address; recalls that a partnership approach supporting better governance must respect the rights of indigenous peoples, smallholders and local communities, and enable multi-stakeholder processes in producer countries; stresses the importance of establishing sustainable, transparent agricultural value chains by means of trade agreements that do not allow access to the EU of agricultural products that do not comply with the Union's standards and values in terms of forest protection; underlines the need to include safeguard clauses in future trade agreements that allow the EU to suspend imports of related products from regions or countries where deforestation is observed; believes, furthermore, that such agreements should include binding and enforceable provisions to protect forests and guard against human rights violations, particularly regarding community tenure;

16. Takes into account global support behind protecting the world's forest ecosystems, including wildlife and their habitats, when calling for urgent action to protect forests worldwide and ensuring sustainable global supply chains;
17. Calls for all products that drive deforestation globally to be prohibited from entering the EU internal market;
18. Encourages the implementation of support measures intended to increase agricultural productivity in targeted countries in order to reduce the social and economic pressure linked to deforestation and the exploitation of peatlands;
19. Stresses that palm oil is an important driver of deforestation on an alarming scale for commercial agriculture in countries of Southeast Asia, while soya cultivation for animal nutrition contributes to deforestation in South America;
20. Underlines the need for further significant progress to be made when it comes to developing and implementing an EU protein plant strategy and ensuring robust protein plant production within the EU in order to limit the danger of deforestation linked to these crops in other regions of the world and to reduce the dependence on imports and to reduce the pressure on forests due to land use change; stresses that such progress should be made, inter alia, through the wider adoption of crop rotation accompanied by support and guidance for farmers in areas suitable for cultivation of protein plants and that such action would reduce the dependence on imports, deforestation, degradation and pressure on forests due to land-use change; calls, therefore, for the introduction of sustainability criteria for plant protein imports;
21. Encourages the Commission to ensure that a multi-stakeholder platform that fully encompasses all relevant stakeholders be integrated into a legal framework;
22. Highlights the importance of further developing and improving existing systems such as the EU Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Action Plan, voluntary partnership agreements with civil society participation, the UN Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) programme and current legislation such as the Timber Regulation², as well as the importance of promoting current voluntary systems; stresses that such systems are important in order to reduce the administrative burden on Member States, facilitate the transfer of knowledge, and increase awareness and sense of responsibility among partner countries outside the EU, and, in particular, to address the legality of timber through the robust and timely enforcement of regulations both in the EU and elsewhere;
23. Takes the view that the drivers of deforestation should be addressed in an EU policy framework, thereby ensuring the coherence of forest-related policies and reducing the pressure on forests; takes the view that such a policy framework would encourage ever more innovative, sustainable and efficient farming within and outside the EU, and would reduce food losses throughout the food chain through new technologies; points out that targets outlined in the framework can be met by giving farmers easy access to funding so that they can acquire cutting-edge high-precision farming technologies; considers that the high demand for food should be addressed through technical

² OJ L 295 12.11.2010, p. 2.

assistance, cooperation among agricultural organisations and knowledge transfer;

