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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

concerning the European Community's participation in the fourth Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (Vienna, 28-30 April 2003)

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The fourth Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe will take place in Vienna on 28, 29 and 30 April 2003. Around 35 European States, among them all EU Member States, will attend that conference, which is organised jointly by Austria and Poland.

Preceding the Conference were:

- the first Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe held in December 1990 in Strasbourg and devoted essentially to forest monitoring and protection, and forest research issues;
- the second Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe held in June 1993 in Helsinki and devoted essentially to 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;
- the third Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe held in June 1998 in Lisbon and devoted essentially to the socio-economic aspects of Europe's forestry sector, criteria and indicators for the sustainable management of forests and to the conservation of biological and landscape diversity of forests.

For those three Conferences on the Protection of Forests in Europe, the Commission was empowered by the Council to participate on behalf of the European Community and to sign the final acts alongside the Member States.

As it was the case for the two preceding conferences, the fourth Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe to be held in Vienna is a step towards the implementation in Europe's forests of the various undertakings entered into at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development which took place in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, including the Conventions on Biodiversity and the Climate Change, as well as the undertakings entered into more recently at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in 2002.

The Vienna Conference will address the sustainable management of forests in Europe in a holistic and integrated manner. In particular, the Vienna Conference will deal with the following topics:

- enhancement of sustainable forest management through cross-sectoral co-operation and national forest programmes,
- economic viability of sustainable forest management in Europe,
- social and cultural dimensions of sustainable forest management in Europe,
- conservation and enhancement of forest biological diversity in Europe,
- climate change and sustainable forest management.

It is planned to submit to the Ministers a general declaration and five resolutions relating respectively to the above-mentioned topics. Although the proposed declaration and resolutions will not have the status of a convention, the fairly detailed texts concerned may nevertheless have some impact on the measures to be taken by the Conference participants.

The relevant Commission services were actively involved in the preparatory phase of this Conference for elaborating the non-legally binding declaration and resolutions.

The Community's participation as such in the Conference is highly desirable, indeed necessary, in view of the following:

- the Conference relates to the implementation at European level of the undertakings entered into internationally, not only by the Member States but also by the European Community;
- as a signatory to the Strasbourg, Helsinki and Lisbon resolutions, the European Community is directly involved in the follow-up and implementation of those resolutions;
- with the Strasbourg, Helsinki, Lisbon resolutions and those contemplated for Vienna, the countries of Europe will have set themselves fairly detailed guidelines on forestry policy laying down broad objectives and strengthening co-ordination and co-operation on policies related to forestry. This is consistent with the Council Resolution of 15 December 1998 on a Forestry Strategy for the European Union¹. The latter Resolution identifies as a substantial element of the EU Forestry Strategy the need 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 Community forestry measures, notably those related to the Rural Development Regulation², the Sixth Environment Action Programme³, the Sixth Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development⁴ and the Commission's Communications on "The State of Competitiveness of the EU Forest-based and Related Industries"⁵ and "A Sustainable Europe for a Better World: A European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development"⁶.

As a consequence, the Commission calls on the Council to decide as follows:

1. The Commission shall be authorised to participate, on behalf of the European Community and alongside the Member States, in the fourth Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe to be held in Vienna on 28, 29, 30 April 2003.
2. The Commission shall sign the appended acts stemming from the Conference. The Commission's signature shall not imply any commitment for joint measures falling outside the scope of Community competence.

¹ OJ C 56, 26.2.1999, p. 1.

² Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/1999 (OJ L 160, 26.6.1999, p. 80).

³ Decision 1600/2002/EC (OJ L 242, 10.9.2002, p. 1).

⁴ Decision 1513/2002/EC (OJ L 232, 29.8.2002, p. 1).

⁵ COM(1999) 457 final.

⁶ COM(2001) 264 final.

**ACTS OF THE FOURTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON THE PROTECTION
OF FORESTS IN EUROPE (SEC(2003) 409)**

- Vienna Living Forest Summit Declaration: “European Forests – Common Benefits, Shared Responsibilities”;
- Vienna Resolution 1: Strengthen synergies for sustainable forest management in Europe through cross-sectoral co-operation and national forest programmes;
- Vienna Resolution 2: Enhancing economic viability of sustainable forest management in Europe;
- Vienna Resolution 3: Preserving and enhancing the social and cultural dimensions of sustainable forest management in Europe;
- Vienna Resolution 4: Conserving and enhancing forest biological diversity in Europe;
- Vienna Resolution 5: Climate change and sustainable forest management in Europe.