

SUMMARY REPORT

EUROPE'S FORESTS IN THE SUSTAINABILITY SPOTLIGHT

25 November 2015

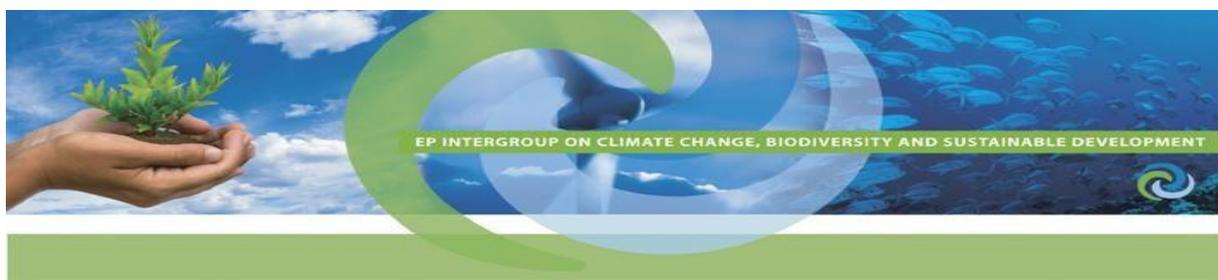
European Parliament, Strasbourg

Members of the European Parliament, policy-makers and representatives from civil society gathered on Wednesday 25 November in the European Parliament in Strasbourg to discuss the issue of sustainable forest management in the event entitled “**Europe’s forests in the sustainability spotlight**”, chaired by **MEP Elisabeth Köstinger**.

Elisabeth Köstinger MEP, Chair of the “Sustainable Forest Management” Working Group of the EP Intergroup on “Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development”, welcomed the participants by highlighting the role of forests in providing a multitude of socioeconomic benefits such as good life quality, valuable renewable sources, jobs and added value. In that regard, she also underlined the need to embrace a holistic approach to forest management and to focus on wood as a sustainable raw material and an important resource for the European economy. In addition, ensuring the meaningful integration of forest policy in the different European strategies also needs to be given due consideration.

Phil Hogan, EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, outlined that the Commission is committed to investing in forests through rural development programmes and the bioeconomy to assist civil society and businesses in harnessing greater value from forests. Fostering research and innovation will also be crucial in that regard. It was underlined that new financial instruments that will be representative of the present and future needs of forests and business are in the process of being developed. It was emphasised that wood is a precious raw material, whose sustainable use can make a great contribution to the development of a resilient, low-carbon energy union. In this context, it was also pointed out that a sufficient biomass supply is required for the bioeconomy and that forestry is already very well placed to contribute to it. The importance of LULUCF was also stressed and the role it plays in mitigating climate change underlining that it will be explored in 2016 how to include LULUCF in the 2030 Climate and Energy Framework. Furthermore, the Commissioner emphasised the importance of considering all aspects related to sustainable forest management, calling for collaboration among stakeholders as well as within the Commission, in order to establish common principles and ensure efficient policies.

Philipp Freiherr von und zu Guttenberg, Vice-President of the Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF), stated that the core comprehension of sustainability is blurred, mainly due to the multitude of distinct definitions attributed to it by the various EU sectorial policies. With regard to forests, it was stressed that their management can only be sustainable as long as it addresses the forest ecosystem as a whole, in a multifunctional and integrative manner.

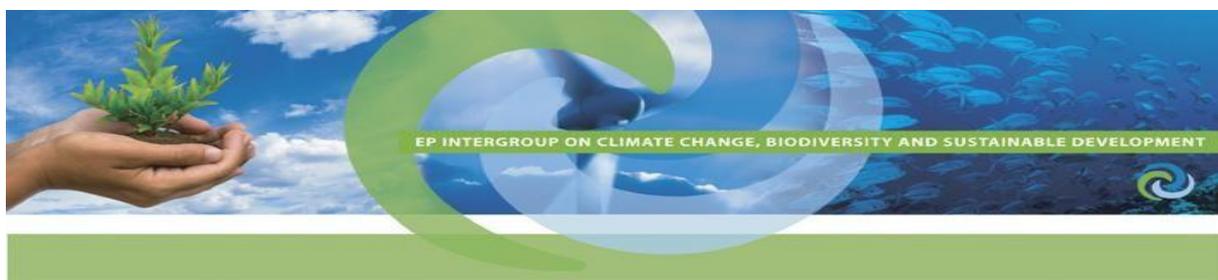


However, an issue of major concern is the one related to the discussion on the adoption of sustainability criteria for solid biomass. As it was highlighted, that forest legislation in the EU Member States has proven to be robust, creating no sustainability risk for solid biomass. It was stated that the European Commission invests considerable time and effort in trying to “solve a problem that does not exist” by pursuing the development of sustainability criteria for solid biomass. Given the role of forests and forestry in addressing today’s challenges, it was called upon DG Agriculture to assume leadership responsibility with a view to securing a coordinated and coherent EU policy relevant for all forestry matters.

