

The EU **Forest**



Action Plan

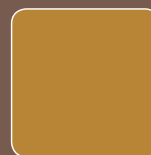


2007-2011



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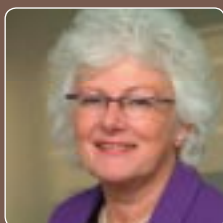
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Foreword

Mariann Fischer Boel

Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development



Forests are an important part of Europe's heritage and identity. When satellites observe Europe from the skies, they see large masses of green. Forests and other wooded areas cover over 40% of the European Union of 27 Member States. But this huge area does not always receive the public attention it deserves, though forests have been essential throughout our history – for fuel, for shelter, for the air we breathe. Forests also contribute to our quality of life and the social and cultural dimensions of forests are increasingly appreciated by our society.

We have to balance multiple policy objectives in the forest sector. On the one hand, forestry and forest-based industries provide millions of jobs and contribute to our prosperity, particularly in rural areas. We need to further encourage the use of wood and other renewable forest resources in a competitive yet sustainable way. On the other hand, forests are important for reaching our environmental objectives and related international commitments, particularly with regard to preserving biodiversity, mitigating climate change, preserving water resources and combating erosion and desertification. At the same time, forests enhance our living environment, offering opportunities for recreation and healthy living.

These objectives are often seen as being in tension with each other. But we should aim to meet all of them. I believe that competitiveness is an important pillar of sustainability; it helps underpin the other key components – the environmental and social aspects. Evidence shows that we can make economic use of our forests without interfering with their other functions. We are currently harvesting only about 60–70% of our annual wood growth. So there's extra wood out there which we could put to good use – without compromising sustainable forest management.

In the EU, we are working on balancing these multiple objectives under our Forest Action Plan covering the period 2007 to 2011. The Forest Action Plan is a step forward, towards better coordination of forest policy and related actions within the EU.

Forest policy fully involves the Member States. The role of the European Commission is to guide and coordinate in achieving common objectives. The Forest Action Plan is the centrepiece of this work, as this brochure explains. Forests make a great contribution to enhancing the quality of life of EU citizens – the Forest Action Plan is therefore for all of us.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Mariann Fischer Boel'.



1. The EU's forests: a valuable asset

FORESTS SERVE MANY PURPOSES

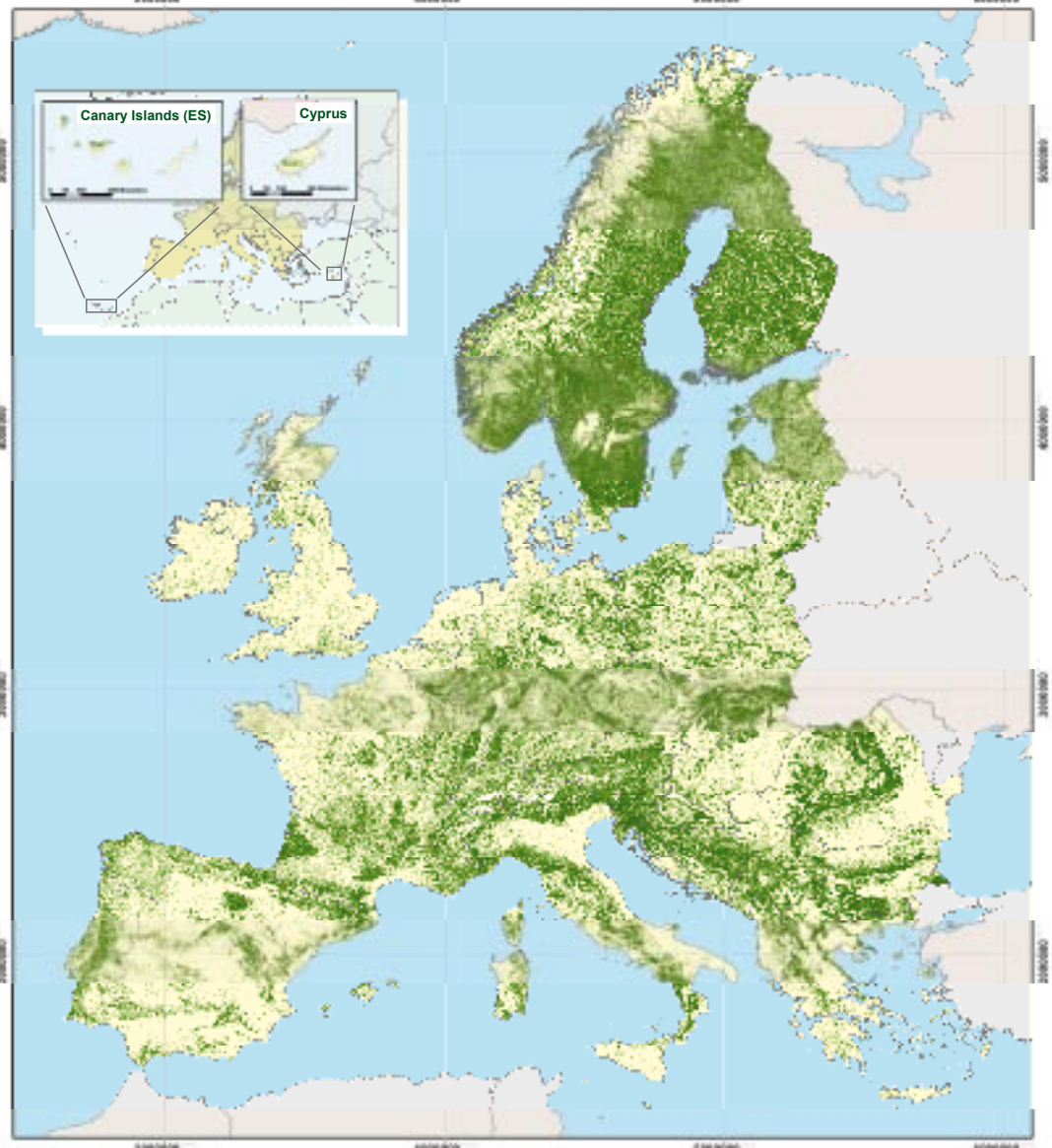
Forests provide a livelihood for millions of workers, entrepreneurs and forest owners, and contribute significantly to economic growth, jobs and prosperity, especially in rural areas. They are an important source of raw materials for forest-based industries, providing the wood, pulp, cork and fibres that supply a plethora of sectors: construction, carpentry and furniture-making, veneer and laminate manufacture, production of household and office paper and sanitary items, to name but a few. In some Member States, forest-based industries are major employers within the manufacturing sector. They also provide energy, both directly and indirectly, and a host of non-wood forest products and services, including grazing and forage for domestic and semi-wild animals.

