

[Reconciling forestry and agriculture: we need a new certification scheme to protect forests](#)



In this interview, [Roby Biwer \(LU/PES\)](#), Member of Bettembourg Municipal Council, answers six questions on the EU action to protect and restore forests worldwide. In the context of the COVID-19, the rapporteur of the CoR opinion on [‘Stepping up EU action to protect and restore the world’s forests’](#) calls for a new EU certification scheme and information system that endorses deforestation-free products and short, transparent supply chains. The opinion is to be adopted at the [1-2 July plenary session](#).[□]

Extensive deforestation in the Amazon is driven by global demand for meat, with thousands of hectares being felled every year to feed world meat markets. Are we literally eating up the Amazon rainforest? In general terms, how can we make sure that food production (meat, coffee, cocoa and palm oil) does not have a negative impact on forests? What is the EU role in protecting and restoring the world’s forests? Is the EU doing enough?

Although most consumers are not aware of it, meat, coffee, cocoa and palm oil are amongst the products that are currently causing heavy deforestation at the global level. We must work in two fronts if we want to make markets move towards more sustainable and deforestation-free products. As a first step, we need to reinforce information and educational actions to ensure that consumers are aware of the economic, social and environmental impact of their food-consumption habits. Consumer behaviour can definitely shape food markets and accelerate the production of sustainable and deforestation-free products. For that same purpose, we must also promote healthier and ethically correct diets, stressing both the nutritive and socio-economic benefits of plant-based intakes with high levels of fruits and vegetables that are certified as resulting from deforestation-free supply chains. The second front we need to work on is a European commitment to design and implement a new certification scheme that encourages deforestation-free products and contributes to the promotion worldwide of a forward-looking European vision on forestry and food production.

While significant deforestation mostly happens in non-EU countries, forests are being currently logged in many mountain areas in Europe, for instance in Romania and Slovakia and in some Balkan countries. Why is it happening here? What can be done at the local and regional level to prevent deforestation from happening? Do you have any concrete examples? What would your message be to mayors, presidents of regions and local and regional representatives across the European Union?

I cannot comment on the specific situation in individual countries, but based on my own experience, I can say that it is always key to have a constructive dialogue between all concerned stakeholders and their interests, and we, as

local and regional authorities, are best placed to conduct this dialogue. We need to protect forests and biodiversity, and we need to work with farmers and forest-owners to find appropriate solutions, which will also benefit them in the long run – including those who want to develop the recreational use of forests in a sustainable way. In this context, it has to be clear that international agreements and EU and national laws on forests protection need to be respected and enforced, but local and regional authorities have an important role in mediating conflicts between different interests at the local and regional levels.

Today, it is very difficult to trace where our food comes from, especially with products such as cocoa and rubber, as there are many small producers involved and the supply chain is long and untransparent. What can be done to make supply chains more transparent? How can we ensure that businesses operate in a sustainable manner and that only sustainably sourced goods from deforestation-free supply chains are produced in the EU? Are voluntary and existing codes of conduct sufficient?

Supply chains are difficult to trace, and, in order to make them more transparent and easy to monitor, an information system (starting from the experience of the Ecolabel database) should be implemented, with the help and close involvement of all the stakeholders who can share their expectations, experiences and concerns in order to implement useful and feasible procedures. The information system should include and promote deforestation-free products and implement procedures to check the accuracy of the information and assessments collected in order to improve confidence in the information provided, including strong traceability requirements guaranteeing the origin of products, and stronger monitoring and enforcement systems in order to help prevent fraud and the mislabelling of products.

How would you convince me that I should buy a 'sustainable' bar of chocolate rather than the cheapest type? What is the role of consumers in making our supply chains more sustainable and preventing deforestation in particular?

Given the increasing demand for organic food, which is driven by a higher consumer appetite for bio- and environmentally friendly food products, deforestation-free and sustainable products are increasing their market share. Indeed, the purchase of sustainable products that are environmentally friendly has become a trend, a fancy and sexy statement to make. Thus, a person is willing to pay more for an environmentally friendly product because she or he is making a statement that has a social value and recognition. Citizens' role is definitely crucial in influencing markets.

The Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies were published by the European Commission on 20 May. Both are central to the European Green Deal. What are your first reactions? Is there a reason for hope? How important is reforestation to achieving climate-neutrality in the EU?

