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The European Forest Strategy - The Way Forward

(2019/2157(INI))

Motion for a resolution (Rule 181(3) of the Rules of Procedure) replacing non-legislative motion for a resolution A9-0154/2020**European Parliament resolution on the European Forest Strategy – the way forward***The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the Commission communication of 11 December 2019 on ‘The European Green Deal’ (COM(2019)0640), to the Commission communication of 20 May on the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (COM(2020)0380), and to its resolutions of 15 January 2020 on the European Green Deal¹ and of 16 January 2020 on the 15th meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity²,
- having regard to the New York Declaration on Forests, ratified on 23 June 2014 by the European Union,
- having regard to its resolution of 28 April 2015 on ‘A new EU Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest-based sector’³,
- having regard to the Commission communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 23 July 2019 entitled ‘Stepping up EU Action to Protect and Restore the World’s Forests’ (COM(2019)0352),
- having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee of 30 October 2019 on the report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the

¹ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0005.

² Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0015.

³ OJ C 346, 21.9.2016, p. 17.

Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 7 December 2018 entitled ‘Progress in the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy - “A new EU Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest sector”’,

- having regard to the Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services published by the Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IBPES) on 31 May 2019,
 - having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions of 10 and 11 April 2019 on the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy,
 - having regard to the Mid-Term Review of the Biodiversity Strategy to 2020,
 - having regard to the 2050 Climate Strategy,
 - having regard to the responsibilities of the EU Member States under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD),
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the opinions of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (A9-0154/2020),
- A. whereas forests and other wooded land have grown substantially in the EU between 1990 and 2015 as a result of targeted programmes and natural growth, covering 43 % of the EU’s territory, equivalent to 182 million hectares, and accounting for 5 % of the world’s total forests; whereas forest areas make up half of the Natura 2000 network; whereas some Member States, with more than half of their territories covered by forests, are dependent on forestry; whereas 60 % of forests in the EU are privately owned, mostly by small-scale owners with less than three hectares of forest; whereas forests host a significant part of Europe’s terrestrial biodiversity;
- B. whereas the EU has committed to the Aichi Targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity, such as target 7 requiring that by 2020 areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are managed sustainably, thus ensuring conservation of biodiversity, but the EU is not set to achieve these targets;
- C. whereas forests are circular ecosystems based on full recycling of matter and nutrients within them; whereas any form of active management is based on exploitation of resources from these ecosystems, which inevitably and negatively affects their functioning, structure and biodiversity;
- D. whereas many aspects of forests and forestry are regulated under EU legislation such as the Birds and Habitats Directives, the common agricultural policy (CAP), the Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) Regulation, the Renewable Energy Directive

and the Timber Regulation;

- E. whereas, according to the European Environment Agency's report on 'The European Environment – state and outlook 2020', long-term trends in bird populations, including common forest birds, demonstrate that Europe has experienced a massive decline in biodiversity, with intensive forest management being identified as one of the drivers⁴; whereas, according to the same report, Europe is facing environmental challenges of an unprecedented scale and urgency; whereas urgent action is needed over the next 10 years to address the alarming rate of biodiversity loss, the increasing impacts of climate change and the overconsumption of natural resources;
- F. whereas, unlike younger, managed forests, large trees and intact, older forests provide essential habitat and are essential stocks of carbon that cannot be replaced for at least 100-150 years if harvested; whereas old forests continue to remove and store carbon from the atmosphere, including in forest soil; whereas primary forests have almost disappeared in the EU;
- G. whereas the Commission's 2018 report on progress in the implementation of the current EU forest strategy states that the implementation of the EU biodiversity policy remains a major challenge and that 'reports on conservation of forest habitats and species show no improvement so far'; whereas, for the period 2007-2012, Member States reported that only 26 % of forest species and 15 % of forest habitats of European interest, as listed in the Habitats Directive, were in 'favourable conservation status'; whereas the quality of forests in the EU has been declining for a long time; whereas illegal logging is still an unresolved issue in some Member States;
- H. whereas, in accordance with Article 4 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the environment is a shared competence between the Union and its Member States; whereas Article 191 of the TFEU provides that EU policy on the environment shall, inter alia, aim for a high level of protection; whereas the Court of Justice has ruled that forests are part of the EU's natural heritage and are thus covered by Article 191⁵;
- I. whereas Parliament declared a climate and environment emergency on 28 November 2019⁶
- J. whereas forests are an integral part of sustainable development; whereas in order to help tackle biodiversity loss and climate crises, it is essential that forests are protected, restored and managed in such a way as to maximise their capacity for carbon storage and biodiversity protection; whereas intact ecosystems have greater capability than degraded ones to overcome environmental stressors, including changes to climate, as they have inherent properties that enable them to maximise their adaptive capacity; whereas, unlike younger and managed forests, large trees and intact, older forests

⁴ European Environment Agency report on 'The European Environment – state and outlook 2020', page 83.

⁵ Judgment of the Court (Fifth Chamber) of 25 February 1999 in joined cases C-164/97 and C-165/97, *European Parliament v Council of the European Union*, ECLI:EU:C:1999:99, paragraph 16.

⁶ European Parliament resolution of 28 November 2019 on the climate and environment emergency, Texts adopted P9_TA(2019)0078.

provide essential habitat and more carbon dioxide (CO₂) storage whereas interconnected forest habitats and forest corridors are key to securing the survival of endangered flora and fauna;

- K. whereas forests and forest areas have a multifunctional role as they are circular ecosystems, founded on full recycling of matter and nutrients, and are crucial for regulating the water cycle, including as water retention to prevent flooding, absorbing CO₂, storing carbon, hosting terrestrial biodiversity, and providing close-to-nature recreation and well-being possibilities, as well as contributing to economic growth and employment in rural and urban areas, where the EU forestry sector is an important pillar employing more than 3 million people; whereas these jobs are dependent on resilient forest ecosystems in the long term;
- L. whereas the EU has committed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including goal 15, which is to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss;
- M. whereas forests contribute effectively to territorial balance, economic growth and employment in rural and urban areas, and help maintain the competitiveness of the forestry sector; whereas a balanced approach to all forest functions is key to ensuring consistency between forest-related policies; whereas it is important to underline the continuous efforts undertaken by forest owners and managers to ensure sustainable forest development, and the importance of further enhancing their potential to achieve the objectives of the European Green Deal and the development of the bio-economy while guaranteeing ecosystem services and biodiversity; whereas EU forest owners and managers have a long tradition of and experience in managing multifunctional forests; whereas, however, owing to current challenges, a good knowledge of forest ecology is required, including in order to tackle natural disturbances;
- N. whereas global demand for authentic wild nature is growing, and public support for strict protection of forest ecosystems has increased significantly;
- O. whereas genetic variety in forests is essential for adapting to changing environmental conditions such as climate change and for restoring biodiversity;
- P. whereas the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Land Use finds that commercial forestry has contributed to increasing net greenhouse gas emissions, loss of natural ecosystems, and declining biodiversity;
- Q. whereas Europe's forests are of immense value for climate mitigation, since forest ecosystems absorb and store around 10 % of Europe's greenhouse gas emissions, and there is potential to increase that capacity; whereas forests also provide a renewable and climate-friendly raw material that acts as a substitute for energy-intensive materials and fossil fuels; whereas, however, the principle of 'cascading' should be recognised and used as a beneficial way of improving resource efficiency in the new forest strategy; whereas forests store and absorb about 2.5 times more CO₂ in soil than in tree biomass; whereas forests disturbed by fires and logging have experienced soil loss of up to 26.6 %; whereas the importance of complex forest ecosystems and of mature forests must be highlighted;;

- R. whereas ‘proforestation’ is the practice of letting forests grow to their maximum ecological capacity to store carbon and reach their full biodiversity potential;
- S. whereas, in order to preserve the full scale of forest biodiversity and functionality and respect the need for mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, with the LULUCF Regulation recognising that a carbon pool of deadwood in the forest is analogous to long-lived harvested wood products, as its carbon does not undergo instantaneous oxidisation and provides crucial microhabitats on which a number of species, including protected ones, are dependent, it is crucially important to protect a proportion of forest areas from any form of active human intervention; whereas new climate change adaptation and mitigation options have been devised, including proforestation⁷ and close-to-nature forestry;
- T. whereas, according to the IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of 2019, nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history and 1 million animal and plant species are at risk of extinction;
- U. whereas the CAP is the main source of EU funds for forest management;
- V. whereas plantations are often monocultures, which contain less biodiversity than natural and semi-natural forests, and are less resilient to climate change, thus leading to more carbon losses due to natural disturbances;
- W. whereas different types of cutting have different impacts on forests’ carbon dioxide storage capacities, soil quality and conservation status; whereas clear-cutting of large areas is the most damaging method, since it removes much of the organic matter and roots from the soil, causes the release of carbon stored in the soil (which is around 2.5 times as much as that stored in tree biomass) and significantly damages the complex structure of the forest and its dependent ecosystems;
- X. whereas bioenergy subsidies lead to worsening of the ratio of wood use between material and energy use, and at the same time to an artificial increase in the supply of biomass⁸, thus lowering the capacity of forests to sequester carbon;
- Y. whereas subsidies for different renewable energy sources help kick-start the sector; whereas the solar and wind energy sectors and related technologies can sustain themselves without subsidies after initial scaling up; whereas, however, this is not true for bioenergy, which is a sector that functions only thanks to subsidies;
- Z. whereas data available on forests at EU level is incomplete and of varying quality, which hampers EU and Member State coordination of forest management and

⁷ ‘Proforestation: growing existing forests intact to their ecological potential’, as in William R. Moomaw, ‘2019: Intact Forests in the United States: Proforestation Mitigates Climate Change and Serves the Greatest Good’, in *Frontiers in Forests and Global Change*.

⁸ Joint Research Centre of the European Commission report of 2018 entitled ‘Biomass production, supply, uses and flows in the European Union’: ‘Indeed, targets for renewable energy set by the EU have resulted in a surge in the consumption of woody biomass.’. Estimates for energy use of wood: 42 % (2005), 43 % (2010), 48 % currently, while energy uses are likely underreported.

conservation;

- AA. whereas rampant deforestation is one of the factors that have created a ‘perfect storm’ for the spillover of diseases from wildlife to people⁹;
- AB. whereas the EU has a responsibility to ensure that our consumption patterns and imports from third countries do not contribute to deforestation or forest degradation, nor to the conversion or degradation of other natural ecosystems, in other parts of the world;
1. Welcomes the Commission’s decision to propose a new forest strategy; stresses the need for the forest strategy to observe the principle of subsidiarity; stresses the need for the forest strategy to recognise the EU’s competences in protection of the environment, including forests; recalls that, under Article 191 of the TFEU, EU policy on the environment must contribute, among other objectives, to preserving, protecting and improving the quality of the environment, and to the prudent and rational utilisation of natural resources; recalls that several pieces of EU legislation affect forests and forest management; emphasises, in this regard, the need for a holistic and consistent forest strategy that enhances the multifunctional role of forests and the forest-based sector in the EU, and that promotes the far-reaching societal, economic and environmental benefits of forests with full respect for the EU’s climate and environmental objectives; emphasises the need for clear prioritisation with climate and biodiversity protection as central and interconnected objectives in the new EU forest strategy; underlines the urgent need to prevent and manage natural disturbances; highlights that the forest strategy should be consistent with the European Green Deal and aligned with the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy;
 2. Observes that, according to the European Environment Agency, urban woods also make a by no means insignificant contribution to combating climate change and its impact on health, and draws attention to their particularly vital function for town- and city-dwellers as places of recreation and as natural surroundings; stresses that, in addition to woods in rural areas, urban woodlands and the interaction of woods and trees with urban and periurban areas should also be evaluated, particularly with reference to the persistent droughts, and that their function for these communities should be better understood;
 3. Emphasises the need for a holistic and consistent forest strategy that enhances the multifunctional role and sustainability of forests and the forest-based sector in the EU, and that promotes the far-reaching environmental, societal, economic and cultural benefits of forests; emphasises, in this regard, that urgent action needs to be taken as a priority to prevent and manage the natural challenges and existing pressures that forests face, and to tackle deforestation;
 4. Underlines that the new forest strategy should serve as a central policy instrument in the EU for efficient coordination of forest-related policies and initiatives as part of the European Green Deal; calls on the Commission and the Member States to consider

⁹ IPBES Expert Guest Article entitled ‘COVID-19 Stimulus Measures Must Save Lives, Protect Livelihoods, and Safeguard Nature to Reduce the Risk of Future Pandemics’, by Professors Josef Settele, Sandra Díaz and Eduardo Brondizio and Dr Peter Daszak, 27 April 2020.

introducing targets for forest cover with a view to sustainably increasing current levels while endorsing the 2030 targets on protected areas, including forests, and restoration in line with the EU's biodiversity strategy and Parliament's calls¹⁰ for curbing deforestation and improving the quality of existing forests and woodland; considers that the forest strategy should include adequate instruments to reach these goals;

5. Stresses that forests make up almost half of the total surface area of Natura 2000 sites (i.e. 37.5 million hectares) and that 23 % of all forests in Europe are within these sites, for which forests are of crucial importance¹¹; underlines, in this context, the urgent need to honour the Commission's pledge to adopt a zero-tolerance approach to non-compliance with environmental legislation and in particular to prioritise effective enforcement of EU nature legislation, including adequate management plans for Natura 2000 sites, and to assess whether sufficient funds have been provided for the protection of forests in Natura 2000 sites, including through infringement proceedings; points out, in this regard, that there are five major challenges for the implementation of Natura 2000 in forests:

- (1) the balance between conserving biodiversity and timber production,
- (2) integrating conservation and the requirements of local stakeholders,
- (3) climate change,
- (4) the lack of funding, and
- (5) conflict with other sectoral policies;

with that in mind, calls on the Commission and the Member States:

- (1) to improve communication and transparency,
- (2) to place more emphasis on the science behind conservation when drawing up management strategies and in responding to climate change,
- (3) to involve the general public more in formulating and implementing policy,
- (4) to put in place an effective funding strategy,
- (5) to establish an integrated European land-use and conservation policy, and
- (6) to improve knowledge about the implementation of Natura 2000 in forests, and about the effects of Natura 2000 on biodiversity, forest management and other uses of land throughout the EU;

6. Notes that safeguarding and sustainably managing our forests makes a core contribution

¹⁰ European Parliament resolution of 16 January 2020 on the 15th meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0015.

¹¹ European Environment Agency, 'European Forest Ecosystems – State and Trends', 2016.

to our general well-being, and should not be subject to competition law; recalls that forests are a home for public-interest activities in the fields of leisure and health, as well as education;

7. Observes that, with reference to the multifunctional role of forests, all aspects need to be promoted: the protective function of forests as a habitat for countless animal and plant species, the utility function of forests as sources of wood and other products, and the protective function of forests for flora and fauna; stresses that the ecological, economic and social functions of forests must be considered in connection with each another;
8. Takes the view that it is of the utmost importance that access to EU support for forests be simplified and red tape cut, taking into account the difficulties faced by small and medium-sized land owners and even by some public entities;
9. Stresses that there are diverging views on the CO₂ absorption capacities of different kinds of forest, and that scientific research indicates that resilient, healthy and biodiverse forests absorb more CO₂ than intensively harvested forests; urges, therefore, that the new forest strategy should promote sustainable forest management; recalls that the EU and its Member States have committed to apply the definition and principles of sustainable forest management (SFM)¹²; notes, however, that the Commission is developing an EU-level definition of sustainable forest management, which should be based on the highest sustainability standards, with protection of biodiversity and valuable carbon sinks as central elements; highlights the overall climate benefits stemming from forests and the forest-based value chain, namely improved CO₂ sequestration, carbon storage and sustainable substitution of fossil-based raw materials and energy; recognises that sustainable forest management must ensure the protection of European forest biodiversity; notes that forest protection and production do not necessarily act in contradiction, but could in some cases be compatible with one another and have a positive result in terms of climate protection;
10. Stresses that under some circumstances there are trade-offs between protecting the climate and protecting biodiversity in the bio-economy sector, and particularly in forestry, which plays a central role in the transition towards a climate-neutral economy; expresses its concern that this trade-off has not been sufficiently addressed in recent policy discussions; calls on all stakeholders to develop a cohesive approach in order to bring together biodiversity protection and climate protection as part of a thriving forest-based sector and bio-economy;
11. Notes that although best-preserved forests, from which no products are extracted, are few, they should be given the attention they deserve, as they make a contribution to knowledge, health and ecotourism that we cannot deny to future generations; stresses that Natura 2000, as the European ecological habitat conservation network, should play a crucial role in the European forest strategy; is of the opinion that Natura 2000 should be key in guaranteeing the protection and conservation of forests;

¹² Provided in Forest Europe Helsinki Resolution H1 of 1993.

12. Stresses the importance and vital role of forestry and woodland clusters for the protection of the climate; stresses that forestry and forestry services, as well as downstream processing operations, generate substantial economic activity, particularly in rural, structurally disadvantaged regions, thanks to their demand for further goods and services from other sectors;
13. Stresses the need for Member States to share good practices in forest management and planning; also draws attention to the importance of establishing European guidelines, linked to the pre-established objectives in the European Green Deal, with a view to providing the Member States with guidance on forestry management, maintenance and planning;
14. Stresses that protection and proforestation, as well as reforestation and afforestation with location and environment appropriate tree species, should be the focus of the future EU forest strategy; notes that close-to-nature management practices are the best able to achieve these goals;
15. Stresses that according to research¹³ old-growth forests continue to accumulate carbon, contrary to the view that they are carbon neutral or even sources of CO₂;
16. Stresses that no substitution effect of forest-based products can compensate for the loss of old-growth and primary forests, which are recognised as irreplaceable¹⁴ and should be protected through legal and incentivising instruments targeting their complexity, connectivity and representativeness¹⁵;
17. Calls for strict protection of the EU's primary and old-growth forests as part of the EU forest strategy;
18. Recalls that about 60 % of the EU's forests are privately owned and that about two thirds of private forest owners own less than three hectares of forest; stresses that all measures must duly take this into account, and hence must be designed in a way that they are accessible to and can be practically implemented by small-scale forest owners; recalls that the Commission has identified administrative burdens and forest ownership structures as limiting factors for the uptake of certain measures¹⁶;
19. Reiterates the fact that conservation of high-carbon ecosystems, including forests, represents a response option with an immediate impact on climate change, unlike afforestation, reforestation and restoration, which take more time to deliver¹⁷; calls for

¹³ S. Luyssaert et al., 2008: 'Old-growth forests as global carbon sinks'. In *Nature*.

¹⁴ Commission communication of 23 July 2019 entitled 'Stepping up EU Action to Protect and Restore the World's Forests' (COM(2019)0352).

¹⁵ European Parliament resolution of 16 January 2020 on the 15th meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0015, the exact reading of paragraph 52.

¹⁶ Commission report of 7 December 2018 entitled 'Progress in the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy – A new EU Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest sector' (COM(2018)0811), p. 3.

¹⁷ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2019: 'Climate Change and Land Report-Summary for Policymakers'.

policy actions in the EU to be guided by this principle;

20. Stresses that the continuing decline in biodiversity has had negative consequences for the delivery of many ecosystem services over the last few decades; notes that these declines have occurred in part because of intensive agriculture and forestry practices; underlines that the continuing decline in regulating services can have detrimental consequences for quality of life¹⁸;
21. Recognises that climate change is altering the growth capacity of forests, and increasing the frequency and seriousness of drought, floods, and fires, as well as fostering the development of new pests and diseases which affect forests; notes that intact ecosystems have greater capability than degraded ones to overcome environmental stressors, including changes to climate, as they have inherent properties that enable them to maximise their adaptive capacity;
22. Calls for Member States to ensure that forests of more than 10 hectares have forest management plans comprising carbon storage and biodiversity considerations and, where applicable, comply with Natura 2000 objectives;
23. Recalls the letter from more than 700 scientists calling for a scientifically sound revision of the Renewable Energy Directive, in particular excluding certain types of woody biomass from counting towards the target and removing its eligibility for support;
24. Highlights that large-scale intensive bioenergy plantations, including monocultures, and especially those replacing natural forests and subsistence farmland, have negative impacts on biodiversity;
25. Emphasises the role forests can play in substituting fossil-based materials with bio-based products; believes that the new forest strategy should reflect the importance of the role played by European forests and the EU's circular sustainable bio-economy in reaching climate neutrality by 2050, and that measures to this end should be included in the strategy; stresses that these measures should make use of the full potential of substitution effects; stresses, however, that measures in the new forest strategy on the bio-economy and use of wood biomass should duly take into account their crucial role in carbon storage, biodiversity protection and the provision of other ecosystem services, as well as the impacts on the conservation of forest ecosystems and on CO₂ sequestration in a resource efficient manner;
26. Points out that in the report on progress in the implementation of the EU forest strategy, it is noted that despite the action taken so far, the implementation of the EU biodiversity

¹⁸ Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) (2018): Summary for policymakers of the regional assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services for Europe and Central Asia of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. M. Fischer, M. Rounsevell, A. Torre-Marín Rando, A. Mader, A. Church, M. Elbakidze, V. Elias, T. Hahn, P.A. Harrison, J. Hauck, B. Martín-López, I. Ring, C. Sandström, I. Sousa Pinto, P. Visconti, N.E. Zimmermann and M. Christie (eds.). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany.

policy remains a major challenge¹⁹, and that the reports on the conservation of forest habitats and species show little improvement so far; calls on the Commission to integrate the protection and restoration of forest ecosystems and biodiversity in the new forest strategy as a key component;

27. Notes with concern that only 15 % of forest habitats and 26 % of forest species were found to be in favourable conservation status in 2015²⁰; recalls target 3b of the EU biodiversity strategy, which seeks to bring about a measurable improvement in the conservation status of species and habitats that depend on, or are affected by, forestry and in the provision of related ecosystem services; deplores the fact that, according to the mid-term review of the biodiversity strategy, no significant progress towards the target has been made²¹;
28. Stresses the need to reduce the EU's consumption in general, and also of wood and wood-based products, by promoting a more circular economy and prioritising the most efficient use of wood, which allows for the locking-in of carbon over the long-term and minimises the generation of waste;
29. Takes the view that the EU's forest strategy should help to reverse the trend of native species increasingly being overlooked in favour of fast-growing alien species, such as the eucalyptus;
30. Emphasises the importance of vocational training and retraining programmes for forestry specialists in the use of new technologies and their adaptation to ongoing change, including the creation of a communication platform for the exchange of good practices, and considers it important to involve forest owners and managers in this process and to encourage them to follow sustainable forest conservation and biodiversity promotion practices;
31. Calls for the new forest strategy to help ensure that forest management practices avoid any fragmentation of forest ecosystems into smaller parts, with a particular focus on primary forests, since many species, including larger mammals, rely on interconnected, intact forest habitats for survival; calls for the forest strategy to prioritise the re-connection of already fragmented forests through the restoration of forest corridors appropriate to local conditions and biodiversity;
32. Takes the view that information on forest resources and forests' condition is essential to ensuring that decisions taken on forests are as socio-economically and ecologically beneficial as possible, at all levels;
33. Stresses the particular importance of the Carpathian region and notes that EU accession to the Carpathian Convention would help provide support to the region, which is home

¹⁹ Commission report of 7 December 2018 entitled 'Progress in the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy – A new EU Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest sector' (COM(2018)0811), p.3.

²⁰ European Environment Agency briefing of 27 November 2019, 'Forest dynamics in Europe and their ecological consequences'. Last modified on 10 December 2019.

²¹ Commission report of 2 October 2015 entitled 'The mid-term review of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020' (COM(2015)0478).

to resources of irreplaceable natural value in continental Europe;

34. Notes with concern that, at EU level, reported data²² indicate that energy accounts for 48 % of total use of woody biomass; reiterates that in addition to natural carbon sequestration and biodiversity protection *in situ*, to be coherent with our biodiversity and climate goals, the use of harvested wood should lean towards use as a material;
35. Highlights the value and the potential of newly established and traditional extensive agroforestry systems for agricultural production, diversification, including for the purposes of the bio-economy, carbon sequestration, and prevention of desertification, and for its potential to decrease pressure on forest ecosystems; regrets that the rules stemming from the reforms of the CAP have systematically led to the degradation of agroforestry systems, and in many cases have hampered their restoration, regeneration and rejuvenation; notes with concern the current large-scale die-off of iconic Mediterranean high nature value agroforestry systems, and urgently calls for changes to the rules in order to facilitate the regeneration and restoration of existing agroforestry systems, and the establishment of new ones;
36. Notes that research and technology have come a long way since the forest strategy was introduced in 2013; stresses the importance of encouraging further research into, inter alia, forest ecosystems, biodiversity, sustainable substitution of fossil-based raw materials and energies, carbon storage, wood-based products, sustainable forest management practices, and forestry and bio-based products; believes that more EU research funds should be directed towards this; calls on the Commission and the Member States to also fund research and continue to gather data on innovative methods of protecting and building the resilience of forests, such as introducing resilient species; stresses that more research and funding would make a positive contribution to climate change mitigation, safeguarding forest ecosystems, and boosting biodiversity, sustainable economic growth, and employment, especially in rural areas;
37. Calls for the introduction of a coordinated electronic timber track and trace system, and for support for the development of automated tools for timber circulation analysis and monitoring at all stages of its transformation and integration with related government and commercial record keeping, reporting, permits issuance, and agreements registration systems;
38. Emphasises that local and regional authorities have a key role to play in ensuring the long-term sustainability of forests, as they could play a part in regional-level sustainable development plans, the development of long-life-cycle carbon-absorbing forestry products and the promotion of SME entrepreneurial spirit in the forestry sector;
39. Calls for continued funding for research in soils and their role in forests' climate change resilience and adaptation, biodiversity protection and enhancement, as well as the provision of other ecosystem services;
40. Considers it essential to preserve native genetic resources, and select those elements of

²² Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, 2018: 'Biomass production, supply, uses and flows in the European Union'.

the existing gene pool that are best adapted to expected growing conditions in the future;

41. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to create economic and policy instruments that will allow more forest to grow to their ecological potential and absorb carbon dioxide;
42. Stresses the importance of the existence of scientific evidence on the EU's forestry policies;
43. Proposes updating the rules on reporting and accounting for LULUCF in order to incentivise choice of non-intervention in the accounting category of managed forest land in areas of old-growth forests, for example by excluding respective removals from the limitations posed by the regulation;
44. Stresses the importance of other forest-related activities, specifically the harvesting of non-wood forest products, such as mushrooms and soft fruit, along with grazing and beekeeping;
45. Considers that strictly protected areas in non-intervention management regimes should be part of the EU forest strategy and of local development strategies based on low impact natural tourism and provisioning of non-productive ecosystem services;
46. Calls for the Commission to uphold the principle of 'do no harm' laid down in the Green Deal communication (COM(2019)0640) and to revise all relevant legislation to reflect the latest science in relation to forest ecosystems, different carbon pools and their true value for climate change mitigation and adaptation, including the crucial role of their biodiversity in this adaptation;
47. Recalls the need to protect forests from growing threats and to reconcile their productive and protective functions, taking into account the fact that drought, fires, storms and pests are expected to damage forests more frequently and more severely as a result of climate change;
48. Expresses its concern over the health and resilience of forests in many parts of Europe; underlines that the new forest strategy should take into account that a diverse forest, reflecting the composition that is natural to the region, is generally more resilient than a monoculture forest; highlights the need to strengthen and make full use of EU mechanisms to tackle the transboundary pressures on forests; recalls that according to the EEA²³ the main sources of pressure on forests in the EU are increased land use, expanding urban areas and climate change; emphasises that these ecosystems are increasingly prone to natural disturbances such as storms, fires, droughts, invasive species, pests, insect infestation and diseases, all amplifying vulnerability to climate change; calls on the Commission to facilitate a platform for exchange of best practices to combat this;

²³ European Environment Agency, 'Forest dynamics in Europe and their ecological consequences', 27 November 2018.

49. Points out that air pollution has a significant impact not only on human health but also on the environment; invites the Commission to explore the impacts of air pollution on forests and forest biodiversity in its upcoming zero-pollution action plan;
50. Welcomes the launch in February 2020 of the Forest Information System for Europe (FISE), which provides European data infrastructure on forests; calls on the Member States to fully engage in sharing data and working towards a harmonised data framework on the state of forests in Europe; calls on the work of the FISE to be completed in a timely manner on all five priority themes: forest basic data, bio-economy, nature and biodiversity, climate change mitigation, and forest health and resilience;
51. Stresses that the EU forest strategy should have as one of its objectives achieving a substantial increase in the proportion of forest species and habitats in favourable conservation status; calls on the strategy to include ambitious measures to this end;
52. Recognises that the EU forest strategy should take into consideration the high economic, social and cultural value of forests; points out that different economic activities related to forests can have varying disruptive effects on forest ecosystems; stresses that the new EU forest strategy should encourage only economic activity that respects sustainable forest ecosystem boundaries;
53. Strongly encourages the limiting of clear-cutting as a harvesting method, and advocates increasing the use of continuous growing; recognises that clear-cutting of a forest releases most of the residual carbon stock from the ground of the area into the atmosphere; stresses the need to promote alternative and less invasive methods of harvesting wood;
54. Welcomes the fact that, as announced in the European Green Deal, the new forest strategy will have as its key objectives effective afforestation, forest preservation and restoration; highlights that the carbon capture potential of forest ecosystems continues to increase as the forest ecosystem matures, and that natural forests offer important benefits; stresses that priority should be given to the protection and restoration of existing forests, in particular old-growth forests;
55. Stresses the need for the EU to do more to stop clear-cutting and illegal logging practices; notes that, despite the EU Timber Regulation, illegal logging still takes place in some Member States; urges the Commission and the Member States to take urgent action on these issues through close monitoring and through the enforcement of current EU laws; calls on the Commission to swiftly initiate infringement proceedings when breaches occur, as well as to follow through on illegal logging cases through bodies such as the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) and the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF); calls on the Commission to finalise, without delay, the fitness check of EU rules against illegal logging;
56. Recalls that most of the EU's forests are managed²⁴, including the majority of old-

²⁴ Naudts, K., Chen, Y., et al., 'Europe's forest management did not mitigate climate warming'. In *Science*, 5 February 2016: Vol. 351, Issue 6273, pp. 597-600.

growth forests; stresses that an EU forest strategy with long-term planning is needed to increase the proportion of old-growth forests; invites the Commission to propose a long-term EU forest strategy for the improvement of the proportion of old-growth forest;

57. Calls on the Commission to explore the potential of developing a legislative framework on an EU certification scheme for locally produced wood that is based on the highest sustainability standards;
58. Points out that there is scope for improvement in the uptake of rural development funds by Member States, especially in the programmes related to improving forest biodiversity; calls on the Member States to use the available support measures for the conservation of forests and biodiversity; highlights, further, the importance of ensuring sufficient resources for the implementation of the new EU forest strategy;
59. Calls on the Commission to restart the negotiations for an international legally binding forest convention, which would contribute to the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests and would provide for their multiple and complementary functions and uses, including action towards reforestation, afforestation and forest conservation, while taking into account social, economic, ecological, cultural and spiritual needs of present and future generations, and recognising the vital role of all types of forests in maintaining the ecological processes and balance, and supporting the identity, culture and rights of indigenous people, their communities and other communities and forest dwellers;
60. Expresses its concern about the biodiversity loss occurring in the EU, which needs to be stopped by the EU forest strategy; recalls that the loss of biodiversity is an internal problem for the EU; notes that the strategy should protect the last fragments of mature forests in the EU because of their importance as biodiversity reservoirs, and as a way to increase forest resilience; emphasises that the strategy should promote silviculture with zero-impact on soil and landscapes;
61. Notes that, despite the establishment of the FISE, the available data on forests in the EU, and in particular on their ecological status, is incomplete, difficult to aggregate, and not backed by remote sensing; calls for significant Commission and Member State investment in the further development of the FISE, and the implementation of a pan-European remote sensing programme;
62. Notes that establishing a unified information system on EU forests has been a long-term aim which has not yet been fully achieved; stresses that in order to address present data gaps, synergies must be sought between authorities and relevant organisations, going beyond project-bound limitations believes that the information should address issues such as data availability, harmonised methodologies and supporting financial and capacity resources;;
63. Emphasises that the new forest strategy should, at both EU and Member State level, incentivise growth in the circular bio-economy, and acknowledge that forest-based value chains are key in achieving this growth; considers that the new forest strategy should also encourage a widening of the circular bio-economy through further integration between forest-based value chains and other sectors and value chains that need to decarbonise;

64. Notes that 90 % of EU funding for forests comes from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD); is concerned about the planned cuts to the EAFRD budget; calls on decision-makers to avoid, if possible, any cuts to support for the forest sector in order to comply with the objectives of the European Green Deal;
65. Calls on the Commission to include in the new EU forest strategy binding targets for the protection and restoration of forest ecosystems, especially native European forests, in order to increase the EU's international credibility in this area, among other objectives, and recommends supporting Member States in protecting native European forests;
66. Highlights the role of forests in increasing resilience towards adverse impacts from climate change; points to the need for concrete and effective actions in climate adaptation strategies and plans, incorporating the synergies between mitigation and adaptation;
67. Calls on the Commission to address the issue of urban forest development in the EU forest strategy; welcomes in this context the fact that many urban centres in Europe have signed up to the Tree Cities of the World programme of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); calls on the Commission to promote cooperation and the exchange of best practices among European towns and cities on boosting urban forestry;
68. Expresses deep concern that in parts of the EU there is a lack of implementation of existing forestry-related EU legislation; calls on the Commission and the Member States to fully implement existing legislation, and strengthen the implementation of sustainable and active forest management;
69. Notes that the implementation of adapted forest management plans takes place at Member State level and requires increased cooperation between forest and environmental authorities, NGOs, local communities and forest owners;
70. Calls on the Member States to ensure that the National Strategic Plans under the CAP will incentivise forest managers to preserve, grow and manage forests sustainably;
71. Draws attention to the need to develop and introduce plans to tackle invasive species, equipped with specific human, technical and financial resources for that purpose;
72. Calls for trade agreements to take account of the principle of sustainability with regard to timber imports, and for penalties to be applied in the event of infringements;
73. Notes that multi-age, multi-species forests which are managed according to biodiversity protection criteria are more resilient to climate impacts such as fires, droughts, and unseasonal weather events, and as such are an important investment for the future, not only for communities and nature, but also for forest economies; insists that monocultures, which are less resilient to pests and diseases, as well as to droughts, wind, storms and fires, should not be supported by EU funds;
74. Stresses that the new forest strategy can only achieve policy impact by encompassing the entire forest-based value chains; notes that forest-based value chains already play a vital role for the European economy today, and will be essential in building a green

growth strategy through the European Green Deal; stresses that a new forest strategy must support competitive and sustainable EU forest-based value chains domestically as well as globally;

75. Emphasises the therapeutic function of forests, which have direct positive consequences for human health and people's quality of life; stresses that forests also contribute to the socio-economic development of Europe's rural territories, including the distribution of income to the most depopulated areas in the EU thanks to ecotourism, which is one of the most popular modalities within the tourism industry;
76. Reiterates its call²⁵ for consistent forest-related policies which combat biodiversity loss and climate-change impacts, and which lead to an increase in the EU's natural sinks while protecting, conserving and enhancing biodiversity;
77. Calls on the Commission to include the need for support to forest owners, including financial support, in the new EU forest strategy; considers that such support should be made subject to the implementation of sustainable forest management; notes that, in order to ensure continued investment in modern technologies, in environmental and climate measures that reinforce the multifunctional role played by forests, with a specific financial instrument for the management of areas in the Natura 2000 network, and in creating decent working conditions, this financial support should be the result of a robust combination of financial instruments, national funding and private-sector financing; calls on the Commission to establish and finance a European Afforestation and Reforestation Programme using global navigation satellite system (GNSS) information, dedicated to increasing forest area, tackling land degradation, increasing air quality in urban areas and ensuring that forests retain their composition of natural species;
78. Regrets that current usage of forest management plans has varied considerably among the Member States; urges the Commission therefore to boost the use of forest management plans, including through the creation of common guidelines for their establishment and implementation; calls on the Member States to reinforce the use of forest management plans, and to closely monitor their implementation while respecting the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity; stresses that a platform is needed in order to find solutions for the many challenges related to forests and forest management at EU level; considers that forest management models must incorporate the criterion of environmental, societal and economic sustainability, which means that the stewardship and use of forests and forest lands should allow the maintenance of their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality and potential to fulfil, now and in the future, relevant environmental, economic and social functions at local, national and global levels, and should not cause damage to other ecosystems²⁶; calls on the Commission to develop a common and sufficiently detailed definition of close-to-nature forestry, building on the ongoing experiences of integrating biodiversity considerations into

²⁵ European Parliament Resolution of 16 January 2020 on the 15th meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0015.

²⁶ Resolution H1, General Guidelines for the Sustainable Management of Forests in Europe, Second Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, 16-17 June 1993, Helsinki.

forest management;

79. Stresses that forest fires are a regular occurrence, and are both a cause and a consequence of climate change; notes that storms, forest fires and pests can be mitigated using improved and more active forest management and forestry techniques through, for example, grazing and agroforestry practices, which should be supported within the framework of the CAP;
80. Highlights the need for effective conservation and strict protection of primary and old-growth forests, taking into account their unique characteristics; notes that there is no EU definition of old-growth forests, and calls on the Commission to introduce a definition in the future EU forest strategy, taking into consideration the different characteristics of forests and the need for effective conservation, and in particular of primary and old-growth forests; notes with concern that data on primary forests remains incomplete, but according to available information, only 46 % of mapped primary forests in Europe have the highest status of protection, 24 % are afforded a status of national parks, and 11 % remain unprotected²⁷; calls on the Commission to propose without delay a comprehensive definition of primary forests, and work to improve data collection on primary forests;
81. Highlights the importance of environmental defenders in common efforts to protect and restore EU forests; calls for a zero-tolerance approach to attacks or harassment against them;
82. Considers that overdue steps are needed to introduce an EU disaster-prevention approach, which should be provided with appropriate financial resources from the EU budget;
83. Takes the view that education plays an essential role in sustainable forest management, and calls on the Commission and the Member States to support training focusing on forests, both in the EU and in third countries, including providing stipends and arranging academic exchange programmes;
84. Recalls its support for a European legal framework based on mandatory due diligence to restrict access to the EU market only to products and commodities that do not contribute to deforestation or forest degradation, or to the conversion or degradation of other natural ecosystems; believes that such framework should apply to all economic actors, including financial actors, both upstream and downstream of the supply chain, and should also ensure the absence of related human rights violations; urges the Commission to adopt this proposal without delay;
85. Calls on the Commission to address the concerns of professionals in the field regarding the Renewable Energy Directive, in particular the issue of categorising all types of biomass as renewable energy sources, inter alia in relation to the high level of wood pellet imports into the EU and the potential risks that these imports pose to forests in

²⁷ Sabatini, F.M., Burrascano, S., et al., 'Where are Europe's last primary forests?'. In *Diversity and Distributions*, first published on 24 May 2018: Volume 24, Issue 10, October 2018, pp. 1426-1439, figure 3.

- third countries, and to continue to promote other sustainable forms of renewable energy;
86. Stresses that tree planting schemes must be an adjunct to restoring natural forests as the wrong tree in the wrong place can intensify forest fires and actually release more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere; notes that forest-restoration schemes must increase their carbon sequestration potential to meet global climate commitments;
 87. Takes the view that a system for monitoring pest outbreaks in the EU may be needed to obtain the full picture with regard to the condition of forests and their impact on forest biodiversity, given the expected impact of climate change on distribution of harmful organisms;
 88. Takes the view that urgent action should be taken to prevent the introduction through international trade of new pests and diseases and their respective vectors;
 89. Believes that, taking into account legislation on invasive alien species and the potential repercussions that these species may have on forests, the Commission should propose new complementary financial tools to help affected areas tackle invasive species, and in particular persistent and new alien species;
 90. Considers that more attention should be paid to the problem of diseases, such as oak decline, that affect trees, which are in decline around the world as a result of pests, diseases and climate change; draws attention to oak decline, which is ravaging cork oak plantations in Portugal, France and Spain and is also affecting special protection areas (SPAs) and biosphere reserves; believes that the Commission should have included in the strategy effective measures and specific resources for tackling tree diseases;
 91. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

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