Forests are one of the key elements of our ecosystems. They fulfil important environmental functions, serving as a habitat for a variety of plant and animal species, protecting water and soil. They also safeguard land, infrastructure and settlements from erosion and help prevent avalanches or landslides in mountainous regions as well as providing catchments and filtering for water supplies. Forests therefore fulfil many functions. Forest management has traditionally taken into account this 'multifunctionality'.

HOW FORESTS AND FORESTRY SERVE THE NEEDS OF EU CITIZENS AND IMPROVE THEIR LIVING ENVIRONMENT

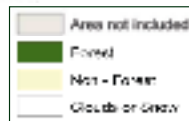
The functions of forests and forestry	
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ providing a source of income ■ serving as a workplace ■ providing renewable resources for local and household consumption ■ providing raw materials for forest-based industries ■ supplying materials for high quality wood products ■ delivering a local and renewable source of energy
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ providing an ecosystem rich in biodiversity ■ mitigating the effects of climate change through carbon sequestration ■ protecting water resources ■ providing ecological stability and integrity in the landscape ■ safeguarding against avalanches and landslides in mountainous regions ■ preventing soil erosion and combating desertification ■ purifying the air
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ supplying recreational and leisure amenities, especially to city dwellers ■ providing a healthy living environment ■ protecting against natural disasters ■ making rural areas attractive to live in ■ safeguarding cultural, heritage and spiritual values

Pan-European Forest/Non-Forest Map 2000



JRC Technical Report 009

Map Projection: ETRS-LAEA
 Input Data Source: Landsat ETM+
 Ancillary Data: CORINE Land Cover 2000
 Date: 15.04.2007
 Produced by: FOREST Action/ LMNH Unit



Reference: A. Pekkarinen, L. Reithmaier, P. Strobl (2008): "Pan-European Forest/Non-Forest mapping with Landsat ETM+ and CORINE Land Cover 2000 data". Manuscript.

More information and data download at: <http://forest.jrc.it/ForestResources/>



EU FORESTS OFFER A WIDE VARIETY OF ENVIRONMENTS

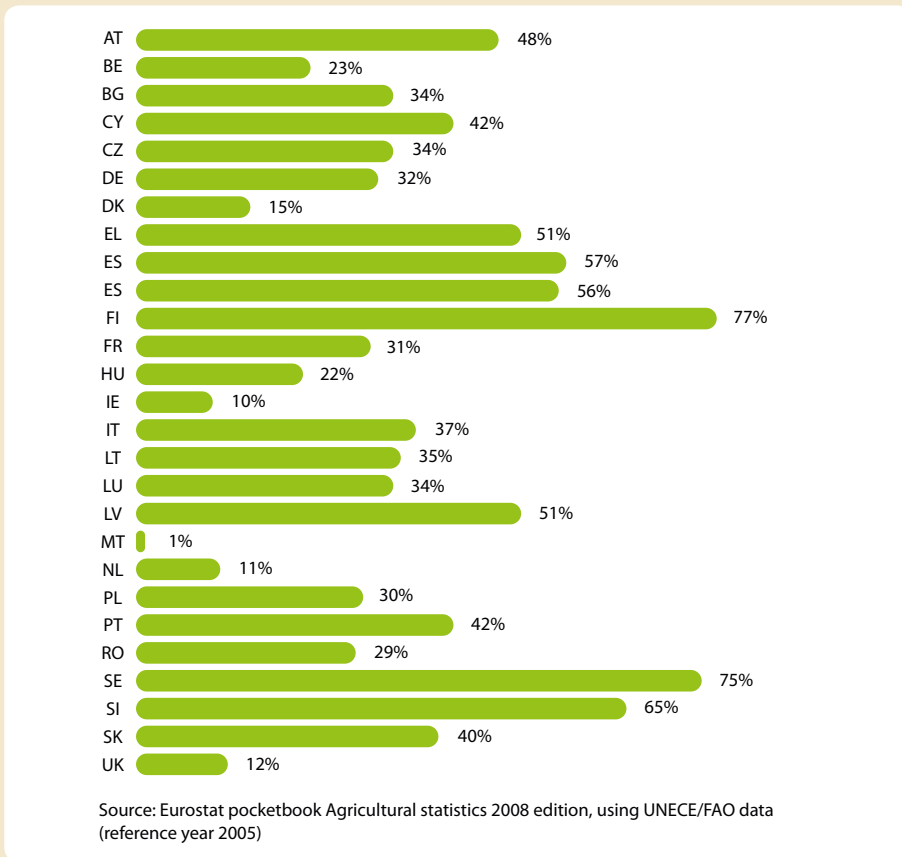
EU forests cover very varied environments, ranging from sub-arctic to Mediterranean and from alpine to lowland, including flood plains and deltas. Forests are home to the largest number of species on the continent (the Mediterranean region alone has 30 000 vascular plants), compared with other habitats, and provide important environmental functions. Approximately 12% of the forest area is designated as protected forest, meaning that ecological or protective functions are given priority over economic and social ones.

FOREST COVER IS EXPANDING IN EUROPE

Forests and other wooded land cover more than 40% of the EU's surface area. Expansion of the EU's forest area exceeds the loss of forest land to infrastructure and urban uses. This trend, starting in the 1950s (earlier in some countries), is driven by a range of factors. Several countries have expanded their forest cover by plantation programmes on agricultural land which is no longer cultivated. This positive development sets the EU apart from many other global regions, where deforestation continues to reduce forest resources.



