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DRAFT REPORT

on the European Forest Strategy - the way forward
(2019/2157(INI))

Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

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The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 11 December 2019 on the European Green Deal (COM(2019)0640), and the Political Guidelines of Ursula von der Leyen of 10 September 2019,
- having regard to the Commission report to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 7 December 2018 entitled ‘Progress in the implementation of the EU forest strategy – “A new EU Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest-based sector”’ (COM(2018)0811),
- having regard to its resolution of 28 April 2015 on a new EU Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest-based sector¹,
- having regard to Commission communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 23 July 2019 entitled ‘Stepping up EU Action to Protect and Restore the World’s Forests’ (COM(2019)0352),
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 15 April 2019 on the progress on the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy and on a new strategic framework for forests (08609/2019),
- having regard to the European Economic and Social Committee opinion of 30 October 2019 on the report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 7 December 2018 entitled ‘Progress in the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy “A new EU Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest sector”’,
- having regard to Committee of the Regions opinion of 10 and 11 April 2019 on the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy,
- having regard to the updated EU Bioeconomy Strategy,
- having regard to the 2050 Climate Strategy,
- having regard to the conclusions of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council of 17 and 18 December 2018 on the updated EU Bioeconomy Strategy,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 28 November 2018 entitled ‘A Clean Planet for All: a European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern,

¹ OJ C 346, 21.9.2016, p. 17.

competitive' (COM(2018)0773),

- having regard to Committee of the Regions opinion of 16 May 2018 on the mid-term review of the EU Forest Strategy²,
 - having regard to the Europe 2020 strategy, including the Innovation Union and Resource-Efficient Europe initiatives,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the opinions of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (A9-0000/2020),
- A. whereas the EU's internal and international commitments to, for example, the European Green Deal, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement and the creation of a zero-emission society, will be impossible to achieve without the climate benefits and other ecosystem services provided by forests and the forest-based sector;
- B. whereas the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union makes no reference to a common EU forest policy, and responsibility for forests lies with the Member States, but whereas the EU has a long history of contributing, through its policies, to sustainable forest management (SFM) and the Member States' decisions on forests;
- C. whereas forests and the entire forest-based value chain are fundamental to the further development of the circular bioeconomy as they provide jobs, ensure economic welfare in rural and urban areas, deliver climate change mitigation and adaptation services, offer health-related benefits, and protect the biodiversity and prospects of mountainous and rural areas;

The past – revisiting recent implementation successes and challenges

1. Welcomes the publication of the Commission report entitled 'Progress in the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy – "A new EU Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest sector"' (COM(2018)0811);
2. Recognises that the eight plus one priority areas of the strategy have been implemented with relatively few impediments, with the exception of ongoing challenges in the areas of 'What forests do we have and how are they changing?' and 'Fostering coordination and communication?';
3. Highlights the fact that a definition of SFM was agreed as part of the pan-European FOREST EUROPE process; notes that the definition has been incorporated into national legislation and voluntary systems, such as forest certifications, in place in the Member States;

² OJ C 361, 5.10.2018, p. 5.

4. Stresses that the promotion of SFM in the EU, as part of the EU Forest Strategy and the rural development measures implemented under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), has had a positive impact on the biodiversity of forests in the EU and has enhanced the climate benefits offered by the forest-based sector; notes, however, that there is still a need to strengthen SFM in a balanced manner in order to ensure that forests are better able to adapt to changing climate conditions and to reduce the risks and impacts of natural disturbances;

The present – state of play of the EU's forests

5. Emphasises that the EU's forests are multifunctional and characterised by great diversity, including differences in ownership patterns, size, structure, biodiversity, resilience and challenges; points out, in addition, that forests offer society a wide variety of ecosystem services including raw materials, improved air quality, clean water, erosion control, and protection from droughts, floods and avalanches;
6. Notes that forests and other wooded areas cover at least 43 % of the surface of the EU and that the sector employs at least 500 000 people directly³ and 2.6 million indirectly in the EU⁴;
7. Recognises that long-term investments in SFM ensure that forests remain not only economically viable, but also contribute to achieving the many goals of the EU, including the successful implementation of the European Green Deal and the transition to a circular bioeconomy;
8. Acknowledges the crucial climate benefits of forests and the forest-based sector; highlights the need to increase CO₂ sequestration in forests, carbon storage in wood-based products and the substitution of fossil-based materials and energy;
9. Regrets the fact that although forests in the EU are managed according to the commonly agreed principle of SFM and forest cover in the EU has been increasing over the past decades, a different approach to SFM has been developed in the context of the recently agreed regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investment and amending Regulation 2019/2088 on sustainability-related disclosures in the financial services sector;

