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**GREEN PAPER**  
**On Forest Protection and Information in the EU:**  
**Preparing forests for climate change**

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*For further details [divisione05@corpoforestale.it](mailto:divisione05@corpoforestale.it) , [l.colletti@corpoforestale.it](mailto:l.colletti@corpoforestale.it) can be contacted.*

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**Question 1:**

**Do you think maintaining, balancing and enhancing forest functions should be given more attention? If so, on what level should action be taken, EU, national and/or other? How should it be done?**

- At any level (EU, national, regional and local), and taking into account also the international dimension, it will be needed to keep a well balanced approach considering all the pillars of the sustainable forest management (ecologic, climatic, economic and socio-cultural ones) and also the overall public land management.
- It is necessary to stress the peculiarities of Mediterranean forests, existing in Italy and other EU member states. They are quite different, sometimes not profitable from the productive side but quite relevant according to the environmental, landscape and social elements: they are also prone to certain extreme climatic events (fires, drought, desertification) expected to worsen according to the scenarios of climatic change. The management of such forests requires particular policies providing support and guidelines. It is quite important, for instance, promoting their harvesting according to the principles of sustainable forest management, especially when there are huge benefits for the society (preservation of biodiversity, forest fire prevention, hydrogeology service and so on) and, therefore, side-benefits linked to the ecosystem services provided, especially where harvesting and management costs exceed the revenue.
- After 2013 the European Commission should present a new common framework for actions – both national and EU – inspired by the current EU Forest Action Plan (EU FAP, expiring in 2011, final evaluation scheduled in 2012) acting as guidelines to the actions to be undertaken at different levels and according to the principle of subsidiarity. As for actions, the EU should get one or more supporting/co-financing instruments of forest measures, EU and national ones, having high added value and recalling, in particular, the current Rural Development Regulation (agriculture) and LIFE+ Regulation (concerning particular environmental initiatives as communication and raising-awareness).
- Therefore, learning from previous experiences and if stronger common forest measures are envisaged, three main tools should be designed: a forest framework having same of higher strength than the EU FAP (a new Forest Action Plan? An EU Forest Directive? An European legally-binding forest Convention? What else?) supported by a new rural development regulation clearly devoting some funds, if not a full axe, to structural measures for the forest sector (too weak if compared with the agriculture one) and a new environmental regulation having the point of view of a program, integrated and long-term, focused mainly on information. Shape and content of such three tools should be negotiated in the right venues, e.g. the EU Council.

**Question 2:**

- **To what extent are EU forests and the forest sector ready to address the nature and magnitude of the challenges posed by climate change?**
- **Do you consider particular regions, certain countries more exposed/vulnerable to the effects of climate change? What sources of information would you base your answer on?**
- **Would you see a need for EU-level early action to ensure all forest functions are maintained?**
- **How could the EU contribute to add value to the respective efforts of MS?**

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- Forest situation in the EU is quite mixed and sometimes not very well known. The Mediterranean region, as confirmed by the IPCC *Fourth Assessment Report*, at global level is one of the most vulnerable areas to the effects of climatic changes. It is quite probable (if not even sure as many processes are already occurring) that Mediterranean forests would be seriously affected by the raising of global temperature exposing them more to extreme climatic events (fires, drought, short but heavy rainfalls, etc) and to events causing erosion, desertification and enabling also biotic factors of disturbance (e.g. heavy outbreaks of parasites – mostly exotic because carried out by the globalization in timber and propagation material trade – difficult to be put under control and having fast biological cycles if compared to natural reaction time of forest ecosystems).
  - Existing studies concerning the impact of climatic changes on forests should be promoted and extended: this is the case of the project BIOREFUGIA, co-financed by the European Commission in the framework of the Regulation (EC) N. 2152/2003 “Forest Focus” and aiming to evaluate the shift in the areal of some of the most important forest species currently occurring in Central Italy. Such project, later on developed at national level on a bigger number of forest species (27) also to foresee potential refuge areas on the land, stressed that due to the climatic change and the progression towards a tropical weather broad areas of Southern Europe and Italy will be affected by a growing risk of desertification and forest fires. Furthermore additional research is needed on the carbon permanence and related gas exchanges in forest ecosystems, especially into soils and in the long run.
  - Based on the information provided by the periodic report from IPCC and on the researches carried out in the Member States, the EU should draft sort of “guidelines for the management of national forests” taking into account also the targets of impact reduction and mitigation.
  - It should be also possible the co-financing of indemnity for forests proving to significantly absorb and store carbon by designing systems of payment of ecosystem services (PES). A further tool to support management techniques able to increase forest carbon stocks could be the acknowledgement of forest carbon credits (only if their environment integrity is proved) inside the system of the EU emission trading scheme (ETS). The exclusion of such credits from ETS leaves the sector without an effective economic incentive able to foster the mitigation function of climatic changes through an active involvement of the privates.