Figure 1. Forest and other wooded area cover in the EU Member States as a percentage of the total land area



FOREST OWNERSHIP

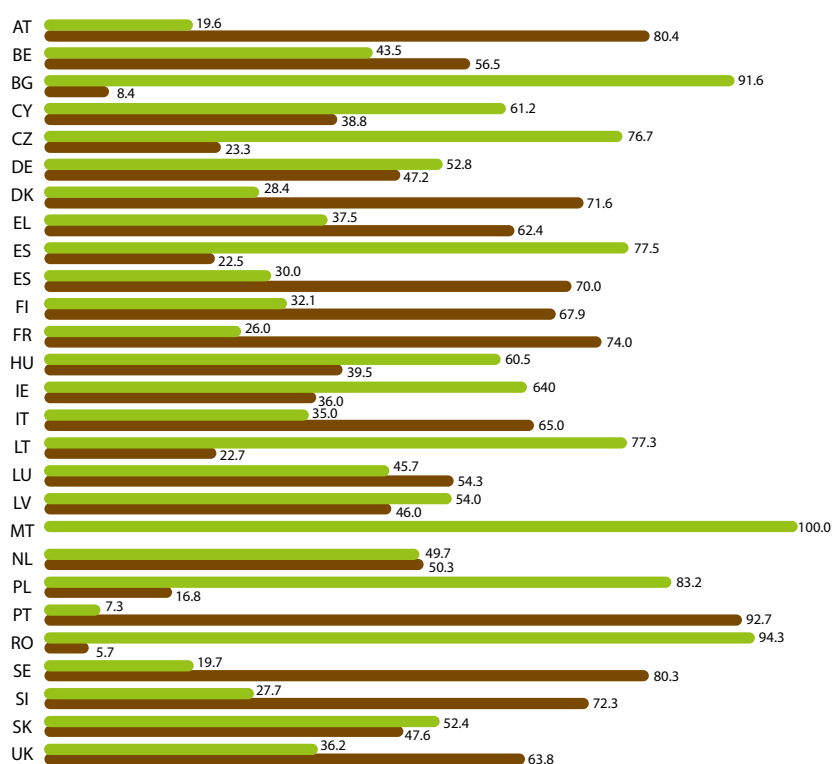
Around 60% of the EU's forests are in private hands, with about 16 million private forest owners. Private forest holdings have an average size of 13 hectares, but the majority of privately-owned forests are smaller than five hectares. Nevertheless, the sector is changing. Alongside alterations in the structure of forest ownership in the EU, changes are also taking place in the occupations and lifestyles of private forest owners. Forest owners are becoming less dependent on forestry as a main source of income. Increasingly, the EU's forests are owned by urban dwellers, who may have different management objectives, compared with traditional rural forest holders.

Following recent EU enlargements, the number of private forest holdings has increased by 25% and the number of forest owners rose by nearly three million (estimated). Forest restitution processes, which took place in the new Member States and still continue in some cases, have facilitated private ownership.



Public forest ownership dominates in most of the eastern and south-eastern EU Member States. The average size of public forest holdings is more than 1 000 hectares, with considerable variation among countries. Within publicly owned forests there is an important area of forests owned by municipalities and communes, managed to meet local needs.

Figure 2. Forest ownership: shares of public and private ownership*



* This includes category 'other ownership' in Estonia, Spain, Lithuania, Slovakia and Finland.

Source: Agriculture in the European Union, Statistical and economic information 2007; FRA 2005 (reference year 2005).

● Public
● Private

2. Europe's forests in the global perspective

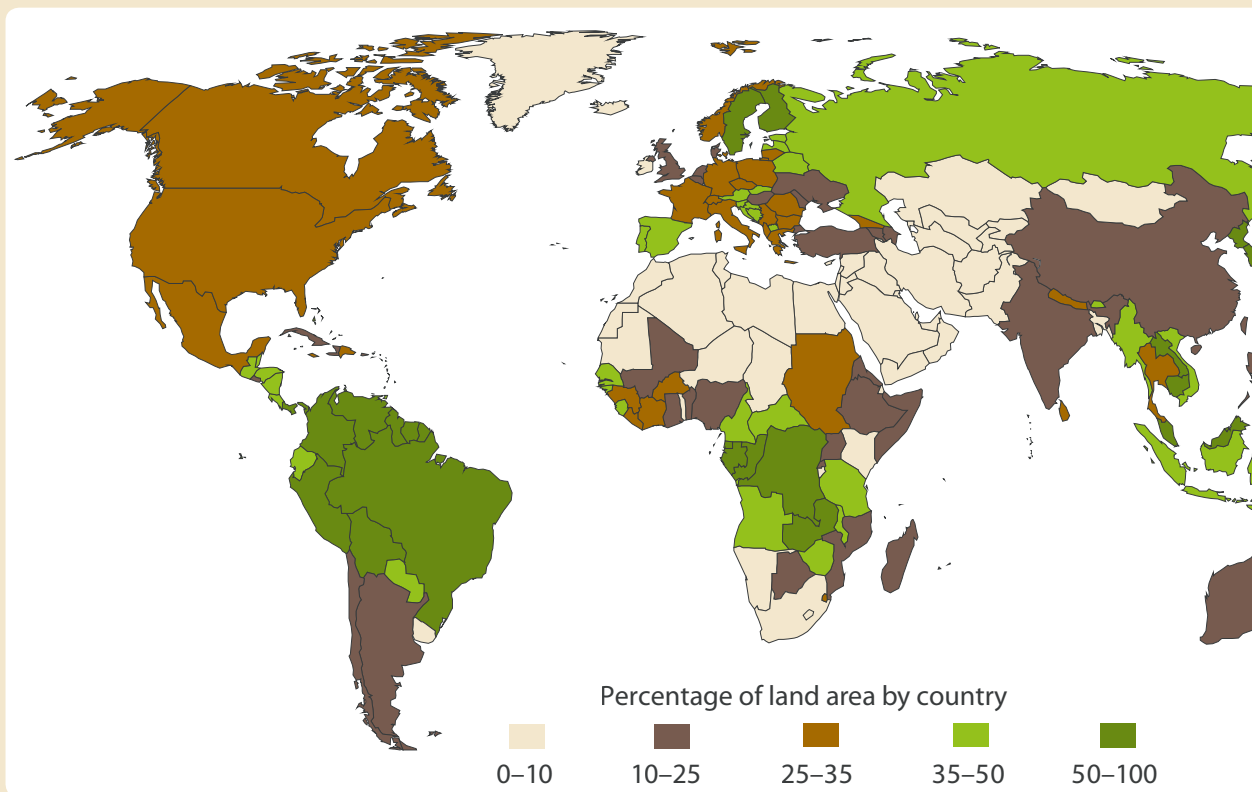
THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S FORESTS

The EU's forests should not be seen in isolation. Forests across the globe face similar challenges as those in Europe. However, some parts of the world have major additional problems, such as desertification, invasive species, illegal logging, and over-harvesting of forests.

