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AGRI 222
FORETS 18
ENV 431
PROCIV 30
JUR 197
DEVGEN 84
RELEX 397
UD 122
PROBA 15
FAO 14

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From: General Secretariat of the Council
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To: Delegations

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Subject: Council Conclusions on the progress on the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy and on a new strategic framework for forests
- *Council conclusions (15 April 2019)*

Delegations will find in Annex the Council conclusions on the above-mentioned subject adopted by the Agriculture and Fisheries Council held on 15 April 2019.

Council conclusions on the Progress in the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy and on a new strategic framework for forests

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

I. General considerations and main achievements

1. UNDERSCORES the importance of forests and the forest-based sector for meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for rural, peri-urban and urban livelihoods and welfare, growth and jobs, nature and biodiversity conservation, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, to combating desertification, the provision of key ecosystem services to European society and the necessary transition to a low-carbon bioeconomy;
2. REITERATES that, although the European Union (EU) has a variety of forest-related policies, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union makes no reference to a common EU forest policy, and that the responsibility for forests lies with the Member States, and EMPHASISES that all forest-related decisions and policies in the EU must respect the principle of subsidiarity and Member States' competence in this field;
3. EMPHASISES the relevance of the contribution made by the EU Forest Strategy to addressing the three dimensions of sustainable development by promoting Sustainable Forest Management (SFM);
4. UNDERLINES the importance of the EU Forest Strategy as a key reference framework to facilitate the coherence and coordination of EU and Member States policies affecting forests and the forest-based sector, and EMPHASISES its role in encouraging Member States, the European Commission and relevant stakeholders to share experiences, cooperate in order to better deal with threats and benefit from opportunities, harmonise terminology, and identify forest-related trends in order to manage forests in the EU in accordance with sustainable forest management principles as developed by Forest Europe, applied by Member States and supported by the EU;

5. WELCOMES the European Commission's Report on the progress made in the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy and the fact that the EU Forest Strategy is well on track to achieve its 2020 objectives ¹ and ACKNOWLEDGES that progress has been made on most of the actions included in the Forest Multiannual Implementation Plan (Forest MAP);
6. RECOGNISES that, for some EU Member States, the EU Forest Strategy has also been a guiding tool for the preparation of their national forest strategies, policies and actions and ENCOURAGES other Member States to also consider it;
7. RECOGNISES that many EU policies have an effect on forests and the forest-based sector and UNDERLINES that concerned policies require stronger cross-sectoral coordination and communication at all levels;
8. ACKNOWLEDGES the important role of the Standing Forestry Committee ², which is already recognised in the EU Forest Strategy as the main forum for close and more constant cooperation under the framework of the EU Forest Strategy, for discussing all forest-related issues, for striving for consistency and coherence of forest-related policies, sharing experiences and knowledge amongst Member States, and providing opinions, advice and expertise to the Commission on the various policies and initiatives relevant to forests and the forest-based sector;

II. Priorities for 2019-2020

9. NOTES that while progress has been made, additional efforts are needed to timely achieve the objectives of the EU Forest Strategy, and therefore INVITES the Commission, Member States and stakeholders, in the remaining two years, to focus on:
 - a. making full use of all the financial tools, in particular the rural development forestry measures under the Common Agricultural Policy and state aid;

¹ EU Forest Strategy/2020 forest objectives –‘To ensure and demonstrate that all forests in the EU are managed according to sustainable forest management principles and that the EU’s contribution to promoting sustainable forest management and reducing deforestation at global level is strengthened, thus - contributing to balancing various forest functions, meeting demands, and delivering vital ecosystem services; - providing a basis for forestry and the whole forest-based value chain to be competitive and viable contributors to the bio-based economy.’

² Council Decision 89/367/EEC.

- b. contributing further to mainstreaming EU biodiversity objectives in a coherent manner, including in the context of the *Action Plan: for nature, people and the economy*, and the planned evaluation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020;
 - c. further strengthening Member States' driven initiatives such as the European network 'INTEGRATE'³ which promotes further integrating nature conservation into SFM;
 - d. continuing to foster the coordination and communication pillar of the Strategy as a framework to balance common interests, national forest competence and EU policy through the active and timely involvement of the Standing Forestry Committee to strengthen the provision of advice and expertise and ensuring the consistency and coherence of EU forest-relevant policies;
 - e. enhancing communication and awareness of the value and importance of forests and SFM by addressing major societal and environmental challenges as a contribution to the integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
 - f. continuing to encourage the use of wood from sustainably managed forests, as an environmentally friendly raw material for multiple purposes;
 - g. promoting the key role of forests in line with the Paris Agreement;
10. NOTES the need for collaborative work, research and knowledge sharing on forest management practices to enhance prevention and management to address the increasing forest threats caused by pests, extreme events (e.g. forest fires, storms, floods, droughts etc.) and long-term climate change;
11. IDENTIFIES as additional elements that would benefit from further collaborative work, research and knowledge sharing on forest-related databases and statistics, methodologies for payments for forest ecosystem services and forests' contribution to society through land use planning, including their role in urban and peri-urban areas;
12. CALLS on the European Commission to present an ambitious Communication on stepping up EU action against deforestation and forest degradation, building on the dedicated feasibility study⁴;

³ <https://informat.eu/european-network-integrate>

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/forests/pdf/feasibility_study_deforestation_kh0418199enn_main_report.pdf

III. Beyond 2020

13. RECOGNISES the need for a new EU forest strategy to further strengthen the consistency and coherence of EU forest-related policies after 2020, and the need to continue to share best practices and enhance communication, taking into account the increasing importance of forests and SFM;
14. RECOGNISES also the importance of further promoting SFM globally in multilateral and bilateral contexts and the integrated implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs, the Paris Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity and other global instruments, and the need for active involvement in the international forest-related policy dialogue;
15. STRESSES the value of further building on Forest Europe process principles, ministerial resolutions and decisions as well as its work on defining, monitoring and reporting on SFM and that the development and eventual results of negotiations on a Legally Binding Agreement on Forests in Europe under the UN system are considered;
16. EMPHASISES the importance of continuing to provide a framework for Member States to establish initiatives and networks for enhancing cooperation, facilitating the exchange of experiences as well as developing best practices of SFM.
17. STRESSES the need for the continued availability of funding while reducing the administrative burden in order to further promote sustainable forest management and the multifunctional role of forests as the guiding principles, including, where relevant, through afforestation and ecosystem-based solutions to address the growing societal demands on and the increasing risks to forests and forest resources and to foster the conservation of biodiversity and the protection of soil and water.
18. UNDERLINES the importance of forests and the forest-based sector in contributing to the further development of the bioeconomy in the EU, enhancing competitiveness and providing job opportunities, especially in rural areas;
19. HIGHLIGHTS the need to further promote research, innovation and the deployment of technologies in forests and the forest-based sector and to strengthen skills through academic and vocational education;

20. CALLS ON the Commission to start reflecting on options for a new EU forest strategy post 2020, considering all the elements of these conclusions and the need for a more integrated approach to continue addressing the environmental, social, and economic opportunities and challenges, while also considering the relevant policy developments at Member State, EU and international levels;
 21. UNDERLINES the need for early consultations with and the involvement of Member States and key stakeholders.
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