

EDITORIAL

WHAT DOES THE NEW EU FOREST STRATEGY FOR 2030 BRING?

The membership of the Republic of Croatia in the European Union, increasing globalisation and global climate change have a lasting effect on Croatian forests and forestry. Although 43 % of the EU's land area is covered by forests, there was no common EU forest policy for the 2014 – 2020 period. Instead, there was a *New Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest-based sector*. The European Commission adopted and published a *New EU Forest Strategy for 2030* in July of this year. The new strategy continues on the EU Biological Diversity Strategy for 2030. A core part of the European Green Deal, it anticipates a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 % by 2030 and a climate-neutral continent by 2050. It also helps meet EU targets to increase CO₂ removal through natural sinks under the Climate Act. **The strategy gives forests, foresters and the forest-based sector a central role in meeting these targets.** With their help, a European transition to a modern, climate-neutral, resource-efficient and competitive economy is expected.

The Strategy aims to obtain healthier, more resilient and biodiverse forests that can fulfil their socio-economic and environmental functions, enable the survival of the population in rural areas, ensure employment, as well as provide recreational functions that contribute to physical and mental health of citizens, thus achieving highly sustainable management. It also aims to reconcile the demand for wood and felling of forests within the limits of sustainability, to achieve optimal use of forests on the cascading principle, as well as a circular economy. The cascading principle has already been incorporated in the EU Forest Strategy for 2014 – 2020. In accordance with this principle, wood is used in the following order of priority: 1. wood products, 2. extension of their shelf life, 3. reuse, 4. recycling, 5. bioenergy, and 6. disposal.

The focus is on strict protection of all primary and old forests. The European Commission is developing guidelines on forestry in harmony with nature and inclusion in a vo-

luntary certification programme “in harmony with nature”. Every effort should be made to prevent climate-related damage and increase forest resilience.

The Strategy sets financial incentives for forest owners and administrators to improve the quantity and quality of EU forests. The Commission has called on member states to adopt new financial schemes within the Common Agricultural Policy. An example of public and private payment programmes for ecosystem services is the Croatian tax levied for non-market forest functions, which has been attacked by the domestic public for years as one of the major parasitical levies. It has consequently been considerably reduced and does not contribute beneficially to forests as it used to.

The European Commission expects a broad discussion on the future of European forests and invites citizens and communities to embrace the pledge to plant at least 3 billion additional trees by 2030 on the basis of the guiding principle: plant and grow the right tree, in the right place, for the right purpose. The natural succession of abandoned rural areas is seen as the driving force in the effort to increase forest areas in the EU. The Commission's Action Plan for the implementation of the pledge to plant 3 billion additional trees by 2030 has also been adopted, and the activities should start in the first quarter of 2022. All the activities will be constantly promoted and monitored, which is crucial for monitoring the progress as the planting project unfolds.

The strategy has been reviewed by users of wood raw material, who fear the reduction of quantities for use, but also by supporters of stricter environmental protection, who criticize the strategy for not being sufficiently clear and for lacking detailed guidelines for monitoring the achievement. As early as next year we will see to what extent the adopted guidelines of the European Commission will facilitate the implementation of the strategy and how much it will affect the various stakeholders related to forests.

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