Forests cover roughly 30% of the world's land area. But forests are unevenly distributed around the world. Five countries (Russia, Brazil, Canada, the United States and China) account for over half the total forest area. Just over a third of the world's forests (36%) are categorised as primary forests – forests of native species in which there are no clearly visible indications of human activity and ecological processes are not significantly disturbed.

Forest area, 2005

Source: FAO State of the World's Forests study, 2007





DEFORESTATION

Deforestation worldwide continues at an alarming rate of about 13 million hectares a year (according to the FAO report 'State of the World's Forests 2007'), an area greater than all of Germany's forests. Deforestation is currently estimated to contribute around 20% of global CO₂ emissions - more than transport, and more than total EU greenhouse gas emissions. To control climate change effectively, it is essential to halt deforestation within the next two decades and then reverse it through afforestation or reforestation schemes.

About 96% of deforestation occurs in tropical regions. Tropical forests, which account for about half of global forest areas, offer a multitude of economic, environmental and social benefits in addition to their function as carbon sinks. Globally, tropical forests should therefore be a prime focus of international action in the coming years.



3. Sustainable forest management and multifunctional forestry

SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT (SFM)

The EU has done much to put in place new and improved instruments to promote the protection and sustainable management of forests, notably under national forest programmes. SFM can contribute to achieving several important EU policy objectives, including competitiveness of forest-based industries, climate change mitigation, rural development, biodiversity conservation, forest protection (from fire and pollution) and monitoring, ensuring plant health and good quality of forest reproductive material.

In general terms, SFM can be defined as the stewardship and use of forests lands in a way that maintains their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality and their potential to fulfil, now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic and social functions, at local, national, and global levels, without causing damage to other ecosystems¹.

COMPETITIVENESS OF FOREST-BASED INDUSTRIES

The EU is one of the world's largest producers, traders and consumers of forest products. Forestry and related industries cover several sectors of the economy, for example: manufacture of wood and products of wood and cork (except furniture); production of pulp, paper and paperboard; printing. In 2005, forest-based industries in the EU employed about 3 million people in 350 000 enterprises, with a turnover of about EUR 380 billion, producing added value of around EUR 116 billion².

In addition, the construction and furniture industries are important users of forest materials.

The total harvest of industrial roundwood and fuel wood amounted to 454 million cubic metres (m³) in 2005. This is 60% of the annual net increment of that year, which means that despite this significant economic use of forest products, the EU's wood resources, as well as the total forest area are growing faster than they are used. However, some of the unused growth may occur in young forests and in forests where accessibility is difficult.

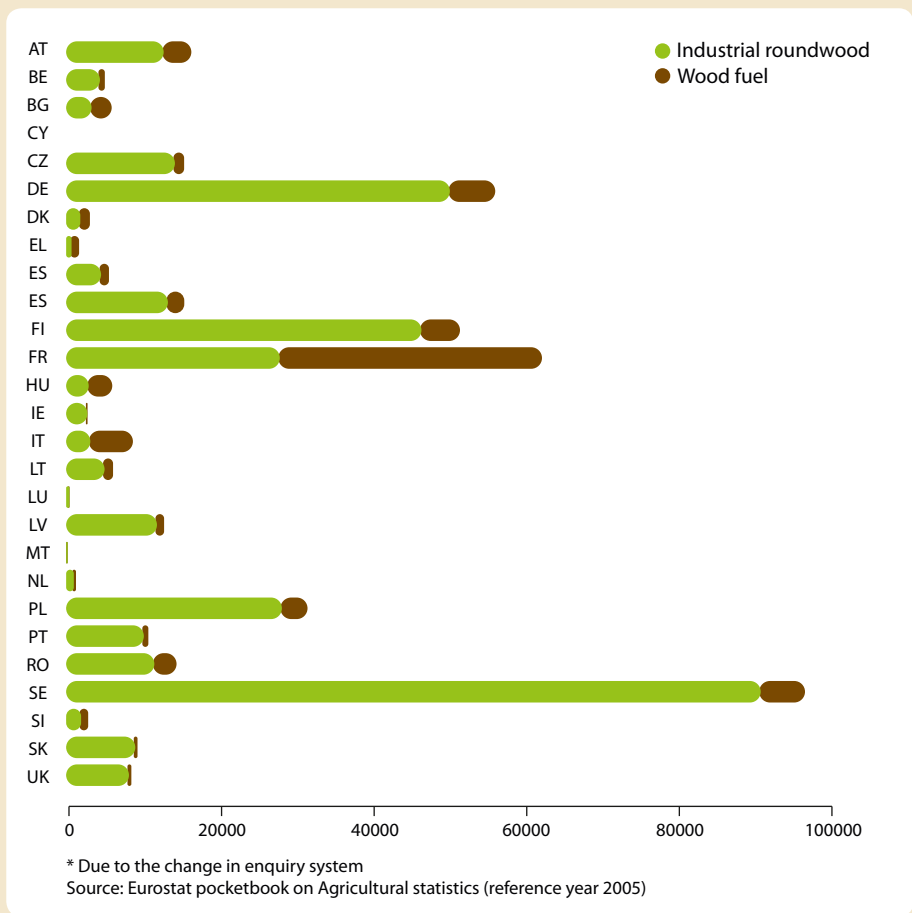
The economic value of non-wood goods and services (NWGS) provided by forests is increasing, but often they do not have a commercial value (though in some European regions NWGS provide more revenue than wood sales). NWGS include hosting biodiversity and helping to mitigate climate change, mushroom and truffle gathering, fruit and berry collection, game products, honey, cork, medicinal products, and the seeds of forest tree species. Cork is an important forest product in the EU, with approximately 1.7 million hectares of cork oak forests – the majority in Iberia – accounting for 80% of world production.

