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<Commission>{PETI}Committee on Petitions</Commission>

<Date>{31/08/2020}31.8.2020</Date>

<TitreType>NOTICE TO MEMBERS</TitreType>

Subject: <TITRE>Petition No 0844/2019 by P.O.S. (Spanish), on behalf of the ‘Vida Silvestre’ wildlife association on fire prevention in the EU</TITRE>

1. Summary of petition

The petitioner calls for investment in the prevention of forest fires and the propagation thereof, arguing that they can be attributed to the condition of forests, the rural exodus and abandonment of grazing. Woodland in the south of Europe is particularly vulnerable because of climate change. He is accordingly seeking the formulation of a European forest management and protection policy, accompanied by an EU-funded comprehensive European fire prevention strategy and the reforestation and restoration of woodland areas devastated by fires.

2. Admissibility

Declared admissible on 10 January 2020. Information requested from Commission under Rule 227(6).

3. Commission reply, received on 31 August 2020

As the Treaties make no specific reference to forests, the European Union does not have a common forestry policy. Forestry policy therefore remains primarily a national competence. The EU Forest Strategy[[1]](#footnote-1) sets the EU framework to coordinate and ensure coherence in forest-related policies, engaging the Commission, Member States and stakeholders to work together towards coherence in forest-related policies. The European Green Deal[[2]](#footnote-2) has committed the Commission to preparing a new EU Forest Strategy covering the whole forest cycle and promoting the many services that forests provide. The Green Deal explicitly refers to the need to help reduce the incidence and extent of forest fires as one of the objectives of the forthcoming forest strategy.

There are already measures and funding available under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the respective rural development programmes that cover the petitioner’s request.

Some 90% of EU funding for forests comes from the EAFRD, and under the current programming period 2014-2020 a single specific measure (8) includes all types of support for investment in forests. The measure covers investment in the development of forested areas and improvement of the viability of forests: afforestation and creation of woodland, establishment of agro-forestry systems, prevention and restoration of damage to forests from forest fires, natural disasters and catastrophic events, investment to improve the resilience and environmental value of forest ecosystems and investment in forestry technologies and in the processing, promotion and marketing of forest products. Another measure is intended to provide rewards for forestry, environmental and climate services and the conservation of forests. Provisions have also been made for other measures not specific to forestry (Natura 2000 and Water Framework Directive[[3]](#footnote-3) payments, for example).

Under the shared management, it is up to Member States to select which forestry measures to implement, and to decide on the financing to be provided for them, as part of their Rural Development Programmes (RDPs). After the most recent modifications of the RDPs, the amount earmarked for forestry measures for the 2014-2020 period is EUR 7.2 billion (18% of which to make forests more resilient and 18% for damage prevention). Out of this budget, EUR 2.1 billion (30%) has been programmed for afforestation and agroforestry systems, EUR 1.7 billion for prevention of damage to forests, EUR 0.7 billion for restoration of damages from forest fires and natural disasters, EUR 1.5 billion for investments enhancing the resilience and environmental value of forests, and EUR 0.7 billion for investments in improving forest technologies. In addition, another EUR 0.5 billion is planned for compensation of restrictions derived from Natura 2000 rules on forest areas and compensation of income loss or additional costs related to voluntary commitments in forests through forest-environment payments.

80 RDPs out of 118 in 20 Member States programmed support for prevention and/or restoration measures for forest areas. 69 RDPs include prevention operations for forestry in 17 Member States and 70 RDPs programmed restoration actions in 19 Member States.

Finally, in order to be eligible for support under the Rural Development Programmes, sustainable forest management should be ensured by a forest management plan or equivalent instrument. This plan consists of basic requirements for managing forests in a sustainable way.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that forestry is not a common policy, there are several instruments in place that cover or tackle the request of the petitioner. A new EU Forest Strategy, the EU tool ensuring coherence of the relevant EU policies and instruments, will tackle forest fires and forest resilience. However, under the shared management principle for EAFRD it is the competence of national authorities to select, design and manage the forestry measures falling under the Rural Development Programmes.

1. <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/forests/index_en.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1–73. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)