**Question 3:**

**- Do you consider that EU and MS policies are sufficient to ensure that the EU contributes to forest protection, including preparing forests for climate change and conserving biodiversity in forests?**

**- In what areas, if any, do you think further action may be necessary? How might this be organized, under the given policy framework or beyond?**

- Currently the forest policies existing in the EU and their Member States are quite fragmented and cross-sectoral to many sectors, therefore usually not being able to be fast, coordinated and homogenous. However several forest problems – first of all the impacts of extreme climatic events and many phenomena of forest degradation – have a transboundary and regional dimension: it is therefore need to finding a sort of “minimum common

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denominator” taking into account all the goods and service, also and especially the environmental ones, that forests have to ensure in a environment changing quickly and continuously and supporting them all together. It will be so very useful a revision and update of the EU Forestry Strategy adopted in the year 1998 by EU (composed only by 15 Member States) and basically staying unchanged nowadays. Such revision should take into duly consideration, especially due to the new scientific evidences, the particularities and needs of areas being very vulnerable to the effects of climate changes, as the Mediterranean region: a EU forest strategy aiming to reduce the negative impacts of climate changes and depending on the degree of risk and vulnerability existing in the different areas should also be drafted.

- It should be important to insert the management and preservation of forests inside the new CBD strategic plan to be discussed in Nagoya next October, being aware of the new decision to have the three Rio Conventions working together in synergy and sharing the same targets also in the forest sector: that’s due to the role played by the forests in the biodiversity preservation and as well as in the mitigation of the effects of climatic changes and of desertification processes. This is also fully in line with the option 4 chosen by the EU Environment Council on March 2010 concerning the commitments on biodiversity. In this framework Italy is currently developing a National Biodiversity Strategy having also a whole section on forests: it will also implement the Framework Program for the Forest Sector (PQSF), the new national forest program recalling and developing the EU Forest Action Plan.
- Apart from the support to the national forest inventories (better described at point N.5) should be designed ways of EU co-financing of planned, coordinated and measurable national forest actions as those carried out at local level according to the national forest programs (nfp). For instance it can be taken into account the example of the Italian Framework Program for the Forest Sector (PQSF): it has been generated by shared and long-term activities between several Italian forest actors, respecting the international forest commitments subscribed by Italy and shaped around the EU FAP. Because the cuts in the national public budget linked to the economic crisis it lost the budget initially foreseen and needed to give it more efficiency and credibility. Forest planning designed at any level should therefore be eligible to EU co-funding to be really implemented.
- It is also necessary to find a way to support forest resources and compensate their public services by incentives, indemnities and tax reduction and designing payment systems for ecosystem services (PES). Such indemnities could also be represented by discounts in taxes and bills aiming to support silviculture activities carried out in the forests, even when not economically viable. It has also to be considered the need to continue the co-financing of field, structural measures, to be carried out both in private and public forests, aiming to support their multifunctionality. Essential public services as the hydrogeological one are ensured by the forests, a major multifunctional resource, but they aren’t usually acknowledged trough an indemnity to their owners of managers. As a further public benefit part of such revenues could be invested in the active and sustainable management of these forests and of their surroundings.
- It could also be considered the idea of better coordinate EU forest policies (currently fragmented and thematic) by the establishment of a Forest directorate general inside the European Commission or of a coordinating group having higher political status than the current Interservice Group on Forestry (ISG).

