1 Introduction

The Council Resolution on a forestry strategy for the European Union was adopted in 1998. It established a framework for forest-related actions in support of Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) based on the coordination of the forest policies of the Member States and Community policies as well as initiatives relevant to forests and forestry.

The Strategy emphasises SFM as defined by FOREST EUROPE with the multifunctional role of forests as overarching principles for action. The Strategy states that forest policy is a competence of the Member States (based on the principle of subsidiarity and the concept of shared responsibility), but that the EU can contribute to the implementation of SFM through common policies. It also emphasises the implementation of international commitments, principles and recommendations through national and/or sub-national forest programmes or equivalent instruments, as well as active participation in all forest-related international processes. Moreover, it stressed the need to improve coordination, communication and cooperation in all policy areas that are of relevance to the forest sector.

Implementation of the forestry strategy was reported by the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament in 2005. The consequent Council Conclusions invited the Commission, in close cooperation with the Member States and in consultation with stakeholders, to elaborate a proposal for an Action Plan. The Council recognised the need for greater coherence of forest-related policies “…the EU Forestry Strategy needs to be updated as a basis for the EU Forest Action Plan to take a proactive approach allowing the forest sector to enhance its competitiveness and economic viability, and to address the growing needs and expectations of society and the challenges of globalisation” (2662nd Council meeting).

In response to the Council request, the EU Forest Action Plan (EU FAP) was put forward and adopted in 2006 by the Commission. It is based on the principles and elements identified in the Forestry Strategy for the EU, and it covers four objectives, namely to:

(1) Improve the long-term competitiveness,
(2) Improve and protect the environment,
(3) Contribute to the quality of life, and
(4) Foster coordination and communication between Community actions, as well as, between Community actions and the forest policies of the Member States.

The Action Plan provides a framework for the implementation of forest-related actions at Community and Member State level, and it serves as an instrument for coordination between different Community actions as well as between Community actions and forest policies of the Member States. The aim was to support and enhance SFM and the multifunctional role of forests. The Leading Actors responsible for implementing the plan in 2007-2011 were consequently the Commission and the Member States.

As part of its implementation plan, the EU FAP was assessed in 20081. The mid-term evaluation report broadly concluded that the EU FAP had been put into practice as the prioritisations of the work programme had been made, and that the Action was on track. However, it was also noted that the effects of the EU FAP on its specific goals (the four objectives above) cannot be expected to show up after only two years of implementation. After an approximately five-year running period, the ex-post evaluation of the Action Plan has now been carried out.

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1http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eval/reports/euforest/
The objectives of the ex-post evaluation of the EU Forest Action Plan were to:

- Build on the mid-term evaluation and provide a review of the implementation, effectiveness and appropriateness of the EU FAP.
- Analyse whether the objectives of the EU FAP have been met, the Action Plan has led to any side effects, the instruments used are appropriate, relevant, effective and efficient and what the role of the key actors was.
- Examine if the EU FAP was the most suitable framework for forest-related actions and instruments of coordination between the Community and Member States.

This was carried out in the light of key developments for the forest sectors in the Member States, and at European and international levels.

This report presents the results of the mid-term evaluation carried out by an external evaluation team during November 2011 – March 2012. The evaluation has been guided by a Steering Group consisting of representatives from the Commission Services involved in the implementation of the EU FAP and led by the DG Agriculture and Rural Development Evaluation unit.

The report is structured into an introduction, a method and analysis section, and conclusions as follows: Chapter 2 briefly explains the state-of-the-play and developments with respect to forests and forestry in the EU, including relevant polices at EU, Member State and international levels, and the implementation of the EU FAP in 2007-2011. Chapter 3 explains the methodology used, as well as the data and information collected during the exercise. Chapter 4 presents answers to the five Evaluation Questions (EQs), three EQs about implementation of the Action (e.g. effectiveness and efficiency, improvement of coherence and cross-sectoral cooperation, and the balancing of economic, environmental and socio-cultural objectives related to forestry) and two EQs about the relevance of the Action (e.g. added value in implementing the EU Forestry Strategy, and; relevance of EU FAP objectives, key actions and activities, as well as adequacy of its organisational set-up). Each EQ response begins with a brief introduction, and in the end there is a summary of lessons learnt during implementation. The lessons learnt are based on the evaluation survey responses and are complemented with open questions as food for thought. Chapter 5 concludes the analysis of the evaluation themes and provide final recommendations for the EU FAP.