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AGRI 457
FORETS 36
ENV 798
PROCIV 79
JUR 549
DEVGEN 180
RELEX 864
UD 239
PROBA 37
FAO 38

NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject: EU Forest Strategy post-2020
- *Exchange of views*

Delegations will find in Annex a background paper from the Presidency for the exchange of views on the above-mentioned subject at the Council ("Agriculture and Fisheries") meeting on 14-15 October 2019.

EU Forest Strategy post 2020

The EU needs a forest strategy in the future too

1. The current EU Forest Strategy¹ (EUFS) runs until 2020. The Agriculture and Fisheries Council in its conclusions² of April 2019 already recognised the need for a new EU forest strategy. In their joint statement³ of January 2019, forest sector stakeholders asked for an updated and stronger EUFS. The Committee of the Regions (CoR), in its opinion⁴ of April 2019, made the same request, and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is likely to follow in October 2019 (according to their draft opinion⁵).
2. In her mission letter to Mr Timmermans, Executive Vice-President-designate for the European Green Deal⁶, the President-elect of the European Commission, Ms von der Leyen, entrusted him to lead the work on the European Green Deal, which should be presented in the first 100 days of the Commission's mandate.
3. Forests are ecosystems of crucial importance for addressing the challenges identified by Ms von der Leyen (transition to a green economy, climate neutrality, zero pollution, biodiversity, rural areas). Sustainable forest management is a holistic way to address the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of the required transitions, promoting the provision of multiple services. The forest sector plays a key role in developing the green circular economy.

¹ [A new EU Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest-based sector. COM\(2013\) 659 final.](#)
² [Council conclusions on the progress on the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy and on a new strategic framework for forests. 8609/19.](#)
³ [Joint Statement – Call for an updated and stronger EU Forest Strategy. 11 January 2019.](#)
⁴ [Opinion – Implementation of the EU Forest Strategy. 10–11 April 2019.](#)
⁵ [EESC opinion process](#)
⁶ [Mission Letter to the Executive Vice-President-designate for the European Green Deal. 10 September 2019.](#)

4. A stronger and independent EU forest strategy post 2020 is needed to keep the right balance and coherence between the forests' contributions to the EU challenges and, due to the cross-cutting importance of forests and the forest sector in providing sustainable solutions for the many challenges of our time, should be an integral and fundamental part of the European Green Deal. As competence for forestry policy lies with the Member States, they need to be closely involved in designing the future strategy.

How can the effectiveness of the strategy be improved?

Policy consistency and coherence

5. The current Strategy describes the increasing number of forest-related policies and the complex and fragmented forest policy environment. The Strategy states that the EU needs a policy framework that coordinates and ensures the coherence of forest-related policies and allows synergies with other sectors that influence forest management. This is even truer now than it was in 2013 and in its conclusions of April 2019, the Council clearly recognised the need to further strengthen the consistency and coherence of EU forest-related policies after 2020. Given the lack of a common EU forest policy this is not an easy task, but for that very reason it is an important one, especially in the light of the EU's new policy priorities.

Tighter links to the sustainable development agenda and international policy environment

6. The global policy environment has changed greatly since 2013, and is increasingly influencing various EU policies. The Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (2015, SDGs) now guide the work on sustainable development. The UN Strategic Plan on Forests⁷ (2017, UNSPF), also with a target date of 2030, *serves as a strategic framework to enhance the coherence of and guide and focus the work of the international arrangement on forests and its components*. The function of the UNSPF at the global policy level is thus very similar to the function that the EUFS is expected to have at EU level. The use of this global framework, adjusted to EU conditions, could provide a natural link to the broader sustainable development and international policy work, both when implementing existing commitments at national and EU level and when influencing future global policies. Coherence with the Communication on Stepping up EU Action to Protect and Restore the World's Forests⁸ and its implementation needs to be ensured.

Shared understanding of the added value is needed

7. The Member States seem to consider that the main function of the EUFS is to provide a mechanism which, at EU level, would guarantee better coordination when preparing various forest-related policies and would ensure that forest expertise is involved from the early stages of policy formulation. This, ideally, would result in coherent and consistent forest-related policies. The Commission, on the other hand, seems to put the emphasis on the coordinated implementation of EU policies at national level. There is a need to identify which EU-level actions would add value compared to national-level actions.

⁷ [United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017–2030](#)

⁸ [Communication on Stepping up EU Action to Protect and Restore the World's Forests](#).
23 July 2019.

8. Against this backdrop, and in order to build a common understanding of expectations for the EU forest strategy post 2020, Finland's Presidency would like to invite ministers at the Council on 14-15 October 2019 to take part in an exchange of views on the basis of the following question:

The current EU Forest Strategy runs until 2020, and the strategy post 2020 is under consideration. How could an EU forest strategy contribute to addressing the challenges ahead in an enhanced, balanced and holistic way?