Reinhardt Neft, Vice-President of the European State Forest Association (EUSTAFOR), highlighted the importance of sustainable forest management in providing the means and solutions to overcome some of the most pressing present challenges, such as climate change mitigation, low-carbon energy transition, preservation and enhancement of biodiversity, strengthening of the rural sector etc. On the issue of climate change mitigation, it was pointed out that EU forests sequester over 400 million tons of CO₂ each year, which amounts to 9% of Europe’s net greenhouse emissions. At the same time, forestry also operates as a major supplier of renewable raw materials, paving the way for a “green” European bioeconomy. It was stressed that Europe should not export its problems by setting aside our own forests for preservation while importing timber from other parts of the world. It was stated that European forests can be used and preserved at the same time through sustainable and multifunctional forest management. It was also highlighted that recent studies have shown that sustainably managed forests result in higher biodiversity levels than unmanaged forests, and particularly when it comes to the diversity of habitats and structure (the so-called “beta” diversity).

Luc Bas, Director of the IUCN Brussels Office, underlined the role of both forest owners (in the cases of private forest ownership) and other users (in the cases of public forests) in implementing sustainable forest management strategies. Biodiversity decline –seen especially from a species perspective– has been a major concern for most forest owners. Indicatively, 25% of the species assessed by the IUCN Red List are threatened with extinction. It is also a concern for society as a whole given the ecological services provided by forests (regulation of water regimes, etc). As it was pointed out, albeit forestry serves very important socioeconomic interests, forests need to be primarily regarded and managed as ecosystems –particularly when considering that forests represent 50% of the Natura 2000 network. Moreover, it was stressed that successful climate change mitigation and adaptation is to a significant extent dependent on sound forest functionality. This is the reason why urgent action is required in terms of enhanced forest landscape restoration also highlighting the importance of incorporating nature-based solutions in the circular economy package. The Bonn Challenge was also mentioned, which is a global aspiration to restore 150 million hectares of the world’s deforested and degraded lands by 2020, where it was called upon the EU to commit to this challenge.

Patrizio Antonicoli, Secretary General of the European Confederation of Woodworking Industries (CEI-Bois), emphasised that the optimisation of forest management will benefit the production of bio-based raw materials with a low carbon footprint, thus contributing to the



overall effort to halt climate change. It was underlined that it is only through healthy and resilient forest ecosystems that sustainable raw materials can be produced. Furthermore, it was stated that more attention has to be placed on the general eco-efficient construction with wood, as this would result in substantial CO₂ savings. It was pointed out that construction with wood provides savings both in terms of greenhouse gas emissions as well as embodied energy and energy efficiency. It was underlined that the wood working industry is committed to sustainable forest management and ensuring a healthy environment while at the same time remaining competitive on the market.

The discussion with the audience highlighted various national experiences and perspectives with regard to sustainable forest management. **Christofer Fjellner MEP (EPP)** pointed out that forests play a central role both in the context of biodiversity conservation as well as in the shift to a bio-economy. However, it was underlined that forest management policy in Sweden has not equally pursued those two objectives to the detriment of the latter one. As a result, whilst biodiversity has been preserved at a very high level, many valuable resources provided by forest ecosystems have been underdeveloped. **Julie Girling MEP (ECR)** provided the British perspective underlining that reforestation is an urgent need in the UK, given that national policies so far have been ill-equipped to ensure the effective protection of forests. **Paul Brannen MEP (S&D)** emphasised the need for attaching more value to wood by making reference to the world's tallest wooden building that is currently under construction in Bergen, Norway. **Miapetra Kumpula-Natri MEP (S&D)** underlined the vital role of forest biomass in the context of bioeconomy, while raising concern about the issue of putting bioeconomy and bio-products in the circular economy package. **Peter Jahr MEP (EPP)** urged the scientific community to provide clear recommendations on how to achieve better and sustainable management of Europe's forests. **Philipp Freiherr von und zu Guttenberg** stressed the importance of engaging all involved stakeholders and considering all necessary facts, prior to applying any forest management strategy. It was also pointed out that whilst demand and price for timber in the EU has notably increased, surprisingly its supply has remained the same. Following the principle of subsidiarity, **Commissioner Phil Hogan** underlined the need to provide Member States with flexibility in both meeting their sustainability objectives and implementing sustainable forest management policies. Furthermore, concern was raised with regard to addressing the issues of job creation and waste, which, as stated, will have to be subject to further discussion.

Elisabeth Köstinger MEP closed the meeting by acknowledging the importance of the Working Group on "*Sustainable Forest Management*" in providing an adequate forum for constructive discourse and cooperation among stakeholders, and she announced that, following this kick-off event, more such meetings will be arranged in the next future.

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