The future – the crucial role played by the post-2020 EU Forest Strategy and the European Green Deal in meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement

10. Welcomes the recent publication of the Commission's European Green Deal and looks forward to the upcoming post-2020 EU Forest Strategy;
11. Welcomes the Commission's 2020 Work Programme and especially the acknowledgment of the new EU Forest Strategy's contribution to the 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP26) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change; stresses, in this regard, that in future, forests should not be considered as the only type of CO₂ sink as that would give other sectors less of an incentive to minimise

³ Eurostat database on forestry, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/forestry/data/database>

⁴ European Parliament fact sheet of May 2019 on the European Union and forests.

their emissions; highlights, in addition, the importance of transitioning from a fossil-based society;

12. Emphasises the crucial role of forests, the forest-based sector and the bioeconomy in achieving the goals of the European Green Deal; stresses that achieving the EU's environmental and climate goals will never be possible without multifunctional, healthy and sustainably managed forests and viable industries; encourages, in addition, actions to increase forest cover;
13. Stresses that an ambitious, independent and self-standing EU Forest Strategy is needed for the post-2020 period which is not subordinate to any other sectoral strategy; calls for a new EU Forest Strategy that builds on the holistic approach to SFM, taking into account all of the economic, social and environmental aspects of the forest-based value chain; stresses that a coordinated and coherent approach to forests, the forest-based sector and the multiple services they provide needs to be developed, given the growing number of national and EU policies directly or indirectly affecting forests and their management in the EU;
14. Takes the view that the EU Forest Strategy should act as a bridge between national forest policies and EU objectives relating to forests, recognising both the need to respect national competence and the need to contribute to wider EU objectives;
15. Stresses the importance of evidence-based decision-making with regard to EU policies relating to forests, the forest-based sector and its value-chain; calls for all forest-related aspects of European Green Deal measures to be consistent with the post-2020 EU Forest Strategy, particularly with a view to ensuring that SFM has a positive impact on society;
16. Highlights the need to take into consideration the links between the forest-based sector and other sectors as well as the importance of digitalisation and investing in research and innovation; stresses the crucial role of wood-based materials in substituting fossil-based alternatives in industries such as the construction industry, the textile industry, the chemical industry and the packaging industry;
17. Stresses that due to climate change, natural disturbances such as droughts, floods, storms, pest infestations, erosion and fires will occur more frequently, causing damage to forests in the EU; emphasises, in this context, the need to better prevent such events by making forests more resilient, for example through research and innovation and by offering better support mechanisms for affected areas and properties so they can be restored;
18. Recognises the role of biodiversity in ensuring that forest ecosystems remain healthy and resilient; highlights the importance of the Natura 2000 sites; notes, however, that sufficient financial resources are needed to manage such areas;
19. Calls on the Commission to support the negotiations conducted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and supported by the Food and Agriculture Organisation, with a view to reaching a legally binding pan-European agreement on forests;
20. Encourages the completion of the ongoing process to develop a non-end-use-driven

sustainability approach with the close involvement of the Standing Forestry Committee and the Member States, building on the two-step approach of the recast Renewable Energy Directive; believes that the two-step approach could be used in other policies aiming to improve the sustainability of forestry;

