

THE FOREST-BASED SECTOR IN A NEW EU FOREST STRATEGY 2015-2020**ADAM CRĂCIUNESCU, ION CHISĂLIȚĂ MIHAELA MOATĂR, SORIN STANCIU**

Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, Timisoara
Calea Aradului, no. 119, 300645, Romania
sorinmstanciu@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The socio-economic importance of forests is high, but often underestimated. Forests contribute to rural development and provide around three million jobs. Wood is still the main source of financial revenue from forests. So the strategy also looks at the EU forest-based industries, subject to EU industrial policy. Wood is also considered an important source of raw material for emerging bio-based industries. Forest biomass is currently the most important source of renewable energy and now accounts for around half of the EU's total renewable energy consumption. The strategy 2015-2020 and the implementation should build on existing legislation and international initiatives and consider the special situation of small forest owners, and address market-based private-sector tools such as certification. To deliver on common objectives and improve coherence and synergies, coordination with and between Member States is important. Member States are asked to consider the principles and goals of this strategy when setting up and implementing their action plans and national forest programmes.

Keywords: forest, strategy, management, ecosystem, biodiversity

INTRODUCTION

Forests and other wooded land cover over 40 % of the EU's land area, with a great diversity of character across regions. Afforestation and natural succession have increased the EU's forest area by around 0.4 % per year over recent decades. Globally, however, forest area continues to decrease. Currently in the EU, only 60-70 % of the annual increment is being cut, therefore the growing stock of wood is rising. However, according to Member States' projections under Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF), harvest rates are expected to increase by around 30% by 2020 as compared to 2010. Some 60 % of forests are owned by several millions of private owners, with numbers set to rise as restitution of forest ownership in some Member States continues.

The remainder belongs to the state and other public owners. Forests are multifunctional, serving economic, social and environmental purposes. They offer habitats for animals and plants and play a major role in mitigating climate change and other environmental services. Nearly a quarter of the EU's forest area is protected under Natura 2000, and much of the rest is home to species protected under EU nature legislation. Forests also offer wide societal benefits, including for human health, recreation and tourism.

According to the National Renewable Energy Action Plans, biomass used for heating, cooling and electricity would supply about 42% of the 20% renewable energy target for 2020. If this is achieved, the amount of wood used for energy purposes in the EU would be equivalent to today's total wood harvest. Forests also provide a large range of other products, such as cork, resins, mushrooms, nuts, game and berries.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Sustainable forest management means using forests and forest land in a way, and at a rate, that maintains their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality and their potential to fulfill, now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic and social functions, at local, national, and global levels, and that does not cause damage to other

ecosystems. While the Treaty on the Functioning the EU makes no reference to specific provisions for an EU forest policy, the EU has a long history of contributing through its policies to implementing sustainable forest management and to Member States' decisions on forests.

Important developments include the Europe 2020 strategy for growth and jobs, the Resource Efficiency Roadmap, Rural Development Policy, Industrial Policy, the EU Climate and Energy Package with its 2020 targets, the Plant Health and Reproductive Materials Strategy and the Biodiversity and Bioeconomy Strategies. Based on subsidiarity and shared responsibility, the 1998 EU Forestry Strategy established a framework for forest-related actions that support sustainable forest management and are based on cooperative, beneficial links between EU and Member State policies and initiatives (CIOLOAC ET AL., 2011). The Forest Action Plan 2007-2011 was an important instrument for implementing the strategy and addressed four objectives: competitiveness, environment, quality of life and coordination and communication.

Co-financing of forestry measures under the Rural Development Regulation has been and will remain the main means of EU-level funding. An ex-post evaluation of the Forest Action Plan underlined the need for a new forest strategy that: develops and implements a common vision of multifunctional and sustainable forest management in Europe; defines action priorities and targets; links EU and Member State funding strategies and plans; strengthens coherent cross-sectorial activity planning, funding and implementation; establishes clear mechanisms for monitoring, evaluating and reporting; and revises stakeholder involvement. This Communication supports these recommendations by providing strategic orientations (BANU ET AL., 2011).

RESULTS

Why a new framework is needed? Over the last 15 years, significant societal and political changes have influenced the way EU society looks at forests and forestry. The overall situation is characterized by growing demands on and threats to forests. At the same time, the increasing number of forest-related Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe creates a complex and fragmented forest-policy environment.

