

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3641/03
by Antonios Trakatellis (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: Definition of 'forest': divergence between the definition in a Greek bill and in the Forest Focus regulation

The Regulation concerning monitoring of forests and environmental interactions in the Community (Forest Focus)¹ provides that 'forest' means land with tree crown cover (or equivalent stocking level) of more than 10% and area of more than 0,5 ha. (Article 3.a). The Greek government recently tabled a bill in the Greek parliament on the protection of forest ecosystems, the establishment of a forest register, the regulation of property titles over forestry and woodlands in general and other provisions. In total contradiction with the Community definition this bill seeks for reasons of political expediency to define 'forest' in such a way as to declassify woodlands and to allow development there. Specifically, this bill - a copy of which I have sent to the Commission - defines 'forest' as an area of at least 0.3 ha. with tree crown cover of at least 25% of the area.

In view of the above, will the Commission say:

1. Given that each Member State is obliged to comply with the requirements of existing legislation and that the Forest Focus Regulation forms part of Community legalisation, what measures does the Commission, as guardian of the Treaties, intend to take to ensure compliance with its provisions and in particular the definition of 'forest'?
2. Is the definition of 'forest' proposed by the Greek government more restrictive than the Community's definition and does it exclude land covered by the Community definition?
3. Does the proposed definition of 'forest' diverge from the Community definition? In which Member States is 'forest' defined more restrictively than under the Community definition and in which others is it defined more broadly in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity (please provide a table with existing definitions)?
4. How does the Commission intend to avert fragmentation and the exclusion of land and changes in the classification of dwellings which are at present protected by the Community in accordance with Directive 92/43/EEC² (Natura 2000), and what measures does it intend to take to maintain and preserve existing forests, protect biodiversity and ensure the sustainable management of forests?

¹ COD 2002/0164 C5-0292/2003, Regulation not yet published in the OJ

² OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p.7