

# Outlines of environmental policy concerning forests in the European Community<sup>\*)</sup>

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The EC has no *official* forest policy — and has never had one — since wood as product was not included in Article 38 of the Treaty of Rome.

There have been several attempts at formulating an actual forest policy in the EC. In 1978 there were advanced and tangible plans, but they were rejected, especially because of opposition from Great Britain, Germany and Denmark. This was done primarily to avoid the financially onerous schemes like those of the agricultural sector. There is a deficiency of wood products in the present EC and until now there has been no need for market schemes for wood.

A consequence of Denmark's and other countries' opposition has been that forest policy in the EC has been (sometimes more or less by chance) an appendage to regional, agricultural, and environmental policy. Forest policy has been a mean in other sector policies rather than a topic in its own right.

When the Single European Act was adopted in 1987 the structural funds were doubled. Large financial resources have become available for a redistribution of EC's agricultural support systems as well as for initiatives which will improve the environment. Forestry measures form a growing part hereof, but still as a mean to obtain other objectives.

Though the Single European Act does not at present implement a common forest policy directly, the Act implies that decisions taken on the environment require a majority voting. The development will be further intensified by this and by the reform of the common agricultural policy.

There will be a substantial need for common strategies concerning forestry and for increased

involvement by forestry professionals in political issues concerning forestry.

## The first Forestry Action Programme

In May 1989 the EC adopted the so-called "Forestry Action Programme" focusing on four themes:

- forest protection,
- support for the afforestation of agricultural land,
- the development and optimal utilization of woodlands,
- the establishing of "The Standing Forestry Committee" under the Directorate General for Agriculture.

In this article the focus will be on the first theme, the other three having been treated in the preceding article.

## Forest protection

EC Regulations (No 3528/86, No 1613/89 and No 2157/92) on the protection of forests against *atmospheric pollution* aimed to help Member States:

- establish a network to monitor the health of forests,
- carry out projects aiming to improve understanding of the phenomenon of forest dieback.

The Regulations were extended in 1992. To the European network of sample tree observation points will be added a network for the intensive monitoring of the forest ecosystem. This new measure should enable an improvement of knowledge of the complex interaction between the forest ecosystem and pollutants. The measures contained in these Regulations are enabling the Community to take an active part in the concerted international programme for the assessment

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and monitoring of the effects of atmospheric pollution of forests (Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (Geneva, 1979); Pan-European Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (Strasbourg, 1990); Ministerial Conference for the Protection of Forests in Europe (Helsinki, 1993)).

The Community has also for several years financed *fire-prevention* measures (Regulations (EC) No 269/79 and No 1610/89 IMP and under Regulations (EC) No 3529/86, No 1614/89 and No 2158/92).

Extensive amendments to these Regulations were approved in 1992 with the aim of:

- financing projects forming of a coherent strategy for the protection of forests against fire in regions with a high fire risk. These measures would cover the whole range of protective measures (combating the cause of fires, prevention, monitoring and fire-fighting),
- creating a Community information system on forest fires to enable the efficiency of protection systems to be improved. This system forms part of the Pan-European data bank on forest fires (decided at the Pan-European Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, in Strasbourg, 1990).

## UNCED 1992

At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, in Rio de Janeiro, 1992) forests played a key role. The adoption of a declaration on the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests belongs to the important achievements of the conference. Within the framework of that declaration, signatory countries have adopted a list of principles to be implemented for the conservation and the sustainable utilisation and development of forests.

At the Lisbon Summit (June 27th, 1992), the European Council welcomed the agreements of UNCED and announced an eight point programme for their implementation at EC level. Two points of this programme directly concern the forestry sector:

1. The Community and its Member States undertake to publish national plans for the implementation of the forest principles.
2. The Community and its Member States will put their weight behind establishing an international review process for the forest principles.

The adoption of the Rio Declaration on forests by the European Community and its Member States, as well as the expiring of the first four year period of the first Forestry Action Programme adopted in 1989, has led the Commission to propose to the Council to:

- adopt a new Community Forestry Strategy which takes into account the principle of subsidiarity and the UNCED agreements on forests, the basic objectives of which are the management, conservation and sustainable development of the Community's forests;
- approve the priorities of a second Forestry Action Programme, of which the Commission will submit to the Council a detailed proposal at a later stage;
- decide upon the procedures for the coordination and establishment by the Member States of national plans and reports for the implementation of the UNCED declaration on forests.

## The European Community's new Forestry Strategy

A new European Community Forestry Strategy has been proposed to The Standing Forestry Committee in 1993 in the context of the follow-up of UNCED.

The proposed new European Community Forestry Strategy intends to define the role and the obligations of the Community and its Member States in the implementation of the UNCED declaration on forests. The strategy is based on following three important and interdependent principles:

- subsidiarity,
- solidarity and cohesion,
- cooperation and coordination.