- The need of timber from EU external countries should also be reduced by financially investing in the “active management” of Italian and European forests (often not economically profitable) by promoting at national level indemnities and tax restitution for works of forest management and by stimulating the establishment of cultivated forests inside marginal, abandoned or available areas (e.g. poplar cultivations along river banks). Also the establishment of peri-urban forests and recreational parks, living windbreaks, green fences and buffer forest zone should be revitalized and promoted. These actions are also interesting as in line with other EU actions against illegal logging, as FLEGT and “due diligence”.

#### **Question 4:**

- **How could the practical implementation of SFM be updated in order to upkeep the productive and protective functions of forests and overall viability of forestry, as well as enhance the resilience of EU forests in view of climate change and biodiversity loss? ?**
- **What steps are required to ensure that the gene pool in forest reproductive material can be successfully conserved in its diversity and adapted to climate change?**

- It is necessary to revise the financial instrument of the Rural Development Regulation and its Rural Development Plans because it shows the following main limitations:
  1. Huge concurrence with the agriculture system and financial underestimation for the forest management and the forest enterprises;
  2. Strong limitations as for forest beneficiaries that besides, are sometimes difficult to be identified in the Mediterranean context (forest enterprises and forest consortia);
  3. Lack of financial support for certain measures (e.g. establishment of associations, bioenergy, management and harvesting plans, etc).

It would therefore be useful to establish new supporting instruments of sustainable forest management providing annual indemnities or similar payments. The main problem in Mediterranean forests is the abandonment of traditional practices, i.e. the lack of active management that could result in a growing number and intensity of forest fires, loss of biodiversity and reduced uptake of atmospheric carbon. Such an instrument could be a Forest Fund helping forest owners and managers by specific indemnities aiming to boost active management in forest.
- It should be foreseen a financial incentive for innovative intervention projects taking into account all together the three sustainability pillars and able to evaluate if they reached their targets. The goal is to improve production and protection of forests together with the rentability of forestry, to increase the resilience of forests ecosystems towards climatic changes and the loss of biodiversity, and to enable their management: all in a forest environment having an high degree of diversity as the Italian one is.
- Supporting also financially silviculture activities having a clear public dimension especially if carried out in a context of medium and long term planning (e.g. plans of land management) and facilitating the “active management” of forests during the most expensive interventions (e.g. clearings, thinning, phytosanitary measures, etc), in forest ecosystems more difficult to be managed (e.g. complex woodlands having high levels of biodiversity) avoiding to take into account the ecologic pillar of sustainable forest management on its own.

- Supporting the environmental values of woodlands, for instance by establishing more mixed forests, by using more local species and suitable provenances, by accelerating the naturalization processes of highly human-altered forest stands, by enabling suitable interventions in the urban-forest interface areas (the most risky for human lives in relation due to forest fires), by respecting rare, scattered species and also by designing, where possible, the establishment of ecologic corridors and forest “germoplasm islands”.
- Promoting association set-up especially at national level, (cooperatives, consortia, consolidation of land and properties) aiming to manage in a unified and sustainable way bigger plots of forest lands originally fragmented and scattered, by also giving more responsibility and indemnities – if possible – fo forest owners and managers.
- Supporting, also financially, planning in private and public forests and foreseeing also a sort of “substitution power” of local authorities if forest owners/managers are not able to carry out such activities.
- Facilitating the establishment of local forest funds financed, for instance, by taxes imposed on polluting activities or fines for environment crimes (e.g. Directive 2008/99/EC for the protection of environment through criminal law) and addressed to forest activities to be implemented in “ virtuous municipalities”.
- Supporting and improving, both at national and EU level, a network of forest biodiversity centers able to test and provide forest propagation materials to enhance local species, also selecting them because their resilience to climatic change, and able to refer in a transparent manner on species and amounts available in any center, to be used to the different needs and programming related to afforestation, reforestation and forest improvement interventions.