21. Stresses the crucial importance of the CAP and forestry measures in implementing the EU Forest Strategy; encourages the continuity of forestry measures under the 2021-2027 CAP; highlights the need for other easily accessible, well-coordinated and relevant EU funding mechanisms;
22. Underlines the essential role of high-level research and innovation in fostering the contribution of forests and the forest-based sector to overcoming the challenges of our time; stresses the importance of the EU's post-2020 research and innovation programmes and recognises the role of the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research;
23. Highlights the fact that global deforestation and forest degradation are serious problems; points out that policy initiatives should be developed to tackle issues outside the EU, with a focus on the tropics and the drivers of unsustainable practices in forests from outside the sector; stresses the need to foster the implementation of the EU Timber Regulation and the FLEGT (Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade) action plan in order to prevent the entry of illegally sourced wood into the EU market;
24. Stresses the need to develop an EU-wide Forest Information System for Europe under the shared responsibility of all of the relevant Commission Directorates-General; stresses the importance of science-based, balanced information with socio-economic indicators for the development of any forest-related EU policy;
25. Calls on the Commission's Standing Forestry Committee to give the Member States a central role in the preparation and implementation of the post-2020 EU Forest Strategy; stresses the importance of the parallel involvement of relevant stakeholders in the Civil Dialogue Group on Forestry and Cork; urges the Commission to involve Parliament in the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy on an annual basis;
26. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Forests, forestry and the whole forest-based sector play an important role in providing sustainable solutions to many challenges of our time. Forests and other wooded land cover at least 43% of the surface of the EU, and the forest sector employs at least 500 000 European citizens directly and 2,6 million indirectly. In addition, 60% of the EU-forests are privately owned. Furthermore, European forests are extremely diverse in terms of size, structure, biodiversity and management approaches.

The global policy environment has changed enormously since the previous EU Forest Strategy in 2013, and this change greatly influences different EU policies. EU's internal and international commitments, such as the zero-emission society, the European Green Deal, the UN SDGs, the Kyoto Protocol, Paris Agreement and others will be impossible to achieve without climate benefits of forests and the forest-based sector and other ecosystem services provided by forests.

In addition, we need to remember that forest policy remains mainly at Member States' competence. The TFEU makes no reference to specific provisions for an EU forest policy, and the EU has a long history of contributing through its policies to implementing sustainable forest management and to Member States' decisions on forests. The growing number of national and EU policies affect directly or indirectly forests and their management in the EU. This creates a complex and fragmented EU policy environment for forests and their management, which needs to be more coherent and better coordinated, benefitting all pillars of sustainability.

Therefore, we need a strong, holistic and independent EU Forest Strategy post-2020. It should mainstream a holistic approach on sustainable forest management (SFM), which builds on the economic, social and environmental sustainability in a balanced way and ensures the continuity of the multifunctional role of forests. The EU Forest Strategy should be an integral and independent part of the upcoming European Green Deal, and not subordinate to any other sectoral strategy.

The new EU Forest Strategy should include instruments that foster its role as an efficient policy coordination tool for different forest-related EU policies and their implementation in a way that takes into consideration the entire forest-based value chain. It should create coherence and synergies with other sectors that influence the sector. The EU Forest Strategy should also be a bridge between the EU sectoral and Member States' national forest policies, and it should ensure that the forest-based sector's expertise is involved from the early stages of policy formulation, which would result in coherent and consistent forest-related policies. In addition, the EU should actively influence the global policy environment, by taking actions to halt global deforestation and encouraging not only reforestation and afforestation but also sustainable management of forest resources.

Furthermore, forests, the forest-based sector and the bioeconomy have a crucial role in meeting the goals of the European Green Deal and therefore EU's climate, energy and environmental objectives. Meeting these goals will never be possible without multifunctional, healthy forests and sustainable forest management with viable industries. It is important to prevent the rural exodus and attract industries to invest in Europe and build business ecosystems that sustainably use available local resources and offer jobs to local people. In this respect, the EU Forest Strategy should play a key role in ensuring also availability of raw

materials to the industries.

Decreasing the dependency of fossil-based raw materials and energy would lead to increased opportunities especially in the rural areas. Forests should not only be considered as CO₂ sinks and thereby reducing other sectors' contribution in minimising their emissions. The importance of moving away from fossil-based society should be highlighted.

Climate change mitigation has to be addressed as one important service that forests and the forest sector have to offer. In addition, adapting to climate change has become increasingly important in order to ensure appropriate prevention measures of natural disturbances. The bark beetle epidemics, drought and forest fires have to be tackled and prevented.

The environmental, economic and social aspects of forests and forest management have to be fostered in a balanced manner while strengthening the crucial overall climate benefits stemming from forests and the forest-based value chain, namely fostered CO₂ sequestration, carbon storage in wood-based products and substitution of fossil-based raw materials and energy. The research efforts need to be strengthened as regards the latter.

Forests and the forest-based sector significantly contribute to the development of local, circular bioeconomies in the EU. In 2010, 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. The uptake of the circular bioeconomy must be promoted via strong research and innovation policies. Every euro invested in bioeconomy research and innovation under Horizon 2020 will generate about EUR 10 in added value.

The importance of resilient and healthy forest ecosystems including fauna and flora should be underlined, in order to maintain and enhance delivery of multiple ecosystem services forests provide such as biodiversity, clean air, water, healthy soils, wood and non-wood raw-materials.

In addition, the Natura 2000 sites provide the society with multiple ecosystem services, including raw materials. However, the management of these areas require sufficient financial resources.

Furthermore, afforestation and reforestation are suitable tools in enhancing forest cover in the EU, especially in abandoned lands, close to urban and peri-urban areas as well as in mountainous areas. We have to highlight the importance of protective functions of forests as well as active and sustainable forest management in these areas to enhance health and resilience of the ecosystems, and to adapt the species composition to regional and climatic conditions.

The crucial importance of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), financing forestry measures and the research framework programmes for the livelihoods and development of bioeconomy in rural areas has to be pointed out. Farmers and forest owners are key actors in rural areas. In addition, the role of forestry, agro-forestry and forest-based industries in the Rural Development Programme of the 2014-2020 CAP has been extremely important. We must encourage its recognition in the CAP 2021-2027 and in the implementation of the European Green Deal as well.

Properly funded high-quality research, innovation, collection of information, maintenance and

development of databases, best practices and knowledge sharing are of utmost importance for the future of EU's multifunctional forests and for the entire forest-based value-chain, in light of the increasing demands being placed upon them and the needs to meet the multiple opportunities and challenges the society is facing.

Forests provide e.g. recreational values and forest-related activities such as harvesting of non-wood forest products e.g. mushrooms and soft fruits. We should point out the opportunities in enhancing biomass removals as forest fire prevention and biodiversity enhancement via grazing but also note that wildlife grazing might have a negative impact on survival of seedlings.

The European society is becoming increasingly disconnected from forests and forestry, and therefore the importance of sustainable forest management should be promoted. Taking into account the SFM's vital role in delivering the multiple benefits forests provide to society, there is a strong need to inform public on the economic, social, and environmental, as well as cultural and historical role of forests and their management as part of our natural heritage.

The Commission should give the Member States a central role through Commission's Standing Forestry Committee when preparing and implementing the post-2020 EU Forest Strategy, and involve in parallel the relevant stakeholders through Civil Dialogue Group on Forestry and Cork. The Commission should also involve the Parliament annually in the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy.

To conclude, we need an ambitious and strong EU Forest Strategy post-2020 to secure a coordinated and holistic approach to forests, forest-based sector and multiple services they provide. Forests and the forest-based sector have potential to provide an increasing contribution to the climate, environment, people and bio-based circular economy with their front running digital solutions and sustainable technologies. We need long-term investments in sustainable forest management in order to make sure that forests remain not only economically viable but also make a significant contribution towards achieving the many goals of the EU, including the European Green Deal and transition to circular bioeconomy. Attracting forest-based investments in Europe and facilitation of the inter-linkages with other sectors have to be taken into consideration in the EU Forest Strategy. Furthermore, the crucial role and potential of wood-based materials in sectors such as e.g. construction, textiles, chemicals and packaging in substituting fossil-based alternatives has to be pointed out. In addition, we need evidence-based decision-making as it comes to EU-policies related to forests.