24. Emphasises that the reshaping of forestry must lead to the use of integrated forest management practices worldwide, as only in this way the potential offered by multifunctional forestry can be exploited to the full; notes that integrated forest management is based on the sustainable production of timber as a natural raw material and the exploitation of the sustainable potential of all forms of timber;
25. Emphasises the importance of sustainable forest management, including training, within the EU and in third countries, as an essential factor in ensuring the income of forest owners, people who live or work in forests and farmers practicing agroforestry, enhancing biodiversity and carbon sequestration within forests and improving their resilience; highlights in this regard the importance of supporting forest owners and, in particular, of taking into account the conditions for small-forest owners;
26. Highlights the role of agroforestry systems, including extensive wood pastures, in biodiversity conservation, mitigation and adaptation to climate change as a practice with high carbon sequestration potential; highlights that in dry periods this potentially represents an important source of feed for animals and for the diversification of production, including for the purposes of bioeconomy; stresses that field studies show that agroforestry uses land more efficiently than monocropping practices and, therefore, has the potential to decrease pressure on other ecosystems, including forests; calls for a change of the rules in order to facilitate the regeneration and restoration of existing agroforestry systems, and calls for the establishment of new ones;
27. Emphasises that reducing consumption pressure is central to the protection of forests; emphasises, in that connection, that the cascading use of timber as a raw material should be encouraged; points out that timber only provides ecological services in long-lived products, such as furniture or buildings;
28. Stresses that trade agreements with countries outside the EU should contain provisions on sustainable forest management and responsible entrepreneurship, as well as commitments on the effective implementation of the Paris Agreement;
29. Is highly concerned about reports of illegal logging, and other associated criminal activity directed at foresters and forest rangers, in third countries and in the EU; calls on the Commission and the Member States to continue to act decisively to prevent and fight illegal logging, especially in Europe's last old-growth forests, and to enforce relevant existing EU legislation and thus applying proportionate, dissuasive and effective sanctions in cases of breaches of EU law;
30. Underlines the need to raise public awareness of the social and economic impacts of illegal logging and forest-related crimes;
31. Stresses that the European Environment Agency's report entitled 'The European Environment – State and Outlook 2020' found that only one third of the forest habitats listed under the Habitats Directive³ are in favourable conservation status, and that there has been little improvement in the conservation status of forest habitats and species

³ OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7.

since 2013, despite the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy; highlights that sufficient resources are needed to manage these sites and ensure enforcement of the Habitats Directive.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	26.5.2020
Result of final vote	+: 31 -: 13 0: 4
Members present for the final vote	Mazaly Aguilar, Clara Aguilera, Atidzhe Alieva-Veli, Álvaro Amaro, Eric Andrieu, Attila Ara-Kovács, Carmen Avram, Adrian-Dragoş Benea, Mara Bizzotto, Daniel Buda, Isabel Carvalhais, Asger Christensen, Angelo Ciocca, Ivan David, Paolo De Castro, Jérémy Decerle, Salvatore De Meo, Herbert Dorfmann, Luke Ming Flanagan, Dino Giarrusso, Francisco Guerreiro, Martin Häusling, Martin Hlaváček, Krzysztof Jurgiel, Jarosław Kalinowski, Elsi Katainen, Gilles Lebreton, Norbert Lins, Marlene Mortler, Ulrike Müller, Juozas Olekas, Pina Picierno, Maxette Pirbakas, Bronis Ropė, Bert-Jan Ruissen, Anne Sander, Petri Sarvamaa, Simone Schmiedtbauer, Annie Schreijer-Pierik, Veronika Vrecionová, Sarah Wiener, Juan Ignacio Zoido Álvarez
Substitutes present for the final vote	Manuel Bompard, Anja Hazekamp, Pär Holmgren, Peter Jahr, Zbigniew Kuźmiuk, Christine Schneider, Sylwia Spurek, Marc Tarabella, Hilde Vautmans

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

31	+
ECR	Mazaly Aguilar, Krzysztof Jurgiel, Veronika Vrecionová
ID	Gilles Lebreton, Maxette Pirbakas,
GUE/NGL	Manuel Bompard, Luke Ming Flanagan, Anja Hazekamp
NI	Dino Giarrusso
RENEW	Atidzhe Alieva-Veli, Asger Christensen, Jérémy Decerle, Martin Hlavacek, Elsi Katainen, Ulrike Müller, Hilde Vautmans
S&D	Clara Aguilera, Eric Andrieu, Attila Ara-Kovács, Carmen Avram, Adrian-Dragoş Benea, Isabel Carvalhais, Paolo De Castro, Juozas Olekas, Pina Picierno, Marc Tarabella
VERTS/ALE	Francisco Guerreiro, Martin Häusling, Pär Holmgren, Bronis Ropè, Sarah Wiener

13	-
ID	Ivan David
PPE	Álvaro Amaro, Daniel Buda, Salvatore De Meo, Herbert Dorfmann, Jaroslaw Kalinowski, Norbert Lins, Marlene Mortler, Petri Sarvamaa, Simone Schmiedtbauer, Christine Schneider, Annie Schrijer-Pierik, Juan Ignacio Zoido Álvarez

4	0
ECR	Bert-Jan Ruissen
ID	Mara Bizzotto, Angelo Ciocca
PPE	Anne Sander

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention