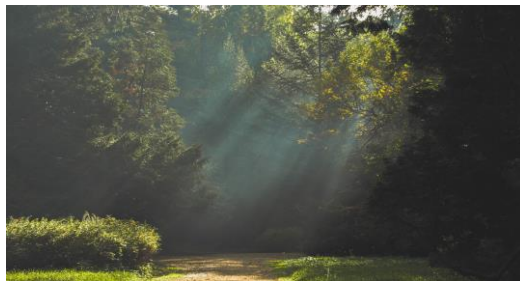




EU Green Deal ambitions: What do we want and need from EU forests?



Wednesday 30 June 2021, 14:30 – 16:30 CEST
Online event

Hosted by MEP Elsi Katainen, MEP Simone Schmiedtbauer

Co-chairs of the 'Sustainable Forest Management Working Group' of the European Parliament Intergroup on 'Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development'

and MEP Carmen Avram

Moderator: **Jo O'Hara**

Opening remarks:

MEP Elsi Katainen
MEP Simone Schmiedtbauer

1st panel:

Thomas Haußmann, Head of the Liaison Unit Bonn of Forest Europe
Nuno Banza, President, Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests(ICNF), Ministry of Agriculture, Portugal
David Kaimowitz, Manager, Forestry Division, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
MEP Emma Wiesner

2nd panel:

Profesor Tudor Stancioiu, Faculty of Silviculture and Forest Engineering, Transilvania University of Brasov
Marius Vaščega, Head of Cabinet of the Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, European Commission
Jože Podgoršek, Slovenian Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Food
Anton Harej, State Secretary, Slovenian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food
MEP Elsi Katainen

Closing remarks:

MEP Carmen Avram

In a nutshell

The aim of the event was to discuss how Europe's forests can help to accomplish the multiple ambitions of the European Green Deal. EU's forests are a **key element to reach the Green Deal objectives**. Therefore, respecting the **principle of subsidiarity** and taking into account the particularities of Member States in the EU Forest Strategy is crucial. Besides, European **forest owners should be given a stronger voice** and their good practices be made more visible. The benefits of European forests should also be upheld in the transition to a carbon neutral economy. These European efforts should have a **global and long-term reach**. Moreover, to achieve a **green, fair and inclusive growth, the EU Forest Strategy should rely on the multifunctionality of EU forests**, reflecting all three pillars of sustainable development. Therefore, numerous panelists called for **sustainable close-to-nature forest management**, while **increasing forests' resilience**.

Opening remarks

MEP Elsi Katainen

“Forests are extremely important to the objectives of the Green Deal. However, problems arise if we don't look at the big picture and focus on a single set of objectives. A holistic approach is needed, as guaranteed by the EU Forest Strategy.”

MEP Elsi Katainen welcomed the adequate timing of the event, in the light of MEPs' expectations as to the European Commission's proposal for the 'Fit for 55' package as well as the new EU Forest Strategy. Indeed, **forests are extremely important in order to achieve the objectives of the Green Deal**, yet problems may arise if a **holistic approach** in forest-related policy making is not adopted. While the European Union has no legal competence in forest policy, it needs a coherent, strong and effective forest strategy that provides an appropriate framework; nonetheless, MEP Katainen pleaded for a correction of the strategy which has recently been leaked. She argued it should be corrected so as to respect Member States' competence on forest policy, for management plans and setting the forestry related

definitions. It should also include the Commission's acknowledgement of the benefits of the multifunctional role of forests for climate, the economy and the environment. Member States have the best knowledge of their forests, and the **new EU Forest Strategy should take forest ownership into consideration**, in that the sector involves a wide breadth of forest owners and actors.

MEP Simone Schmiedtbauer

“Ecological, economic, social output and sustainability go hand in hand. They are not contradicting; we just need to tie the ends. Sustainable forest management is a European strength, not a weakness. It must remain the heart of the new EU Forest Strategy.”

Member States should seek common ground with regards to the contribution of Europe's forests in helping to achieve the objectives of the European Green Deal. MEP Schmiedtbauer called for a **generational approach** to forestry, given its significance over long periods of time. While it is crucial for the future of forest owners and managers to understand the European Commission's strategy in the light of the Green Deal, **MEP Schmiedtbauer shared her concern regarding the draft EU Forest Strategy** which is to be presented by the Commission mid-July. The draft strategy seems to be **unbalanced, endangering family forestry in Europe, undermining the principle of subsidiarity, downgrading fossil fuel phase out and criticizing sustainable forest management**. According to the MEP, it could even **compromise the transition to a sustainable bioeconomy**, despite the urgency to put an end to fossil times. Overall, forest owners are willing to play an active part in the implementation of the European Green Deal. Their engagement is needed, for **their knowledge and ability to find sustainable solutions for forest management and environmental protection are key** to the success of the strategy. They form a core part of the European potential in tackling environmental and climate challenges of today, which should be leveraged, while **maintaining competitiveness and job creation**.

Panel discussion 1: forests for green growth and social cohesion

Keynote speech:

Thomas Haußmann, Head of the Liaison Unit Bonn of Forest Europe

“We need to respect local conditions; I am therefore hesitant in favoring a top down approach in terms of forest management all over Europe. However, we do need a common policy framework.”

It is first and foremost necessary to determine what Europeans want and need from forests in the EU, which may appear simple but remains rather complex, mainly due to the **diversity of forest owners, of their interests and objectives**. Even though effective forest policy needs to respect local and national conditions, **a harmonious European policy framework should be adopted**. The latter should convey consideration for not only European forests but also on a global scale, and build on the concept of **sustainable forest management**, thus involving a balance of interests and the protection of certain hotspots.

As Head of Liaison Unit at Forest Europe, Mr. Haußmann exposed its angles of contribution. Namely, **Forest Europe participates in the promotion of sustainable forest management**, in its implementation as part of a circular bioeconomy, and offers a **platform for high level debates** based on latest science.

Following the keynote speech of Mr. Haußmann, the panel moved on to discuss the priorities which should be achieved through the European Green Deal to ensure that Europe’s forests deliver **green growth and social cohesion**. Mr. Nuno Banza, President of the Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests (ICNF), called for the adoption of a **consistent and coherent approach** in Europe, all the while remaining flexible and recognizing the **autonomy and competence of Member States** in this diverse sector. Further, this **diversity** needs to be recognized within the Green Deal; one cannot assume there can be one single solution. Mr.

David Kaimowitz, Manager of the Farm and Forests Facility at FAO firstly highlighted the need to make sure **investments used for short term purposes of economic recovery create long term social, human and natural capital**. Yet the quality and sustainability of such **economic recovery is linked to how resilient communities are**, as well as local actors such as farmers, cooperatives and institutions. Secondly, although EU activities are only concerned with European forests, it is crucial to consider **global efforts** in terms of deforestation, climate change and preventing future pandemics. The latter is all the more important given the rise in **zoonotic diseases** linked to land use change and wildlife trade. Mr. Kaimowitz welcomed the current direction of European policy, yet called for more harmony between trade and development policies, biomass and biofuel policies, anti-corruption and financial crimes initiatives. However, in terms of forests, many European policies are already affecting forestry and forest owners, according to MEP Emma Wiesner from the Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament. The strategy undertaken at European level **should therefore be centered around forest owners**. A consensus amongst the panelists seems to have also been drawn with regards to the need for a **flexible approach** across Member States, as MEP Wiesner shared this view. **Forestry should finally be leveraged in the transition from fossil energy to greener sources**, by increasing the use of timber for example.

The responsibility for forests lies within Member States; the Union should uphold the principle of subsidiarity according to Mr. Banza. The **contribution of forests to economic development and environmental protection should be dealt with on a national level**, while continuing to implement EU policies.

This call for a territorial approach was shared by FAO, which intends to **protect individual and private forest actors and owners**. Mr. Kaimowitz agreed with MEP Wiesner's proposals to replace plastics with forest products. For example, wood is a more sustainable alternative than cement. Nonetheless, the view of FAO is that in Europe and elsewhere in the world, there are still significant areas for improvement in forest management, and no room for complacency.

The moderator then specifically asked MEP Wiesner to share some reflections on the contribution of forestry to building greater social cohesion in Sweden. MEP Wiesner exposed the significant number of forest owners in Sweden (330 000) and how scattered they are all

over the country, yet so integrated in society. Given this considerable involvement and that 10 to 12% of Sweden's growth comes from forestry, **forest owners have to be at the core of forest policy**. While there may indeed be much room for improvement, **good practices which are already currently adopted should also be relayed**, shared and valued. **Both the EU and Member States should be better at telling the story of forest owners** and how forests are used in the transition to cleaner sources of energy.

In short, the moderator Jo O'Hara summarized the discussion of the first panel by reiterating the need to keep in mind a **diverse and integrated approach**, by respecting the principle of subsidiarity. Policy makers should also make sure that **short term priorities go hand in hand with long term objectives**. Moreover, the **forest sector should be at the heart of the transition from a fossil to a biobased economy**. Finally, European policies should not only have a European reach, but also a global one in order to be fully effective.

Panel discussion 2: forests for climate and nature

Keynote speech

*Profesor Tudor Stancioiu, Faculty of Silviculture and Forest Engineering,
Transilvania University of Brasov*

"A large-scale approach is needed to cope with complex forest mosaics. For this reason, forest management plays a crucial role."

During his presentation, Prof. Stancioiu stressed the **three key elements to best understand and use EU forests' potential: a large-scale approach, a long-term perspective, and the dynamic nature of forests**. Only a large-scale approach can have a significant impact at both the EU and the global levels, and can accommodate conflicting values or certain scale-dependent values. Indeed, **values required from forests are not always fully compatible** and cannot be maximized at the same time in the same place. Moreover, **understanding the natural dynamics of forests** is necessary to achieve proper decision-making, as forests are not

fully predictable and controllable. To this end, adopting a long-term perspective is decisive. As biodiversity and all other values are **dependent on a close-to-nature approach, only very large landscapes with a diverse mosaic of all forest stages and structures can deliver what is expected from EU forests**. Therefore, **relying on forest management is the only way to ensure forests' prosperity and biodiversity, and have an impact at the EU level**. A no management approach could jeopardize providing forests' values, and lead to more frequent and more severe disturbances. Besides, **strict protection on old forests produced by management should not be imposed** as it means reducing the chance and area of having such forests, and affecting biodiversity at a larger scale. However, all efforts **cannot be successful without the direct involvement of the forest's owners and managers**. Prof. Stancioiu concluded his presentation by highlighting the need for **decision-making to be based on sound science, adopting both a global and a local approach**. Similar efforts must be made in terms of percentages covering each Member State while taking into account their particularities. For a successful EU Forest Strategy, **understanding EU forests' diversity and particularities will be crucial**.

After the keynote speech of Prof. Stancioiu, the panel discussion focused on what can be achieved through the Green Deal to ensure EU forests play their part in addressing climate change and biodiversity decline. First, most of the panelists recalled the **importance of all three pillars of sustainable development** for the European Green Deal and in addressing forests. Indeed, forests are crucial to address climate change and biodiversity loss, but also to strengthen the circular economy, and rural vitality and development. Reflecting all three pillars in the upcoming EU Forest Strategy would **enable a holistic framework** while addressing the increasing fragmentation of sectoral approaches to forests. Therefore, to use the full potential of forests, **a balance between all forest's functions is key**. Besides, to ensure forests are addressed consistently across the different policies, **all forest-relevant policies should be integrated into a comprehensive strategy**, underscored Mr. Vaščega.

Further, **sustainable close-to-nature forest management should be enhanced**. However, to be effective, the definitions of “sustainable forest management” and “close-to-nature” need to be pragmatic, based on science and gathered experience. Prof. Stancioiu also pointed out

the **crucial role of rewarding the actors already engaged** in sustainable close-to-nature forest management, and **supporting the ones who need to change their forest management**. This rewarding system should not only be implemented at the EU level but also **through national legislation**. According to Prof. Stancioiu, reforestation could also be a tool to fight climate change and biodiversity reduction, provided it is based on sound analysis and implemented where it does not affect local biodiversity, and the economic or social viability of local communities.

Moreover, forests are under growing pressure from climate change and natural disturbances, affecting their long-term capacity to deliver the main services they provide. Thus, Mr. Podgoršek and Mr. Vaščega underlined the importance of **increasing forests resilience**. Promoting efficient forest resources management and biodiversity protection is also essential, added Mr. Podgoršek. To this end, **national characteristics**, capacities as well as limitations, **should be taken into account**. To have the best results, Ms. Katainen stressed that **all Member States should be equally committed to implementing** the EU Forest Strategy. Mr. Vaščega pursued by recognizing a shared responsibility to step up the efforts and to act now.