¹ This definition of SFM in the European context was adopted by the Ministerial Conference for Protection of Forests in Europe, Helsinki, 1993. See: www.mcpfe.org

² Source: Eurostat, Statistics in focus 74/2008.



Figure 3. Wood removal in the EU Member States (1 000 m³ excluding bark)



CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION

Forests can help mitigate the effects of climate change. Plants absorb CO₂ through photosynthesis and use captured carbon to build organic matter. The storage of organic carbon in soils and above-ground biomass offers considerable potential to remove CO₂ from the atmosphere. Significant amounts of carbon can also be built up and stored through afforestation of farmland, agro-forestry systems, and use of carbon-conscious forest management practices.

EU forests are also affected by changing climatic conditions. Global warming is likely to intensify the risk of forest fires and pest outbreaks. In the longer term it will influence the kind of tree species that will grow and timber production capacity as well as biodiversity, though the impacts will vary regionally. Extreme weather events, such as high winds, storms, and prolonged heat waves, floods and droughts will also affect the EU's forests. Heavy storms have already caused severe damage to forests in recent years and are becoming more frequent. Over time, climate change might jeopardise the capacity of EU forests to perform economic, social and ecological functions.





FORESTS, BIOMASS AND ENERGY

The EU has adopted an ambitious energy and climate policy which aims by 2020 to reduce energy consumption by 20%, with a similar cut in CO₂ emissions, while raising the share of renewables in the EU's energy mix to 20%.

More than half of the EU's renewable energy already comes from biomass, 80% of which is wood biomass. Wood can play an important role as a provider of biomass energy to offset fossil fuel emissions, and as an environmentally friendly material. There has recently been higher demand for wood from the energy sector in addition to rising demand from the established wood-processing industries. Many experts consider that significantly more wood could be mobilised from EU forests than is currently the case. However, the cost at which this can be done is the key factor.

BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

The EU has taken a major step to preserve biodiversity through the creation of the Natura 2000 network (an EU-wide network of nature protection areas established under the 1992 Habitats Directive³). Almost 30% of designated Natura 2000 sites comprise forest habitats and another 30% partly contain woodland elements and related species.

THE TWIN DANGERS OF FIRE AND POLLUTION

EU measures to support the protection of forests against fires and atmospheric pollution have strengthened cooperation between EU countries in these areas. However, these threats continue to be a major concern. Forest fires are the most important damaging factor in Mediterranean countries, where between 300 000 and 500 000 hectares of forests and other woodland burn each year.

While EU legislation has led to considerable improvement of air quality in Western Europe over the past 20 years, deposition of air pollutants (such as acid rain⁴) is still a problem in European forests.

PLANT HEALTH

Plant health and the quality of forest reproductive material are of vital importance for the well-being of the EU's forests. Over the last few years, the EU has adopted legislation on a number of key aspects concerning the marketing of forest reproductive material. Wood imported from third countries can sometimes be a source of harmful pests and diseases. Accordingly, stringent provisions to address these risks have been introduced.



³ Council Directive 92/43 of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (OJ L 206 of 22.07.1992)

⁴ Acid rain is a popular term referring to the deposition of wet (rain, snow, sleet, fog and cloudwater, dew) and dry (acidifying particles and gases) acidic components



4. Putting the EU Forest Action Plan in place

In the past the EU has dealt with forest-related matters on a piecemeal basis, using the limited number of policy instruments available in a sector which is mainly market-based and under the responsibility of national governments. As the need for a more structured approach has become apparent, not least due to EU enlargements that have significantly increased its forest area, a series of initiatives has been developed, the most significant of which is the European Union Forest Action Plan (FAP)⁵. The FAP builds on the 1998 EU Forestry Strategy⁶.

In 1998 EU Ministers asked the European Commission to report back to them in five years on implementation of the EU Forestry Strategy. The report, issued in 2005⁷, stressed that, despite progress in the sustainable management of EU forests, the policy context was changing and new issues had emerged:

- The competitiveness and economic viability of sustainable forestry in many parts of the EU were increasingly being challenged in the global marketplace;
- The importance of good governance for the protection and sustainable management of forests was increasing, requiring additional skills and efforts from forest owners and managers;
- It was necessary to enhance cross-sectoral cooperation, and coordination between forest policy and other policy areas that affect forests and forestry.

The FAP is the brainchild of the report. It aims to provide a coherent framework for implementing forest-related measures and to serve as an instrument of coordination between what the EU does and the forest policies of its 27 Member States. The Action Plan covers a period of five years starting in 2007. Adopted in 2006, the FAP encompasses both EU forest-related actions and those to be carried out by the Member States according to their specific conditions and priorities. The actions of the FAP are structured around the four main objectives:

- Improving long-term competitiveness;
- Improving and protecting the environment;
- Contributing to the quality of life;
- Fostering coordination and communication.

It seeks to contribute to the achievement of the above objectives, bearing in mind the following underlying principles:

- National forest programmes as a suitable framework for implementing international forest-related commitments;
- Global and cross-sectoral issues in forest policy, calling for improved coherence and coordination of EU actions;
- The need to enhance the competitiveness of the EU forest sector and good governance of EU forests;
- Respect for the principle of subsidiarity (meaning decisions are taken as close as possible to the operational level);
- Specific approaches and actions are appropriate for different types of forests.

⁵ COM(2006) 302 final – see http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/action_plan/com_en.pdf.

⁶ OJ C 56, 26.2.1999

⁷ see: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2005:0084:FIN:EN:PDF>

5. Implementing the FAP

The FAP sets four main objectives (and contains 18 key actions). In order to achieve these objectives, the European Commission developed the FAP work programme in cooperation with the main stakeholders. This programme is updated annually in cooperation with the Member States. The European Agricultural Rural Development Fund (EARDF) is the main financial instrument supporting implementation of the FAP.