Following the subsidiarity principle, the Community acts only if the interest of the Community as a whole is concerned and as far as the objectives of the action considered cannot be sufficiently realised by the Member States and, consequently, because the dimensions and effects of the action can be better realised with a Community participation.

The global dimension of the threats that constitute global warming, the loss of biodiversity, erosion and desertification, and the important role which forests play in this context show that in the forestry sector many objectives which have to be considered today are beyond the single

national interest of Member States.

The first objective of the proposed European Community Forestry Strategy is *the optimal utilisation of forest resources, based on the sustainable management of the heritage*. The economic interest of well managed and utilised forests is the best guarantee for their conservation. Unfortunately, many forests have lost this interest notably due to the rural exodus, the absence of any organisations for private forest owners, the evolution of market conditions and the lack of infrastructures. These forests have to be revalued and managed in a sustainable way.

The second objective of the proposed strategy is *the conservation of the Community's forest heritage*. It includes the protection of forests against atmospheric pollution, fire and pests, as well as the conservation of forest genetic resources, protective management of fragile forest ecosystems and the reconstitution of forests damaged or destroyed by factors such as atmospheric pollution and fires.

The third important objective of the proposed European Community Forestry Strategy has to be *the extension of the forest areas and the development of the forestry sector*. The extension of the forest areas as foreseen by the UNCED declaration on forests and chapter 11 of Agenda 21 is a task of global importance and impact.

With Regulation (EC) No 2080/92 (afforestation of agricultural land) the Community now has a valuable instrument for this purpose. Nevertheless, it is necessary to develop an active afforestation policy, based on this regulation and using its instruments and means, which not only responds to the agricultural problems which were at the origine of the this regulation, but also to the afforestation goals as announced at the UNCED.

The fourth objective of the proposed strategy is *the reinforcement of forestry research and information*. In reality this objective covers accompanying measures, essential to reach the three first objectives: The development of forestry information and research programmes at Community level. The Community intervention in these essential fields is justified by the limitations of the possibilities existing at a national level, the dimension of the tasks and the increased efficiency of coordinated efforts in this field. The common action is consequently based on common interest, cooperation and coordination.

## The second Forestry Action Programme

Taking into account the above-mentioned strategy and an evaluation of the results of the first four year Forestry Action Programme (1989-1992), the Commission has proposed to elaborate, in close cooperation with the Standing Forestry Committee, a new programme for immediate actions covering the coming four years. This programme will focalize on the following priorities:

1. *Utilisation and sustainable management of forests*  
Actions already under way within the framework of the reform of the structural funds in objective 1 and 5 b regions will be continued and extended to other forested regions of the Community. Furthermore, it is considered necessary to adopt Community guidelines for the sustainable management of forests. All future financial participation of the Community in afforestation, reforestation, forest improvement and forest utilisation projects should be conditioned by the application of such guidelines.
2. *Conservation of the Community's forest heritage*  
Actions already engaged concerning the protection of forests against atmospheric pollution and fire will be continued and their budgetary provisions will be adapted to the effective needs. As an example: For 1993 the request of Member States for Community financial assistance under the existing scheme amounts to about 50 million ECU whereas the available budget is less than 15 million.  
Furthermore, it is necessary to engage a Community action for the reconstitution of forests destroyed or damaged by atmospheric pollution, fires or epidemics.  
Finally, the Community action should cover the conservation of forest genetic resources, including the establishment of a conservation network and coordinated actions for the in situ and ex situ conservation of the Community's most important tree species.
3. *Extension of the Community's forest area*  
The measures already engaged for the afforestation of agricultural land (Regulation (EC) 2080/92) should be continued and if necessary, their field of application should be extended. Important afforestation efforts should notably be concentrated on land susceptible for erosion or desertification.
4. *Development of forest information and research*  
This includes the full implementation of the Euro-

pean Forestry Information and Communication System (EFICS) set up by the Council in 1989 (Regulation (EC) No 1615/89) and the continuation and strengthening of forestry research programmes already engaged within the framework of the Community's Research and Development Programmes. In particular, a special thematic core on sustainable management and development of forests could be foreseen within the new Community Framework Programme of Research and Development for 1994-1997.

### **Conservation of habitats**

In 1992 the European Council approved a *directive on the conservation of natural and semi-*

*natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora* (EC No 43/92). So far this directive has not had any major influence on forestry in the EC. But it is believed that that might be the case in the future.

### **Final remarks**

This outline of environmental policy concerning forests in the EC is not exhaustive. Forest policy in the EC is as mentioned an appendage to regional, agricultural, and environmental policy, and therefore it is difficult to present an exhaustive and simple overview. However, it is believed and hoped that the most important issues have been covered.