#### **Question 5:**

**Taking into account the various relevant policy levels, is available forest information today sufficient to assess with sufficient accuracy and consistency:**

- **The health and condition of EU forests?**
- **Their productive potential?**
- **Their carbon balance?**
- **Their protective functions (soils, water, weather regulation, biodiversity)?**
- **The provision of services to society and their social function?**
- **Overall viability of forestry?**

**If it is insufficient, how should forest information be improved?**

**Are efforts towards harmonised data collection on forests sufficient?**

**What can the EU do to further develop and / or enhance forest information systems?**

- Due to the end of the EU common scheme of monitoring of forest health, co-financed during some 20 years (1986/86) until the expiration end of the “Forest Focus” regulation, currently the main forest knowledge tools in the Member states are the national forest inventories (nfi) and forest maps and, for forest monitoring, only the EU project FUTMON co-financed by the LIFE+ program and involving 24 Member States. The nfi, apart from first experimental attempts of standardization and networking (COST actions) usually show two limitations: national differences and not systematic approach, thus complicating the comparison. It should be, therefore, very useful to define common criteria and methodologies of data

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sampling and elaboration, shared and better integrated with remote sensing and/or detailed activities. Forest maps (both national and more detailed) should, in any case, respect as soon as possible the UE legislation concerning the INSPIRE system in order to be better spread and used. For the new maps to be established or updated a shared, European common methodology could be suggested, also compatible with the different needs of thematic representation of vegetation units.

- A first action in urgent need of EU support is, therefore, forest information, i.e. the establishment of forest inventories, statistic, monitoring and related cartography. Such activities have a strong added value as knowledge issues are needed as a basis for elaboration and implementation of any forest strategy, however in the same time they are based only on national financial resources put under growing risk by the economic crisis. The preparation of EU coordinated templates, established also thanks to co-funding and linked to periodic and mandatory reporting, should oblige national governments of Member States to keep at least a minimum, reliable and homogeneous level of forest information and would facilitate the collection of data and the availability of national funds being complementary to the UE ones. For the management of the related cartography it would be enough the respect of the INSPIRE European system and to the related national ratification legislation.
- It is also necessary a strategic intervention on the knowledge of forest land under all its quantitative and qualitative elements, aiming to give to everybody knowledge and transparency and, therefore, the opportunity to correctly act in forest planning by the related silviculture activities carried out at any land level. It should be so envisaged the public and systematic collection, during seasons and years, establishment of database and free consultation of optical data (remote sensing pictures having medium-high resolution and georeferenced ortophotos) together with the conclusion and update of forest inventories in each Member State. A first implementation opportunity, for instance, is provided by the new framework agreement on 16 March 2010 between the EU and the Italian firm E-geos to provide high definition satellite imageries: an Italian example in application to be developed thanks to the figures available is represented by the National Geogate of the Ministry of Environment that, thanks to the recent national legislation acknowledging the EU Directive on INSPIRE system, takes a national, strategic role. This possible availability of georeferenced “mapped” data offers huge operational opportunities by broad multidisciplinary sectors linked in different ways to the forests: land planning and management, forestry in particular, biodiversity, climate change, hydrogeologic disorders, phytosanitary topics, forest fires and so on.
- Apart from traditional quantitative data the nfi could be enriched with qualitative topics, i.e. modules/studies on the health of forests and connected resources and on the global forest sector (human activities, socio-economic context, etc). Such activity should be, in particular, carried of for mapping and progression of biotic factors affecting the forests, for instance by integrating the existing inventories with thematic or detailed plots. Each ifn should be converted info a sort of national central hub for forest knowledge actions having different nature, in the same time connected to other national hubs on other land knowledge.
- The network of nfi should also be better integrated with other international databases already existing, for instance the JRC database on forest fires managed in Ispra and the related forecast of fire risk or other extreme climatic events and their potential impact on forests.



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- Concerning the provision of forest goods and services and the enhancement of “made in EU” forest products it could be useful to imagine a tracking system on the origin parallel to FLEGT/due diligence instruments and to existing sustainable certification schemes, aiming to certify the place of production as already done in the agriculture sector.
  - The promotion of the value of sustainable forest management should also be carried out according to a “bottom up” approach, by developing a bigger number of initiatives aiming to shape a common forest consciousness among citizens. To this end it would be useful to support and co-finance more activities spreading common messages as forest public campaigns aiming to explain and further spread the concept of sustainable forest management or broad initiatives of forest pedagogy (e.g. follows-up of the EU PAWSMED project). The preparation and use of a common format of EU forest communication would also be envisaged to give a coordinated and homogenous message as much as possible.