A. IMPROVING LONG-TERM COMPETITIVENESS

In order to improve the long-term competitiveness of the forest sector, and to increase the sustainable use of forest products, goods and services, the FAP encourages innovation and research activities as well as training for forest owners and forest workers. To improve the competitiveness of the forest sector, the FAP also proposes actions to increase the use of forest resources for energy production. More intensive use of wood for energy would provide bigger markets for low-value timber and small-sized wood.

Examining how globalisation affects the economic viability of EU forestry has already produced indications of ways to improve long-term competitiveness. More research and development should enhance the competitiveness of the forest sector. Exchange and assessment of experiences in valuation and marketing of non-wood forest goods and services will provide a better understanding of the state-of-the-art in this field.

Concrete steps to achieve this objective include staging a number of stakeholder conferences, and commissioning pilot projects, such as a study conducted by the consortium led by the European Forest Institute to identify marketing possibilities for currently non-marketed forest goods and services

Adding value to non-wood goods and services

In December 2007, the Commission launched a study on the development and marketing of



B. IMPROVING AND PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

The FAP includes specific steps for dealing with climate change and biodiversity issues. It also addresses the protection of forests and proposes to work towards an improved European forest monitoring system. The Action Plan will also facilitate EU compliance with its obligations under the Kyoto Protocol⁸. Among its other positive results, the Action Plan is expected to increase knowledge about the effects of climate change on forest ecosystems. The European Commission has launched a study on the adaptation of forests to climate change.

Achieving the EU 2010 target of halting the loss of biodiversity will require efforts at both EU and Member State level. Better information and monitoring of the EU forest's condition are essential for our awareness of the state of forest ecosystems. Recognising this, a European Forest Data Centre has been established by the European Commission at the Joint Research Centre.

<http://efdac.jrc.ec.europa.eu>

The FAP and forest fires

Forest fires are the most important damaging factor in Mediterranean countries. During 2007, fires in Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, and Greece burned a total area of 574 361 hectares, which is well above the average for the last 28 years. The number of fires was particularly high in Italy and Greece, accounting for approximately 79% of the total burnt area in the five southern Member States. The total burnt area in Greece was estimated to be over 225 700 hectares. Forest fires were also particularly violent during the summer of 2003, when forests were exposed to very hot and dry climatic conditions and when, for instance in Portugal alone, around 400 000 ha were destroyed by fire.

Support from the EU for forest fire prevention measures is available through the rural development programmes.

In this context, the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS) is being developed. EFFIS supports the service bodies in charge of protecting forests against fires in EU countries and provides the European Commission, the European Parliament and other interested parties with updated and reliable information on forest fires in Europe.

<http://effis.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

⁸ see: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/climat/kyoto.htm>



C. CONTRIBUTING TO THE QUALITY OF LIFE

To contribute to the quality of life, the FAP promotes the social and cultural dimensions of forests and forestry. It encourages environmental education, underlines the importance of the protective role of forests, and proposes to explore the potential of urban and near-urban forests. Education and information activities are especially important in the context of increasing urbanisation and the corresponding move away from rural life-styles.

Green public procurement

Each year European public authorities spend the equivalent of 16% of the EU's gross domestic product on the purchase of goods, such as office equipment, building components and transport vehicles, services, such as buildings maintenance, transport services, cleaning and catering services and works. Public procurement can shape production and consumption trends. A significant demand from public authorities for 'greener' goods will create or expand markets for environmentally friendly products and services. By doing so, it will also provide incentives for companies to develop environmental technologies.

Environmental education and information efforts will also help raise awareness about the goods and services provided by forests. Placing more focus on the establishment and management of urban and near-urban forests should enable forestry to better serve society in providing amenities, recreational and preventive healthcare services.

D. FOSTERING COORDINATION AND COMMUNICATION

To improve coordination and communication, the FAP proposes measures for more efficient cross-sectoral cooperation in order to balance economic, environmental and socio-cultural objectives in forest-related policies. The role of the Standing Forestry Committee⁹ is being strengthened and the exchange of information between the European Commission, EU governments and regional authorities facilitated.

Better information exchange and communication on forests and forestry are expected to improve the availability of up-to-date information on forest resources and forestry and to make this information more accessible both to decision-makers and to the general public.

A concrete example of an activity under this objective is the development of a European Forest Information and Communication Platform, which in the future will be incorporated into the European Forest Data Centre. The Commission is also working, with Member States, on the issues related to application of public procurement policy to wood and wood-based products.

⁹ The SFC brings together the forestry administrations of the EU Member States

6. The FAP interaction with other EU policies

RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

The EU's rural development policy, the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy, seeks to establish a coherent and sustainable framework for the future of rural areas. This includes developing the multifunctional role of agriculture and forestry, going beyond the production of foodstuffs and raw materials to managing the countryside and protecting the environment. This implies the recognition and encouragement of the range of services provided to society by farmers and forest owners.

Rural development policy has been the main instrument for implementing forestry measures in recent years. Financial support from the EU for forestry measures in the context of rural development, not including additional funding directly by Member States, amounted to EUR 4.8 billion for the period 2000-2006 (almost 10% of the total rural development budget). It is estimated that spending on forest-related measures during the 2007-2013 rural development programme period, from the EARDF alone, could amount to EUR 9-10 billion (around 10% of the total EARDF contribution to rural development measures).

The FAP's objectives are linked to the strategic guidelines used by Member States to draw up their rural development programmes. These include, for instance:

- A range of measures to promote human capital, knowledge transfer, innovation and quality production in the agriculture and forestry sectors;

Rural development and forestry – project diversity

EU countries draw up their own rural development programmes. They therefore fully reflect the regional diversity of forests and forestry. Programmes have included projects as diverse as:

¹⁰ High nature value farming systems play an important role in preserving biodiversity and habitats, as well as in landscape protection and soil quality



- Measures to protect and enhance natural resources;
- Action to preserve high nature value farming¹⁰ and forestry systems and cultural landscapes in Europe's rural areas.

Under rural development policy support is available, *inter alia*, for the first afforestation of agricultural land, the first establishment of agri-forestry systems on agricultural land, and the first afforestation of non-agricultural land. Natura 2000 payments can compensate private forest owners for costs incurred and income foregone, while support is also available for actions to restore and protect forestry potential.