The increasing links between international food, feed, fiber and fuel markets are also causing unexpected market disturbances (SOLOMONESC ET AL., 2012). A new framework is needed to:

- Ensure that the multifunctional potential of EU forests is managed in a sustainable and balanced way, enabling our forests' vital ecosystem services to function correctly;
- Satisfy the growing demand for raw material for existing and new products (e.g. green chemicals or textile fibers) and for renewable energy. This demand is an opportunity to diversify markets, but poses a significant challenge for sustainable management and for balancing demands. Demand for new uses in the bioeconomy and in bioenergy should be coordinated with traditional demands, and respect sustainable BOUNDARIES (IOSIM ET AL., 2013);
- Respond to the challenges and opportunities that forest-based industries face in resource and energy efficiency, raw materials, logistics, structural adaptation, innovation, education, training and skills, international competition, climate policy beyond 2020 and information and communication, to stimulate growth;
- Protect forests and biodiversity from the significant effects of storms and fires, increasingly scarce water resources, and pests. These threats do not respect national borders and are exacerbated by climate change;

- Acknowledge that the EU does not only rely on its own production, and that its consumption has implications for forests worldwide;
- Develop an adequate information system to follow-up on all of the above. The EU needs a policy framework that coordinates and ensures coherence of forest-related policies and allows synergies with other sectors that influence forest management. It needs a new forest strategy that is a key reference in forest-related policy development. EU forests and forest sector need to be positioned in a way that ensures their contribution to the EU's objectives and targets.

CONCLUSIONS

This proposal promotes a coherent, holistic view of forest management, covers the multiple benefits of forests, integrates internal and external forest-policy issues, and addresses the whole forest value-chain. It identifies the key principles needed to strengthen sustainable forest management and improve competitiveness and job creation, in particular in rural areas, while ensuring forest protection and delivery of ecosystem services. It also specifies how the EU wishes to implement forest-related policies. For this strategy to be meaningful to those policies that require or might require evidence of sustainable forest management and to reach its goals, objective, ambitious and demonstrable sustainable forest management criteria that could be applied to all uses of forest biomass are needed (LILE, 2010).

The strategy, and its implementation, should build on existing legislation and international initiatives and consider the special situation of small forest owners, and address market-based private-sector tools such as certification (BANU C. ET AL., 2011). To deliver on common objectives and improve coherence and synergies, coordination with and between Member States is important. Member States are asked to consider the principles and goals of this strategy when setting up and implementing their action plans and national forest programmes. Networking opportunities and ways of exchanging information and best practices should be developed. Guiding principles are:

- Sustainable forest management and the multifunctional role of forests, delivering multiple goods and services in a balanced way and ensuring forest protection; (ORBOI, 2012).
- Resource efficiency, optimizing the contribution of forests and the forest sector to rural development, growth and job creation.
- Global forest responsibility, promoting sustainable production and consumption of forest products. Europe has a long tradition of sustainable forest management, which is reflected in the Forest Europe principles applied by Member States' policies and supported by the EU, in particular through rural development policy. It is a dynamic concept with international, regional and local layers that need to be implemented by forest managers on the ground.

Member States are bound by Forest Europe commitments to manage their forests sustainable, according to their national forest policies and legislation. When implementing this strategy, they should address sustainable forest management baselines, improve information exchange and disseminate good practice.

In the forest sector, resource efficiency means using forest resources in a way that minimizes impact on the environment and climate, and prioritizing the forest outputs that have higher added-value, create more jobs and contribute to a better carbon balance. The cascade use of Pan-European political process for the sustainable management of the

continent's forests wood fulfils these criteria. In some cases, different approaches may be necessary, for example in cases of changing demand or environmental protection.

Society has a growing need for forests. Covering large parts of rural areas, forests are also vital for the rural population because they support economic welfare and jobs. A sustainable, trained and safe workforce is one of the pillars of a more competitive forest sector. Well-managed forests with qualified forest managers, workers and entrepreneurs pave the way for a sustainable and competitive forest sector that plays an important role in rural development and in the whole economy while providing societal benefits. The Commission considers that rural development funds should be used to support the implementation of sustainable forest management. (STANCIU S. AND TABĂRĂ AMĂNAR C., 2011).

Member States should use the opportunities given in the new Rural Development Regulation and priorities investments in: modernizing forestry technologies; optimizing the sector's contribution to the bio-economy; improving the resilience, environmental value and mitigation potential of forest ecosystems. Under the cascade principle, wood is used in the following order of priorities: wood-based products, extending their service life, re-use, recycling, bio-energy and disposal; achieving nature and biodiversity objectives; adapting to climate change; conserving genetic resources; forest protection and information; and creating new woodland and agro-forestry systems.

A strategy for forests and the forest sector is necessary since there is no common EU forest policy or guiding framework for forest-related issues. Since a growing number of EU policies are making increasing demands on forests, there is a need to coordinate sectorial policies. There is also a need for an agreed holistic strategic vision on forest issues, and for ensuring that linked EU policies are fully taken into account in national forest policies. This will strengthen the capacity of forests and the forest-based sector to respond to developments in various policy areas.

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