The Green Deal lists among its many objectives the design of a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system, preserving and restoring ecosystems and biodiversity, and the 'zero pollution' objective for an environment free of toxic substances. To protect European citizens and ecosystems, the EU must

be more effective in monitoring, reporting, preventing and remedying air, water, and soil and the pollution of consumer products. We can therefore deduce that reforestation to achieve climate neutrality in the EU is of fundamental importance. Europe is moving towards a new way of life, sending a key message to the whole world and aiming at becoming the leader of a new economy decoupled from resource use.

The Covid-19 crisis has hit our global supply chains hard. What are the lessons we can learn from this crisis?

This crisis was caused by globalisation, which spread the virus at a high speed. Today, we know better the extent to which supply chains, such as those linked to industrial farms, are closely intertwined and how the system can easily collapse if a link is broken. Rethinking these mutual dependencies and making supply chains more resilient to global challenges is becoming a must. We must equally reconsider the important role of short (and probably more easily traceable) supply chains, and the need to monitor the relationships with and between long-chain suppliers. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, we have also learned that social disparity leads to less attention being paid to the environment. This occurs because human survival is put in the foreground, while taking care of the environment is only a background consideration for low-income social groups.

Notes:

The European Union has close to 182 million hectares of forests, covering 43% of its land area, making it one of the most forest-rich regions in the world. In addition to providing lumber and wood products, our forests are home to a major part of Europe's biodiversity and contribute to our health and well-being. As a major carbon sink, forests act as an important stopgap to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change ([European Commission](#)).

Since 1990, it is estimated that 420 million hectares of forest have been lost through conversion to other land uses, although the rate of deforestation has decreased over the past three decades. Between 2015 and 2020, the rate of deforestation was estimated at 10 million hectares per year, down from 16 million hectares per year in the 1990s. Agricultural expansion continues to be the main driver of deforestation and forest degradation and the associated loss of forest biodiversity. These and other insights can be found in the report ['The State of the World's Forests 2020'](#).

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First “BORDERS FORUM” and the 10th EGTC Platform meeting



On 9 and 10 November 2020, the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) is hosting the first edition of the [BORDERS FORUM](#) and the 10th Annual meeting of the EGTC Platform in cooperation with the European Committee of the Regions and the European Commission in Paris. The event will gather high representatives from the local, regional, national and European level including Commissioner Elisa Ferreira, CoR President Apostolos Tzitzikostas and ministers from France, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Luxembourg and Poland. The event is organised under the high patronage of the President of France, Mr Emmanuel Macron.

The COVID-19 crisis has put borders back at the centre of political debate when European internal borders were abruptly closed due to the pandemic. This had huge effects on border regions as cross-border territories comprise about 40% of Europe and more than 2 million Europeans daily cross a border to get to work

The objective of the Borders Forum is to create a place for discussion and a far-reaching political sounding board to highlight the needs of cross-border territories. It will bring together local, national and European players involved in cross-border cooperation, and will reaffirm their shared ambition and their place in political debate, as well as consolidate a European cross border citizens' Alliance.

This event comes at a time when Europe is celebrating the 30th anniversary of its Interreg* cooperation programmes, the 10 years of the EGTC** Platform, and the implementation of the Aachen Treaty, a bilateral agreement between France and Germany on closer cooperation and integration.

For more information please visit: www.bordersforum.eu

Note to the editor:

*[Interreg](#) is one of the key instrument of the European Union supporting cooperation across borders through project funding. Its aim is to jointly tackle common challenges and find shared solutions in fields such as health, environment, research, education, transport, sustainable energy and more.

**[European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation](#) are an European legal instrument designed to facilitate and promote cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. It allows entities from different member states to come together under a new entity with full legal personality.

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Press release – New rules allow EU consumers to defend their rights collectively



The new rules introduce a harmonised model for representative action in all member states that guarantees consumers are well protected against mass harm, while at the same time ensuring appropriate safeguards from abusive lawsuits. The new law also aims to make the internal market function better by improving tools to stop illegal practices and facilitating access to justice for consumers.

“Europe must become a shield that protects the people”

Rapporteur [Geoffroy Didier \(EPP, FR\)](#) said, “We have sought to strike a balance between the legitimate protection of consumer interests and the need for legal certainty for businesses. Each member state has at least one entity qualified to exercise a remedy, while at the same time putting in place safeguards against abusive recourse. Europe must become a shield that protects the people. This new legislation offers new rights to consumers in their daily lives and shows that Europe is making a difference.”

