

## THE NEW EU FOREST STRATEGY AND PERSPECTIVES FOR THE BALTIC SEA REGION

The CPMR Baltic Sea Commission Working Group on Energy and Climate will organise a meeting on 21 January 2021 dedicated to the future of the EU Forest Strategy. The Strategy will be closely linked to the [EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy](#) (presented in the spring of 2020). This background paper aims to provide a brief overview of recent EU developments related to the topic and set out the key issues at stake for the Baltic Sea Regions.

Among the key questions to be addressed during the meeting:

- What is the vision and overall objectives of the new EU Forest Strategy?
- How will the multi-functional role of forests be reflected in the new Strategy?
- How will the EU Forest Strategy contribute to the Green Deal objectives?
- How can the new Strategy contribute to the recovery of European economies?
- How will the Forest and Biodiversity Strategies relate to each other?
- How will different objectives be balanced in the new EU Forest Strategy?

### 1. Towards a new EU Forest Strategy in line with the Green Deal Agenda

EU forest policies build on subsidiarity and shared responsibility to set up their respective frameworks for forest-related actions. **European legislation (such as the Common Agricultural Policy), actions and measures** influence national policies. For example, a million hectares of forest are part of the Natura 2000 nature protection network, set up under the EU Environmental Policy. The framework for forest actions is the **EU's Forest Strategy** (2013-2020), that is now expiring.

**The EU is now revising its Forest Strategy for the post-2020 period**, to take into account the objectives of the Green Deal Agenda, which set out that the EU should become a sustainable and climate neutral economy by 2050. The future Forest Strategy also **builds on the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy**. The new strategy should cover the **whole forest cycle and promote the many services that forests provide**. The update of the Strategy aims to strengthen the role of the EU Strategy for Forests and the forestry sector, including the importance of forests to society, and encourage sustainable forest measures.

At the end of 2020, the **European Commission** launched a [roadmap on the new European Union Forest Strategy](#) which aimed to inform about the Commission's work and collect feedback from stakeholders. **The Strategy is planned to be published during the first quarter of 2021** and will be co-drafted by the Commission's agriculture, environment, and climate departments, and will set out a long-term vision for the forest sector.

**The European Parliament adopted a Resolution “The European Forest Strategy - The Way Forward” (Own Initiative Report) in October 2020**, in which the European Parliament emphasised that the future EU Forest Strategy should seek **the right balance and synergies between the need to increase forest protection and restoration efforts to achieve the EU's climate and biodiversity objectives** on



the one hand, **and the different socio-economic interests related to forests as well as many value chains**, on the other which together needs a holistic policy development. It also stressed that forestry has a huge potential to create jobs and growth.

## 2. Forestry - a crucial sector for the Baltic Sea Regions

**The forest sector represents important environmental, economic, and social aspects in the Baltic Sea Region.** Forests play an important role in mitigating climate change, both as carbon sinks and in providing substitutional carbon-binding materials and products (timber, energy, paper). Forests also provide a vital value in terms of human recreation, health benefits and outdoor life. **The forest sector is crucial for national and regional economies around the Baltic Sea.** A significant number of people draw their income directly from the forest and the wood value chain.

In total, forests cover **43% of the EU's land area**. The six **EU Member States with the largest forest areas are Sweden, Finland, Spain, France, Germany and Poland**. **About 48% of the Baltic Sea Region is forested, with Sweden and Finland containing the majority of the forest.** Finland is Europe's most heavily forested country, with 74% of the land area. Sweden is covered by 69% forest. In Estonia, forests cover about 50% of the country's territory. In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, forests cover 24% of the region.

## 3. Key issues at stake for Baltic Sea Regions regarding the revision of the EU Forest Strategy post-2020

- The governance: Importance of involving Regional Authorities with their special expertise and competences in the geographical area in the revision process and in the implementation of the new EU Forest Strategy. The new Strategy should rely on a holistic approach to ensure coherence, involving academia, the private and the public sectors.
- A Strategy relying on a place-based approach: The new Strategy should take into account national and regional differences in the EU in terms of forest lands, forestry and biodiversity.
- Support the diverse economic use of forests: Substitute fossil raw materials with bio-based carbon-binding (carbon storage) resources (for example building material, forest products such as furniture, textiles and bio-chemicals and plastics as well as biofuels) and at the same time maintain sustainable forest management practices, as well as implement sustainable consumption and production patterns including utmost resource efficiency.
- Need for an appropriate recognition of the multi-functional and cross-cutting role of forests: Emphasise the biological, economic, and social values of forests in the fight against climate change.
- Fostering skills and investments in human capital related to the forest sector: It is important to provide new training, skills and jobs reflecting the multiple functions of forests, not least in rural areas.
- Forest-related research and innovation to strengthen the bioeconomy: R&I is essential to improve our knowledge of forests and to optimise their composition, sustainable management and use.
- Nature tourism: The forest is also a place for outdoor life and recreation and contributes to tourism and health benefits.
- The importance of bio-based energy: Emphasise that efficient and sustainable use of biomass, including forest biomass is required to meet the EU's Climate and Energy Policy objectives.
- Preservation of biodiversity: There is a need to continue reviewing and improving forest management practices in a manner that benefits the biodiversity of the forest.
- The importance of forests to reach the goal of carbon-neutrality: A sustainable forest management contributes to the resilience of the forest and plays an important role, through carbon capture (carbon sinks) and substitution, in the fight against climate change. The future Strategy should reflect the invaluable role of the forest, the forest sector and sustainable forestry, anchored in an ambitious Climate Policy and the transition to a circular bioeconomy.