ENVIRONMENT POLICY

The EU's 6th Environment Action Programme (EAP)¹¹ seeks to promote the integration of environmental concerns in all EU policies and to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Forest-related projects are included in several EAP priority areas such as climate change, nature and biodiversity, environment and health, quality of life, natural resources and waste.

With a budget of EUR 2.14 billion (for the period 2007-2013), LIFE+¹² provides specific support for the development and implementation of EU environmental policy and legislation. It covers forest-related projects, so forest monitoring can be supported by LIFE+.

EU-FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS

The EU's 7th Research Framework Programme, covering 2007-2013, places greater emphasis than in the past on research relevant to the needs of European industry, to help it compete internationally and to develop its role as a world leader in certain sectors. The 'Forest-based Sector Technology Platform'¹³ provides a framework for stakeholders to establish the forest sector's research and development roadmap for the future.

ENERGY POLICY

In December 2005, the European Commission adopted a Biomass Action Plan (BAP¹⁴) to increase the use of energy from forestry, agriculture, and waste materials. The BAP would reduce Europe's dependence on imported energy, cut greenhouse gas emissions, protect jobs in rural areas and extend the EU's technological leadership in these sectors. It also invites Member States to draw up national biomass action plans. The BAP activity on forest biomass is closely linked to relevant measures in the BAP.

INDUSTRIAL POLICY

In February 2008 the Commission adopted a 19-point plan, complementary to the BAP, to address the challenges facing the EU's forest-based industries¹⁵ and seeking to help them remain competitive in an increasingly global marketplace. Access to raw materials at competitive prices, the strategic role of the sector in combating climate change and innovation are amongst the diverse key issues addressed in the plan and which link in with the work programme of the BAP.

¹¹ see: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/newprg/index.htm>

¹² see: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/funding/lifeplus.htm>

¹³ see: <http://www.forestplatform.org/>

¹⁴ COM (2005) 628 final, Communication from the Commission of 7 December 2005 - Biomass Action Plan (OJ C 49 of 28.02.2005).

¹⁵ see: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/forest_based/com2008_113_en.html

7. The EU's global responsibilities

THE EU – A MAJOR PLAYER

The EU is a leading player in many international bodies in which forest-related issues are debated and actions agreed. It takes a particularly strong stance on items related to sustainability, biodiversity and climate change.

The international dimension

The Ministerial Conferences on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE)

With 40 members, the MCPFE has become a well established policy process, whereby European countries and the EU have developed comprehensive guidance for forest policy, and strengthened coordination and cooperation on forest-related matters. Globally, the MCPFE is one of the strongest regional political mechanisms addressing forest issues. The main aim is to further develop a common understanding regarding the protection and the sustainable management of forests in Europe.

UN Forum on Forests

The EU participates actively in international discussion and negotiations on forestry-related issues in the UN Forum on Forests. The Forum's main objective is to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests and to strengthen long-term political commitment to these aims.

UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol

Since forests play an important role in the carbon cycle and have the largest carbon sequestration level among land-based ecosystems, their existence is critical for climate change mitigation. The UNFCCC's work is thus very pertinent for EU forest policy.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

The CBD is an international agreement established by the UN aimed at preserving biological diversity around the world. As forests harbour the majority of global terrestrial biodiversity, the objectives of the CBD are of direct relevance for sustainable forest management.

The Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

Trees and forests are key to the UNCCD's role of combating desertification and soil degradation, as well as the UNCCD's objectives related to poverty reduction. UNCCD provides a framework in which forests can be addressed together with other forms of land use such as grazing and agriculture.

The International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO)

The ITTO is a forum for policy dialogue among producer and consumer member countries (around 50) on sustainable management of tropical forests and trade in tropical timber. The EU is a party to the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA).

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

CITES is an international agreement to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. Twenty-seven tree species are currently listed by CITES.



THE EU AND THE REST OF THE WORLD

The EU is an important player in international cooperation on forests and forestry. Besides its role in world trade in forest products, the EU promotes sustainable forestry and good forest governance. The EU seeks to tackle illegal logging by its EU Action Plan for Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT)¹⁶. A FLEGT licensing scheme for monitoring and controlling imports of timber into the EU followed. The EU also uses its development cooperation programmes to improve sustainable forest management in developing countries and help them to protect and use their resources better.

FAP and globalisation

A recent study by the European Commission found that globalisation has been favourable to the development of the EU forest sector. From 1985 to 2005 the EU substantially increased its global export share in all categories of industrial roundwood, sawnwood, wood-based panels, newsprint, printing and writing paper. However, it lost ground in pulp and paper and paperboard.

The study also found that know-how, quality, logistics, institutions, etc help define the competitive position in a globalised world. Global bio-energy development was seen to be crucial and should be furthered by European policies. Tighter wood supply, demand from the energy sector, and increased demand in emerging economies may cause a substantial increase in the demand for forest raw material and industrial forest industry products between 2005 and 2030.

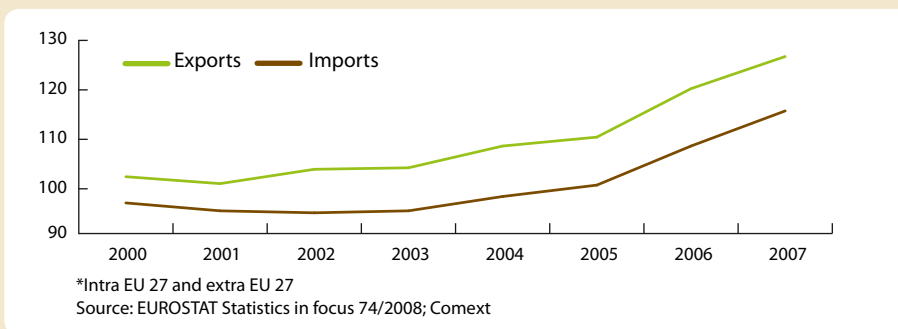
The study report can be found at:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/analysis/external/viability_forestry/index_en.htm

TRADE IN FOREST PRODUCTS

International trade in forest products is increasing. The EU is one of the biggest traders and consumers of forest products in the world, and is a net exporter overall. The EU 27's foreign trade in forest-based industry products grew strongly from 2000 to 2007, in particular during the last three years of that period. The EU's main export destinations were the US (11% of total), Switzerland (11%) and Russia (10%). The EU's imports of these products came from China (15%), the US (14%) and Brazil (11%). The EU's trade surplus in forest-based industry products grew over the period peaking at EUR 8.5 billion in 2006, with exports of pulp and paper by far outweighing the value of imports of wood and wood-based products.