Then, Mr. Podgoršek pinned **forestry as one of the Slovenian EU presidency's priorities**. During its presidency, Slovenia will aim to promote forest sustainable management and multifunctionality, development of rural areas, and address the issues of illegal logging and deforestation. Slovenia will also consider **prevention measures reducing the magnitude of natural disasters** and boosting positive impacts on the resilience and vitality of forest ecosystems.

To achieve the balance between all ecosystem services that forests provide, Mr. Vaščega recalled that **forest multifunctionality is the core principle** around which the EU Forest Strategy and forest-relevant policies are being built. The EU Forest Strategy will **reinforce the balance between wood production and forest protection**, and **create synergies between the two dimensions**. The Commission is also looking to boost revenues from non-timber forest resources, and working with DG AGRI to find win-win solutions.

Nonetheless, Ms. Katainen expressed her concerns about the recently leaked Commission EU Forest Strategy draft. The **Commission did not take into account what the European**

Parliament agreed on in its report on EU Forest Strategy (“The European Forest Strategy - The Way Forward”) adopted last autumn. While the European Parliament and the Commission both acknowledge the need to enhance biodiversity, **actions to reach this goal greatly vary.**

To conclude, Prof. Stancioiu recognized that the role of sustainable and multifunctional forests for biodiversity is well reflected in the European Green Deal as it promotes sustainable and inclusive growth. Yet, some terms are still not defined clearly, and their **definition will play a crucial role.** Mr. Stancioiu closed the discussion by hoping the role of sustainable and multifunctional forests in climate mitigation, biodiversity conservation, social and economic welfare will also be adequately reflected in practice.

Finally, Ms. O’Hara wrapped up the discussion by summarizing the main ideas of the discussion recalling for the need of pragmatism, clear definitions, involvement of forest owners, and **building long-term capacities for forest policymaking.** Moreover, the three pillars of sustainable development should be reflected in the EU Forest Strategy, as the European Green Deal’s goal is about green inclusive growth. Therefore, an eye should be kept on the growth part. The question of subsidiarity was once again raised by the panelists, emphasizing the importance of national competences. To reach the EU’s ambitions, the forests’ multifunctionality and resilience will be key.

Q&A session with audience

Asked on the risk of the EU Forest Strategy being a “soft law”, Mr. Vaščega highlighted that **both soft measures as well as legislation are needed.** The Strategy’s results will **depend on the definitions** set by the Commission and the Member States. The terms should not impose more restrictions without serving the multifunctional sustainable forest management.

Then, speakers were invited to share their views on the **definition of “multifunctionality”.** Mr. Haußmann focused on the **three pillars of sustainability** (economy, society, and environment) to define it. Furthermore, **multifunctionality is not a static concept,** but a dynamic one. Thus communication efforts are needed to communicate to forest owners’

concrete actions. Ms. Wiesner focused on the **circularity of the forestry sector**, where high-value products, as well as residues, are used. **Forest management is vital** to ensure forests are as efficient, fast-growing, and healthy as possible. As markets are unpredictable, it is also key to be **careful when regulating the multifunctional possibilities** of forests, especially at the EU level. Mr. Harej concluded on the importance of adopting a **participatory approach**, as society as a whole should be the one to define forests' functions and priorities.

Closing remarks by MEP Carmen Avram

EU forests greatly differ in size, ownership, structure, and most importantly in functionalities. Thus, a one-size-fits-all approach is unrealistic, and **different angles are needed to address EU forests.** Ms. Avram was pleased that the Commission's draft strategy contains key elements such as sustainable forest management, or the vital importance of wood for rural regions, etc. However, she also expressed several concerns. To address forests, the EU needs to rely on **shared competences on forests, on the multifunctionality of forests, and on the synergies between forestry and other interconnected sectors.** Furthermore, to be successful, the Strategy should **not overwhelm forest owners and Member States with more bureaucracy.** Then, Ms. Avram pointed out the necessity to seek not only **coherence between strategies, but also between sectors.** To conclude, stakeholders of the sector **need predictability and a framework that accommodates local and national specificities.** Otherwise, the EU Forest Strategy will not only keep on exporting carbon leakage outside the EU but will also jeopardize EU competitiveness.