Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1282 (2002)[1]

Forest management in Canada and co-operation with Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The earth's forest resources are estimated at some 4 000 million hectares, covering nearly one third of the planet's land mass. In the past they were valued mainly for the wood and by-products that they provided but now they are regarded as a natural resource, performing, among other things, a vital ecological function. It is essential, therefore, to preserve them all while ensuring that their important economic and social role is not undermined. Judicious management of our forests is one of the major challenges faced by our societies.

2. With 410 million hectares of forest covering half of its territory, Canada possesses 10% of the world's forests. Europe, for its part, possesses one third of the world's forests, most of which (some 80%) are located in Russia. Russia alone accounts for 23% of the world's forest cover.

3. In 1992, at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Canada and the member states of the Council of Europe and the European Union adopted the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 and signed the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Framework Convention on Climate Change, thus subscribing to a Statement of Forest Principles and recognising the need to ensure sustainable forest management.

4. The Parliamentary Assembly points out that sustainable management of forests means preserving their biological diversity, their productivity and their ability to fulfil their various functions without undermining other ecosystems.

5. It is also important to take account of the potential repercussions of climate change on forest ecosystems and the role that the latter can play in the implementation of policies in this area.

6. The Assembly is pleased that, as a result of the Canadian Government's invitation and hospitality and the welcome extended by the Federal Parliament and the authorities of the Provinces of British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec, a delegation from the Committee on the Environment, Regional Planning and Local Authorities[2] was able to visit Canada in September 1999 to review the situation on the spot and meet the various parties involved in Canada's forest management policy.

7. The Assembly delegation was able to gauge the role that the exploitation of forests plays in the Canadian economy and what it represents for industry, civil society and the other parties concerned.

8. The Assembly welcomes the fact that on two occasions since 1992 all the parties concerned (governments, industry, native communities, civil society, etc.) have signed the Canada Forest Accord, under which they agreed to help implement the National Forest Strategy. This strategy, which runs for a five-year period, reflects Canada's commitment to the sustainable management of its forests and its desire to establish co-operation and dialogue with both governmental and non-governmental partners.

9. The Assembly is also particularly concerned about the situation of Canada's indigenous peoples and is aware of the importance that representatives of the First Nations attach to the forest, which is often a key element in their social, cultural and economic lives.

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1. Assembly debate on 25 April 2002 (15th Sitting) (see Doc. 9289, report of the Committee on the Environment and Agriculture, rapporteur: Mr Martínez Casañ). Text adopted by the Assembly on 25 April 2002 (15th Sitting).
2. Which has since become the Committee on the Environment and Agriculture.

10. Accordingly, it welcomes the increased commitment and determination of the Canadian authorities – both federal and provincial – to involve the indigenous peoples more closely in the management of natural resources, for which they are now assigned some responsibility. It particularly welcomes the decision to set up training courses for these peoples, designed to enable them to deal with every aspect of forest management.

11. The Assembly also notes the growing interest that civil society in general and environmental groups in particular are taking in forest management. It is important for the public to be informed of and, where possible, involved in natural resource management. Accordingly, it welcomes the steps taken in this direction by the federal government and some of the provinces.

12. Furthermore, in its belief that the future of the forests and the communities that depend on them lies in increased international co-operation, Canada has chosen to play an equally active part in the framing of international agreements of relevance to forests, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Convention on Biological Diversity.

13. As early on as the Rio Conference in 1992, it highlighted the need to set standards and indicators making it possible to arrive at a common definition of sustainable forest management and assess the implementation of sustainable management policies. Since then, Canada has taken an active part in the Montreal Process, which brings together the representatives of various non-European countries wishing to co-operate on this issue.

14. The Assembly welcomes this because it is convinced that all successful forest management policies have to be devised on the basis of criteria deriving from reliable and comprehensive data. It also considers that the discussions that have already been launched at various levels in Europe are particularly worthwhile and that this work may give rise to a legal instrument which would serve the purpose of establishing a number of the conditions required to ensure sustainable forest management.

15. The Assembly is also pleased that Canada is involved in international co-operation on technological research and development in this field. Advances in research, information and communication are an essential factor in improving sustainable resource management and methods of combating threats to forests such as fire, disease, insects or, indeed, inappropriate practices.

16. Bearing in mind that, between them, Canada and the Council of Europe member states possess nearly 40% of the world's forests and that there are many similarities between the situation of the Canadian and Russian forests, particularly as regards their structure, nature and composition, the Assembly considers it important to promote co-operation – especially at parliamentary level – in this field, on questions of specific interest to the various parties.

17. In the light of the foregoing, the Assembly:

encourages Canada to continue in its efforts to set up a sustainable forest management policy resulting from a broad-ranging dialogue with all the groups concerned, while continuing to respond positively to calls for increased dialogue with local communities, civil society and non-governmental organisations;

requests, therefore, that it take account of the concerns expressed by the public regarding forestry practices in certain regions and that it look into the possibility of increasing the number of protected areas in order to preserve an irreplaceable heritage;

stresses that while Canada has a duty to safeguard the economic role of its forests, it must refrain from any forest management practices which might threaten the survival of environmentally vulnerable areas or the conservation of forests which represent an important cultural and ecological heritage;

invites Canada to persist in and enhance its major role in international co-operation in this area by continuing to make its expertise and skill available to other countries;

considers that it would be particularly worthwhile to establish co-operation projects between Canada and those Council of Europe member countries which, like Russia, have a similar forest heritage;

points out that it is particularly important to step up research and share knowledge and experience of major problems such as forest fires, disease and insects;

asks Canada and the Council of Europe member states to consult one another on the definition of standards and indicators and to continue supporting the stance taken by Canada since 1992 and by the European Union, calling for an international agreement on forests setting out common forest management principles while respecting the diversity of forests;

asks the Council of Europe member states to ensure that their national or regional forest programmes are in conformity with the forestry principles adopted at the Rio Conference in 1992. These programmes are essential tools for the implementation of decisions taken by member states under international conventions such as those on climate change, biodiversity and desertification;

calls on the member states of the Council of Europe to introduce the necessary tax measures to attract new investors in the sector, who, in order to qualify, would be required to enter into commitments with regard to sustainable management;

in the same spirit, encourages member states to develop the forestry sector, in particular the use of forestry-derived products for energy purposes, by adopting measures such as the temporary exoneration from social insurance contributions due by young entrepreneurs, or – where applicable – the application of reduced VAT rates for products deriving from this sector which are intended for energy purposes;

recommends that Council of Europe member states keep a close watch on the paper consumption of their administrative and governmental authorities, and in so doing avoid wasteful use of wood products;

points out that within the European Union, although forest management is the responsibility of the member states, many of the activities carried out as part of existing common policies have a major impact on forests. The European Union can therefore make a major contribution in this respect, particularly in the establishment of standards and indicators for the sustainable management of European forests and in the preparation of a legal instrument on the subject;

encourages member countries of the Council of Europe which have not yet done so to join the forest certification system of the Pan European Forest Certification Council (PEFC);

wishes to contribute to parliamentary co-operation in this field by organising meetings on specific subjects with the national parliaments concerned.