Figure 4. Total* forest-based industry exports and imports, 2000 to 2007 (EUR billion)



¹⁷ see: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/facts/4_2_0_en.htm

8. A question of teamwork

The development of EU measures related to the forest sector has long been characterised by close cooperation and interaction between the European Commission and national government officials and stakeholders.

CONTRIBUTION OF STAKEHOLDERS IN DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FAP

Drafting the FAP involved many consultations with Member States, stakeholders, and cooperation among Commission departments. The Standing Forestry Committee was consulted several times. The committee set up three thematic working groups to deal with the strategic objectives and individual actions to be considered in the FAP.

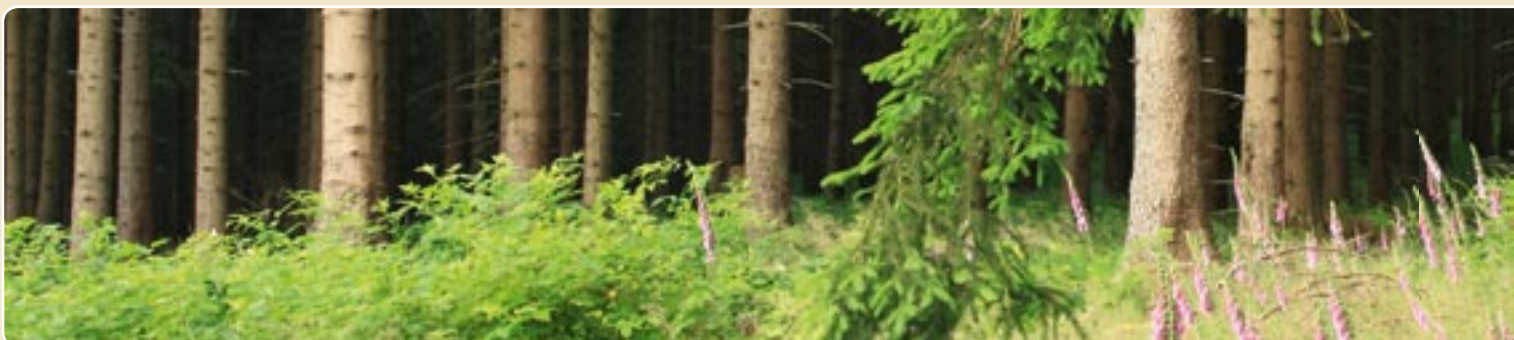
The Advisory Group on Forestry and Cork was consulted on several occasions. The Advisory Group includes representatives of forest owner organisations (public and private), research bodies, forest-based industries, environmental NGOs, forest trade unions, traders, and consumer groups. Several other stakeholders, including those from civil society, made individual contributions.

STANDING FORESTRY COMMITTEE (SFC)

Not only was it consulted in the planning stages of the FAP, the SFC plays an active role in ensuring that the FAP works in practice, facilitating exchanges of experience, sharing information, strengthening cooperation between the SFC and stakeholders and preparing recommendations on specific topics.

INPUTS FROM OTHER EU INSTITUTIONS

Other EU institutions contributed to the preparation of the FAP with their opinions and reports. In particular, the European Parliament's report on the implementation of the EU Forestry Strategy provided a clear set of recommendations on the content and scope of the Action Plan. It and other reports underlined the importance of forests, forestry and forest-based industries in the EU. The EU's Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee are also closely involved in forest sector issues and policy.



¹⁷ see: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/facts/4_2_0_en.htm

9. The FAP and the public

The public has access to nearly all forest and other woodland areas in the EU, and the space available for recreational and other activities linked to the natural environment is increasing. Forests provide scenic and cultural sites for social and environmental activities, such as the traditional collection of mushrooms and berries, hunting, and tourism. This is a major reason why forests are important to all citizens and why forests are seen as serving many functions.

Members of the European Parliament (the directly-elected representatives of EU citizens) have always played a major role in the development of the EU's forest measures, through debates and opinions on proposals to improve EU activities and by commissioning detailed studies on various forest-related issues.

Overall, the contribution that forests make to the quality of life of EU citizens should not be underestimated. Countries with low forest cover indicate that for them afforestation remains a necessary objective so that their citizens can benefit from the goods and services that forests provide.



10. The FAP - a positive story

What the EU and its Member States are doing in the forestry sector is a 'good news story'. The FAP seeks to contribute by encouraging all parties to work together and to broadcast the positive aspects of forestry. The FAP is in place and operational; it is part of a dynamic process and will be adapted to future challenges. While the Action Plan spans five years (2007–2011), a mid-term evaluation is due in 2009 and a final evaluation will be carried out in 2012.

The Action Plan is primarily a framework for activities to be pursued jointly by EU countries and the European Commission. Its success depends on effective and close collaboration among all involved.

A LONG-TERM VISION

Adopting the Forest Action Plan marked an important milestone in creating coherence in policy for the forest sector. The 1998 Forestry Strategy established an overall framework for forest-related activities which the FAP transformed into a more dynamic and focused process capable of effectively addressing emerging challenges. These challenges will be considerable.

Forests are so important for all EU citizens, not just those who live and work around them. A major aim of the FAP is to engage with both practitioners and the public more widely to increase awareness of, but above all to stimulate involvement in, the proactive management of our forests and in securing the multiple benefits this can generate.

11. Sources of further information

European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development:
http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/index_en.htm

European Commission Directorate-General for Enterprise and Industry
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/forest_based/index_en.html

European Commission Directorate-General for Environment
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/forests/home_en.htm

European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS)
<http://effis.jrc.it>

European Commission Joint Research Centre
<http://forest.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS)
<http://effis.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

European Forest Data Centre (EFDAC)
<http://efdac.jrc.ec.europa.eu>







European Commission
Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development

<http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/>



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