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AGRI 458  
FORETS 37  
ENV 799  
PROCIV 80  
JUR 550  
DEVGEN 181  
RELEX 865  
UD 240  
PROBA 38  
FAO 39

**NOTE**

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From: Presidency  
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

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Subject: Communication on stepping up EU action to protect and restore the world's forests

- *Presentation by the Commission*
- *Exchange of views*

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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.

## **Commission Communication on stepping up EU action to protect and restore the world's forests**

1. The Communication on stepping up EU action to protect and restore the world's forests<sup>1</sup> was adopted on 23 July 2019 as a response to the continued and widespread destruction of the world's forests. Forests host 80 % of biodiversity on land, support the livelihoods of around a quarter of the world's population, and are vital to our efforts to fight climate change. From an economic and social perspective, forests support the livelihoods of around 25 % of the global population, and they also embody irreplaceable cultural, societal and spiritual values.
2. Between 1990 and 2016, a forest area of 1.3 million square kilometres was lost due to deforestation and degradation. Land use and land use change, mostly due to deforestation, account for 12 % of all greenhouse gas emissions, and tropical forests are particularly at risk. Approximately 80 % of global deforestation is caused by the expansion of land used for agriculture. Urban expansion, infrastructure development and mining are also factors driving deforestation. The EU is an importer of products such as palm oil, meat, soy, cocoa, maize, timber and rubber, including in the form of processed products or services. When looking at deforestation in terms of total final consumption, EU consumption represents around 10 % of the global share, according to the Communication.
3. **The objective** of the Communication is two-fold: to protect and improve the health of existing forests, and to significantly increase sustainable, biodiverse forest coverage worldwide.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/forests/eu\\_comm\\_2019.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/forests/eu_comm_2019.htm)

4. The Communication sets out five priorities for stepping up EU action:
  - reduce the EU’s consumption footprint on land and encourage the consumption of products from deforestation-free supply chains in the EU;
  - work in partnership with producing countries to reduce pressures on forests and to ‘deforest-proof’ EU development cooperation;
  - strengthen international cooperation to halt deforestation and forest degradation, and encourage forest restoration;
  - redirect finance to support more sustainable land-use practices;
  - support the availability and quality of, and access to information on forests and commodity supply chains, and support research and innovation.
5. **The priorities** of the Communication are planned to be implemented through 36 actions as well as recommendations to the Member States, industry and civil society. Further consideration will be needed to specify the various roles of the Commission, Member States, partner countries, intergovernmental organisations and other actors.
6. Potential actions to reduce EU consumption and encourage the use of products from deforestation-free supply chains are proposed to be explored through the creation of a new multi-stakeholder platform, which could bring together a broad range of relevant stakeholders. In addition, stronger certification schemes for deforestation-free products could be encouraged. Possible demand-side legislative measures and other non-regulatory incentives could also be assessed. Further consideration will be needed on possible impacts on the EU’s agriculture production, competitiveness and markets.

7. It is proposed that the EU work closely with partner countries to help them to reduce pressures on their forests, and to ensure that EU policies do not contribute to deforestation and forest degradation. Partners could be assisted to develop and implement comprehensive national frameworks on forests, enhancing the sustainable use of forests, and increasing the sustainability of forest-based value chains. The Commission aims to continue to ensure that trade agreements negotiated by the EU contribute to the responsible and sustainable management of global supply chains, and encourage trade in agricultural and forest-based products which do not cause deforestation or forest degradation.
8. Action by the EU alone will only have a limited impact in reducing deforestation and forest degradation, in increasing forest cover through afforestation or promoting sustainable forest management globally. It is therefore important to strengthen cooperation, encourage consistent action, and avoid the diversion of trade to products whose supply chains may involve deforestation. The EU already actively contributes to promoting a global agenda for the sustainable use of natural resources, rural development, food and water security, sustainable forest management, reforestation, and restoration of degraded forest areas in key international fora. For example, the REDD+ mechanism under the Paris Agreement strengthens capacities and offers opportunities for result-based payments for reduced deforestation in developing countries. The EU is also working, through sectorial intergovernmental organisations, with countries, key stakeholders and initiatives such as the Task Force on Rural Africa, where it shares experience and knowledge, exploring opportunities to develop employment and revenue-generating activities. These actions lead to initiatives to use natural resources more efficiently – producing more with less.

9. In line with the commitment to make EU trade policy contribute to the responsible management of global supply chains, the Commission aims to ensure that all new comprehensive EU trade agreements contain provisions on sustainable forest management and responsible business conduct, as well as commitments to effectively implement the Paris Agreement.
10. Also, there will be a focus on redirecting public and private finance to help to create incentives for sustainable forest management and sustainable forest-based value chains, and for the conservation of the existing and sustainable regeneration of additional forest cover. Together with the Member States, mechanisms with the potential to foster green finance for forests and further leverage and increase funding will be assessed. As an example of a regional approach, the EU alliance with Africa on sustainable investment and jobs can provide significant possibilities in supporting sustainable forest management and afforestation.
11. Effective forest policy needs reliable information and knowledge on forest resources, their condition, management and utilisation, as well as information on land-use change. The EU has been supporting research and capacity building in this domain at the global, regional and national levels. There is a need to further harness earth-observation and supply-chain data, and to combine research and monitoring capacities to strengthen and/or develop early warning systems. This may require better monitoring of trade flows down to national, regional and local levels, and better access to timely information as well as better utilisation of the existing monitoring and data collection systems. The Commission proposes the creation of an EU Observatory to monitor and measure changes in the world's forest cover and associated trade.

12. The proposed actions build on previous experiences, such as the implementation of the FLEGT Action Plan and the EU Forest Strategy. Successful implementation of the Communication will require a constant dialogue between the EU, Member States and its partners in the world, strong involvement of the private sector, and active consultation with civil society. Significant financial resources will also need to be mobilised.
13. With a view to the preparation of Council conclusions to direct and support the efficient implementation of the Communication, 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:

*Are the priorities presented appropriate and adequate in order to achieve the objectives of the Communication, and what are the key actions that should be set as priorities?*

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