The EU Forest Strategy for 2030

Enhancing the resilience of forests and regional value chains

EUROMONTANA'S FEEDBACK TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S ROADMAP FOR THE 2030 FOREST STRATEGY

DECEMBER 2020

Forests are the most common land cover of mountains in continental Europe, covering 41% of the total area (EEA, 2010). Mountain forests provide multiple functions, essential for human activities. These include not only the production of wood but also the provision of ecosystem services, such as protection against natural hazards, conservation of fauna and flora, landscapes, regulation of water supplies, and carbon storage.

Protection of forests habitats and species

Mountain forests are rich of different habitats and species, including endemic ones, in particular in Mediterranean countries. At the same time, they are particularly vulnerable to forest fires due to land abandonment and climate change. In 2019, 50% of forest fires in Europe occurred in Natura2000 sites, primarily in Romanian, French and Italian mountains (JRC, Forest Fires in Europe, 2020).

Euromontana therefore expects the new EU Forest Strategy to bring solutions for forest protections and their adequate management. In particular, we call for the European Commission to promote more integrated approaches to natural hazards management, for example including forestry, agriculture and tourism activities, and further training of risk experts. The danger of forest fires is ever increasing with climate change. The need for robust intervention forces (firefighting) and early warning increases.

Social innovation can also play a role in raising awareness on the importance of forests and on their protection, its contribution should therefore be enhanced in EU countries. Concrete proposals can be found in the SIMRA (Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas) research project and more specifically on its forestry brochure.

Setting up an EU mechanism of compensation for ecosystem services should also be considered in the Forest Strategy in order to encourage the protection of forests and their ecosystems, to prevent against natural risks such as rock falls on roads and to retribute forest owners for carbon sequestration.

Increasing forests' resilience towards natural hazards should also be achieved through research, with more focused projects in European research and environmental programmes. The study and monitoring of forest genetic biodiversity can for instance provide evidence on their ability to adapt to climate change. Moreover, the exchange of good practices and experiences should be further encouraged at EU level beyond the project's level; this would fit in the activities of the EIP-AGRI and future CAP network.

Protection of landscapes

In its report on the new EU Forest Strategy, the European Parliament "welcomes afforestation and reforestation as suitable tools in enhancing forest cover, especially on abandoned land that is not suitable for food production, close to urban and peri-urban areas as well as in mountainous areas, where appropriate". Likewise, the Europe Commission plans to set up a "a roadmap for planting at least three billion additional trees in the EU by 2030".

If planting more trees can be welcome in many areas, Euromontana alerts against such afforestation without taking into appropriate consideration the territory. Indeed, in some mountain areas, it would close landscapes and damage other habitats and cause irreversible biodiversity losses. Large scale afforestation of natural grasslands or culturally rich historical small-scale landscapes can lead to the loss of specific species, as it is happening in the Alps where meadows and open spaces are disappearing. Thus, a place-based approach is particularly important in mountain areas. In agreement with EUSTAFOR, Euromontana considers that restoration objectives must be precise and based on scientific knowledge and specific causes of forest ecosystem degradation must be identified. Adapted management practices should be encouraged without forgetting the market opportunities provided by wood when forests are correctly managed.

Protection of mountains' local economy

Euromontana wants to insist on the necessity to develop a balanced Strategy, in respect of the different existing uses of forests.

The timber industry is a key sector in mountain areas, it creates jobs and contributes to keeping our territories dynamic. Moreover, the wood value chain in mountainous regions can contribute to achieve the Green Deal's objective by proposing cheap biomass heating alternatives to fuel as well as by developing new products from wood waste, in a logic of circular economy. Therefore, the Commission should for example encourage research and innovation on wood stoves and promote the subsidy of biomass heating plant in remote mountain villages. Experiences, notably from the Smart Village of Cozzano, in Corsica, demonstrate the benefits in terms of reduction of the use of fossil fuels energies as well as in structuration of circular economy regional value chains for wood waste. Such subsidy for biomass heating plant should be encouraged in ERDF funds. In addition, the different non-timber forest products should also be considered in the new Forest Strategy for their interesting development potential. To strengthen forestry value chains, Euromontana also recommends boosting digitalisation in mountain areas in order to support SMEs from the sector. Moreover, the creation of Geographical

Indications for non-agricultural products is another interesting tool to valorise regional producers and non-relocatable products, as demonstrated by the "Jura wood" Protected Designation of Origin.

Yet, the use of wood and wooden products can be encouraged only if originating from sustainably managed forests. Illegal logging remains a huge problem in some East-European countries. The EU Forest Strategy must therefore put forward concrete measures to combat this practice as well as encourage the certification of sustainably managed forest plots.

Finally, we call for preserving mountain forests that can capture CO_2, a long-term planning for the regeneration of species as well as an improved governance of forest management in terms of production and land policy.

Euromontana - the European Association for mountain areas

Euromontana is the European Association for mountain areas. Founded in 1996, it assembles around 65 organisations (regions, universities, chambers of commerce, of agriculture, development and environmental agencies) from 15 European countries in and out of the EU. Dedicated to the improvement of the quality of life of mountain people, Euromontana is working on different themes of crucial importance for mountain areas, such as cohesion policy, rural development, climate change, innovation, mountain products, tourism, agriculture and forestry, transport, youth among others. Euromontana is also officially supporting the RUMRA (Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas) & Smart Villages intergroup of the European Parliament.

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