



## Forestry Strategy

The Commission has recognised the need for a co-ordinated policy to be developed to ensure recognition for the diversity of European forests, their multifunctional roles and the need for environmental, economic and social sustainability. On 18 November 1998, it adopted a Communication (COM(98) 649) to the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament on a forestry strategy for the Union.

The forest area in the EU of 130 million hectares, represents 36 per cent of the total European area. Of this, 87 million hectares are exploitable forests (managed for wood production and services). The proportion of private forests is 65 per cent, with 12 million forest owners.

The Strategy, according to the Commission, should be considered as an essential contribution at EU level to the implementation of the international commitments on

the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests, as advocated by the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the Ministerial Conferences on the Protection of Forests in Europe (Strasbourg 1990, Helsinki 1993 and Lisbon 1998), as well as the international Conventions (climate change, biodiversity, desertification, transboundary air pollution), and the 5<sup>th</sup> Environmental Action Programme Towards Sustainability. These are to be implemented by means of national or sub-national forest programmes as part of measures taken by the EU when they can offer value added help.

The Treaties on European Union make no provision for a comprehensive common forestry policy. Within the Community context, forests and related industries have been until now run directly by the Member States or as part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) or Struc-

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tural Funds. For the first time, the Commission is paying heed to the links between forestry and industry. The aim is to improve coordination and the way national and Community policies and schemes complement each other, and for the Member States to retain power in this area out of respect for the subsidiarity principle. The forestry strategy recommended is primarily based on proposals in the Commission's Agenda 2000. For example:

- *Rural development support measures*, for protecting forests, developing and enhancing the socio-economic potential of forests, preserving and improving the ecological value and restoring damaged forest, promoting new outlets for the use of wood, extending forest areas, and education and training programmes.
- *Pre-accession measures for agriculture and rural development in the application countries of Central and Eastern Europe*: Community aid for the sustainable adaptation of the farm sector and rural areas in the implementation of the EU's legislative achievements as regards the Common Agricultural Policy and related policies, and help for the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests in Central and Eastern Europe.

The Commission also stresses the need to take account of a number of issues that have a direct bearing on forests, such as the certification of forests that are

sustainably managed (assessment criteria and principles to apply in this area), conservation and improvement of biodiversity, creation of protected areas, wood as a source of energy, and forests in the context of climate change (carbon cycle).

The Strategy is in line with general principles such as free movement of goods, no distortion of competition, and the EU's international obligations. It is also intended to help the competitiveness of the EU's forestry sector in due course while furthering the principle of integration of sustainable development and environmental protection in forest-related policies.

It is estimated that forest-based industries' production value amounts to almost ECU 300 billion, representing 10 per cent of the total for all manufacturing. About 2.2 million people are employed in forest-based industries.

One of the main industries concerned, the paper industry, broadly welcomes the Commission's approach but feels it falls down by continuing to regard forestry as a separate industry.

The issue of Community support for the use of wood as a source of energy is currently being discussed within the framework the Agenda 2000 proposal on rural development, and the proposed strategy will help fuel this debate. (MJ) □



Courtesy: Species