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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
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Subject:	Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on a monitoring framework for resilient European forests *- Information from the Presidency*

Delegations will find in the Annex a Presidency note on the above-mentioned subject to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council meeting ("Agriculture and Fisheries") on 24 June 2024.

ANNEX

PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION ON A MONITORING FRAMEWORK FOR RESILIENT EUROPEAN FORESTS

INTRODUCTION

On 22 November 2023, the European Commission published a proposal for a Regulation on a Monitoring Framework for Resilient European Forests. This proposal constitutes the main legislative initiative announced in the "New EU Forest Strategy for 2030" published in 2021.

The proposal aims to ensure high-quality forest monitoring. Such monitoring would make it possible to track progress on achieving EU targets and policy objectives concerning forests (including on biodiversity, climate and crisis response), to improve risk assessment and preparedness, and to support evidence-based decision-making.

The proposal's ambition is to establish a comprehensive, high-quality monitoring system (managed by the European Commission in cooperation with the Member States) that would ensure standardised or harmonised data and cover all forests and other wooded land.

The data would be obtained using a combination of remote sensing (notably through the Copernicus programme) and ground surveys. It would build on existing data sets, good practices within Member States and the technological advancement of remote sensing as well the EU capacity to provide these services.

The forest monitoring system would consist of three main elements:

- a geographically explicit identification system for the mapping and localisation of forest units;
- a forest data collection framework, specifying timing and data collection requirements; and
- a forest data sharing framework that would enable the sharing of data and make such data publicly available.

Member States would also be encouraged to develop voluntary integrated long-term forest plans or adapt their existing integrated long-term forest plans or strategies, taking into account a medium- to long-term perspective.

THE PROCESS IN THE COUNCIL

The Spanish Presidency organised an exchange of views on the proposal in the Environment Council on 18 December 2023. The Belgian Presidency organised a similar exchange of views in the AGRIFISH Council on 23 January 2024.

In order to effectively address the cross-sectoral issues covered by this legislative proposal and to carry out the preparatory work linked to its examination within the Council, the Belgian Presidency proposed to establish an **ad hoc working party on forest monitoring** (AHWP FM). The establishment and mandate of the AHWP FM (code F30) were agreed by the Permanent Representatives Committee on 17 January 2024.

The above working party works under the "Agriculture and Fisheries" configuration of the Council, involving the communities of the Working Party on Forestry (F.16) and the Working Party on Environment (J.1). The AHWP FM reports to the "Agriculture and Fisheries" configuration of the Council and, on a regular basis, to the "Environment" configuration of the Council.

At the Environment Council on 25 March 2024, the Belgian Presidency informed ministers on the progress made in the examination of the proposal.

The AHWP FM has discussed the proposal in 6 working party meetings. The AHWP FM met for the first time on 5 February 2024, when delegations exchanged views so as to develop a common understanding of the general technical elements of the proposed forest monitoring system. The discussion took place around four specific questions addressed to the Commission[1] and was comprehensive, detailed and instructive.

To facilitate the examination of and the discussion on the proposal, the Presidency opted for a clustering approach[2] allowing for a step-by-step analysis of the proposal, starting from principles and generalities, progressing through the details and ending with the implications in terms of implementation. The Presidency identified eight clusters: Cluster 1. Forest Monitoring System; Cluster 2. Planning; Cluster 3. Identification system; Cluster 4. Collection framework; Cluster 5. Sharing framework; Cluster 6. Exchange and use; Cluster 7. Data collected; Cluster 8. Implementation.

For each cluster addressed, the work has been structured in the following way: (1) Overview of the provisions presented by the Commission; (2) Exchange of views with Member States and further clarifications if needed; (3) Opportunity to send, after the meeting, detailed comments and text proposals for the provisions analysed.

In the second meeting of the AHWP FM on 23 February 2024, delegations expressed their appreciation of the approach proposed by the Presidency, which was considered appropriate for the analysis of such a complex and technical proposal. During this second meeting, the examination of the articles of the proposal started and the first two clusters were analysed and discussed in an open, interactive, and constructive atmosphere.

1 5933/24
2 6696/24

More time was needed for the analysis of the provisions of cluster 3 and two AHWP meetings (11 March and 22 April) were, eventually, dedicated to it.

On 21 and 22 May, the clusters 4 and 5 were analysed. Taking advantage of the opportunity of the presence of an expert from the JRC, a presentation of the provisions of cluster 7 was also made.

The last meeting of the AHWP took place on 6 June during which clusters 6 and 8 were presented and discussed.

The multidisciplinary format of the AHWP group has provided both forestry and environmental expertise, which has proved to be particularly useful in the examination of the proposal.

The discussions on the proposal have been technical and intense between the Commission and the Member States, which generally share the main objectives of the proposal. They have provided a better understanding of the proposal. However, many questions still remain open. These include the definition of 'forests' and of the concept ‘forest unit’, the complementarity and compatibility of forest data gathered by remote sensing and 'in -situ', data protection, how data would be harmonised at EU level, how the Regulation would apply to small forest holders, the question of administrative burden and the costs for the Member States etc. The presence of various voluntary provisions in the Regulation and the number of delegated and implementing acts also raise concerns. There is also a certain level of scepticism in relation to the main principles of the proposal, its various underlying modalities and practical implications.

The first examination of the proposal is expected to continue with cluster 7 and its three lists of forest indicators, under the Hungarian Presidency.