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NOTE

From: Slovak delegation
To: Council

Subject: Damage to forests in the Slovak Republic caused by the wind storm
- Information from the Slovak delegation

Delegations will find, in the Annex, a note from the Slovak delegation to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council (Agriculture and Fisheries) on 16 June 2014.

On 14 and 15 May 2014, high rainfall occurred in the whole territory of the Slovak Republic. In addition, cold and rainy weather prevailed during two weeks preceding those days. Extraordinary weather situation, when the wind gusts reached 100 km per hour, was caused by high differences in atmospheric pressure in Europe.

For comparison, the wind speed during the storm of 19 November 2004, causing the largest calamity in Slovak forests in last 20 years, reached 140 km per hour with wind gusts reaching 240 km per hour.

Soil and tree crowns saturated with rain water together with extraordinary wind speed were main factors that caused damage to trees and destruction of forest stands in large areas. Based on preliminary reporting from forest owners/managers, the total estimated volume of timber damaged by the wind storm is 3,7 million cubic meters. This value represents roughly 50 % of total annual felling in the Slovak Republic. As regards the total volume of calamity timber, 56 % of it is coniferous, 44 % is broadleaves. Regarding damaged trees, around 30 % are windbreaks, 70 % are wind throws. Concentrated calamity is about 47 %, scattered 53 %. Concerning forest management structures, the volume of calamity timber in state forests (forests managed by state organisations) is 2,4 million cubic metres, in forests managed by “non-state” holders (private, municipalities, church) is 1,3 million cubic metres. Most damaged forests are in the regions located in the middle part of the country. The estimations, that are still under a revision, indicate that this is the calamity of similar scale as the calamity after the windstorm “Alžbeta” on 19 November 2004 which was the largest natural disaster in a modern history of Slovak forestry (with 5,3 million of calamity timber).

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic has identified risks resulted from the calamity situation. At this period of the year, there are no secondary injurious agents relevant to hardwood that could over-reproduce on calamity timber and cause significant damage to healthy forest stands later on. A potential decrease in quality of calamity beech timber during incoming summer is seen as a main threat. On the other hand, calamity soft timber (mainly spruce) lying on the ground constitutes good condition for over-reproducing bark beetles. This represents another main risk. It is anticipated that insects from spring flights, that are still ongoing, and from consequent summer flights will attack most attractive pieces of calamity soft timber on the ground. In spring 2015, a most of unprocessed calamity timber will not attract bark beetle. Therefore it is very likely that populations from 2015 spring flights will attack healthy forest stands nearby calamity sites.

Slovak Republic has quite negative experiences from past developments after large-scale calamity situations in forests, in particular after the wind storm in 2004. In order to avoid further increase of damage to forests in post-calamity period, it will be crucial to process and remove all calamity timber from damaged sites till April 2015. If not, the consequent measures will be more time consuming and costlier, other forest stands will be destroyed and negative impacts on the environment will increase. If calamity timber is not processed timely, forest regeneration will be more complicated. Thus, further fulfilling vital forest functions, such as soil protection, water protection and climatic function, will not be ensured. Solving consequence of this natural disaster requires a coordination of actions at a national level in sectors of agriculture and forestry, environment and nature protection and interior affairs.

In a case of a late reaction, economic losses will be higher for forest owners / managers due to decrease in quality of calamity timber. The largest state forest enterprise “Lesy Slovenskej republiky”, which is a most negatively influenced, interrupted all planned felling and intend to cover all pending deliveries of beech and spruce timber (based on existing contracts) from calamity only by the end of 2014.

Immediately after the end of the wind storm, the measures have been taken to solve the consequences with the primary aim to save human lives and property. All planned rehabilitation measures will be primarily focused on preventing high losses for a national economy (in relation to the environment and economic infrastructure) as well as on eliminating threats for human lives and settlements.

More accurate data on wind storm calamity and value of losses will be used by the Government of the Slovak Republic in the process of reporting on the natural disaster caused by the wind storm to the European Commission. The Slovak Republic will consequently examine possibilities for receiving assistance through the EU Solidarity Fund.
