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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

**The European Union's participation in the 7th FOREST EUROPE Ministerial
Conference (Madrid, 20 -21 October 2015)**

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The 7th FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference will be held in Madrid on 20 - 21 October 2015. More than 40 European States, among them all Member States of the European Union, together with the European Union (represented by the European Commission) will attend the Conference, which is organised jointly by Spain and Slovakia.

The forest policy discussion under the Ministerial Conferences, renamed Forest Europe in 2009, is an inter-governmental, country-led process launched in 1990 with the objective of promoting the sustainable management of Europe's forests. It operates by voluntary commitments of its current 47 signatories. The European Union has been a party in the process since its beginning, and, so far, has signed all its resolutions and declarations.

Since 1990, six FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conferences (previously known as Ministerial Conferences on the Protection of Forests in Europe) have taken place.

- The first Ministerial Conference, held in December 1990 in Strasbourg, was devoted essentially to forest monitoring and protection, and forest research issues.
- The second, held in June 1993 in Helsinki, mainly addressed the sustainable management of forests, conservation of biological diversity in forests, the forest-climate relationship and forests in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.
- At the third, held in June 1998 in Lisbon, the main focus was on the socio-economic aspects of Europe's forestry sector, criteria and indicators for the sustainable management of forests and the conservation of biological and landscape diversity of forests.
- The fourth, held in April 2003 in Vienna, was principally concerned with integrating sustainable forest management into the broader context of sustainable development.
- The fifth, held in Warsaw in November 2007, addressed two main themes; the relationship of forests, wood and energy, and forests and water.
- And finally the most recent Ministerial Conference was convened in June 2011 in Oslo, Norway. Here, Ministers adopted European 2020 Targets for the protection and sustainable management of forests, and took a decision to launch negotiations on a Legally Binding Agreement on Forests in Europe.

For these six Conferences the Commission participated on behalf of the European Union and signed the final acts alongside the Member States.

As was the case for the past conferences, the 7th FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference is a step towards the implementation in Europe's forests of the various commitments taken at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development which took place in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention to Combat Desertification and the Framework Convention on Climate Change, as well as the commitments taken at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in 2002, and at the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF, 2000 to the present).

The 7th FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference in Madrid will address the following topics:

- Green economy and social aspects of sustainable forest management;
- Protection of forests in a changing environment;
- The future direction of FOREST EUROPE.

It is expected to submit to the Ministers a general declaration and two resolutions relating respectively to the first two above-mentioned topics. The proposed declaration and resolutions do not represent legally-binding instruments, but establish political commitments by the Conference participants. In addition, it is also expected to submit to the Ministers a 'decision', to be adopted by consensus, concerning the future direction of FOREST EUROPE.

The relevant Commission services were actively involved in the preparatory phase of this Conference for elaborating its non-legally binding declaration and resolutions. All elements within the declaration and resolutions are in line with existing policies.

The European Union's participation in the Conference is necessary, in view of the following:

- the Conference relates to the implementation at the pan-European level of the international commitments taken, not only by the Member States but also by the European Union;
- as a signatory to the Strasbourg, Helsinki, Lisbon, Vienna, Warsaw and Oslo resolutions, the European Union is directly involved in their follow-up and implementation;
- with the Strasbourg, Helsinki, Lisbon, Vienna Warsaw and Oslo resolutions and those contemplated for Madrid, the countries of Europe will have set themselves fairly detailed guidelines on forest policy laying down broad objectives and strengthening their co-ordination and co-operation in this field. This is consistent with the new EU Forest Strategy¹ for forests and the forest-based sector, and with the associated Conclusions from the Council², and own-initiative report from the European Parliament³. Both the latter support the EU Forest Strategy's proposal to improve co-ordination and co-operation in all policy areas with relevance to the forest sector between the Commission and the Member States as well as between the Member States;
- the Conference topics relate to areas partly covered by Union forestry measures, notably those related to the Rural Development Regulation⁴, the Seventh Environment Action Programme⁵, the Horizon 2020 EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation⁶ as well as with the objectives of EU policies, including rural development; climate; energy; environment and biodiversity; research and technological development.

¹ COM(2013) 659 final; COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION A new EU Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest-based sector

² http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/agricult/142685.pdf

³ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P8-TA-2015-0109&language=EN>

⁴ REGULATION (EU) No 1305/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013

⁵ DECISION No 1386/2013/EU

⁶ [COM/2011/0808](http://ec.europa.eu/horizon2020/) Horizon 2020 - The Framework Programme for Research and Innovation

As a consequence, the Commission will:

1. Participate, on behalf of the European Union and alongside the Member States, in the 7th FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference to be held in Madrid on 20, 21 October 2015.
2. Sign the acts stemming from the Conference on behalf of the European Union. The Commission's signature shall not imply any commitment for joint measures falling outside the scope of European Union competence.

ACTS TO BE ADOPTED BY THE 7th FOREST EUROPE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

Draft Madrid Declaration "25 years together promoting sustainable forest management in Europe"

Draft Madrid Resolution 1: "Forest sector in the centre of Green Economy"

Draft Madrid Resolution 2: "Protection of forests in a changing environment".

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS:

Draft Ministerial Decision on "the future direction of FOREST EUROPE".