Main elements of the agreement:

- Each member state will have to name **at least one qualified entity** (an organisation or a public body) that will be empowered and financially

supported to launch **actions for injunction and redress** on behalf of groups of consumers and will guarantee consumers' access to justice;

- On **designation criteria** for qualified entities, the rules distinguish between cross-border cases and domestic ones. For the former, entities must comply with a set of harmonised criteria. They have to demonstrate 12 months of activity in protecting consumers' interest prior to their request to be appointed as a qualified entity, have a non-profit character and ensure they are independent from third parties whose economic interests oppose the consumer interest;
- For **domestic actions**, member states will set out proper criteria consistent with the objectives of the directive, which could be the same as those set out for cross-border actions;
- The rules strike a balance between access to justice and protecting businesses from abusive lawsuits through the Parliament's introduction of the "**loser pays principle**", which ensures that the defeated party pays the costs of the proceedings of the successful party;
- To further avoid abusive lawsuits, Parliament negotiators also insisted that courts or administrative authorities may decide to **dismiss manifestly unfounded cases** at the earliest possible stage of the proceedings in accordance with national law;
- Negotiators agreed that the Commission should assess whether to establish a **European Ombudsman for collective redress** to deal with cross-border representative actions at Union level;
- The **scope** of collective action would include trader violations in areas such as data protection, financial services, travel and tourism, energy, telecommunications, environment and health, as well as air and train passenger rights, in addition to general consumer law.

Next steps

Parliament as a whole and the Council will now have to approve the political agreement. The directive will enter into force 20 days following its publication in the Official Journal of the EU. Member states will then have 24 months to transpose the directive into their national laws, and an additional six months to apply it.

Background

The Representative Action Directive is a part of the [New Deal for Consumers](#), launched in April 2018 by the European Commission, to ensure stronger consumer protection in the EU. It includes stronger consumer rights online,

tools to enforce rights and compensation, penalties for violating EU consumer law and improved business conditions.

Remarks by President Charles Michel after the 22nd EU-China summit



I am pleased that we could speak by video conference to discuss important topics for both the EU and China today. In fact, our diplomatic relations are 45 years old this year and evolving. Our discussions today were open and substantive and we discussed many topics, topics we agree on, but, of course, we also discussed topics we disagree on.

We focussed on four important areas. The first one, COVID-19 and the economic consequences, the economic recovery. The second one is the EU-China relationship. The third one is Hong Kong and the important question for us of human rights. And the fourth topic is related to international issues.

Concernant le premier aspect, le COVID-19 et ses conséquences, nous avons eu l'occasion d'exprimer l'importance pour nous de tirer les conséquences en toute transparence de la réaction internationale sur ce sujet. Nous avons aussi eu l'occasion de rappeler à quel point nous sommes mobilisés, s'agissant de la question des vaccins qui, pour nous, doivent être un bien commun, accessible pour tout le monde et également à un prix abordable. Et nous considérons qu'une relance ambitieuse sera extrêmement importante sur le plan économique. Nous avons eu l'occasion d'expliquer aussi le processus européen en lien avec le budget européen et le fonds de relance que nous souhaitons mettre en place pour soutenir l'activité économique.

We had also the occasion to discuss the EU China relationship, and we stressed the need to implement the commitments made at the 2019 EU-China summit. More particularly, we discussed very concrete topics.

The first one is trade. We have a dynamic trading relationship with China. We trade on average over one billion euros a day. It's huge and the EU is China's first trading partner. But progress is needed in many areas to rebalance this relationship. And we made clear that we need to resolve concrete problems such as market access, subsidies, regulatory issues, public procurement, forced technology transfers, level playing field and WTO reforms.

Nous avons aussi eu l'occasion d'exprimer de part et d'autre le souhait de continuer à négocier de façon intense sur la question de l'accord relatif aux investissements. Nous avons aussi constaté les progrès réalisés s'agissant des accords sur les indications géographiques pour lesquels nous avons bon espoir de pouvoir clôturer dans un délai rapproché les discussions. Nous

avons eu bien sûr l'occasion, c'est un thème essentiel pour nous vous le savez, de mettre en évidence l'importance à nos yeux du changement climatique et de la mobilisation internationale qui est nécessaire sur le sujet pour faire en sorte que l'on puisse travailler à la stabilité, parce que le changement climatique est une menace pour l'humanité, pour le monde. Et parce que nous considérons qu'il y a aussi un lien avec la question économique et la question commerciale. Il faut aussi travailler pour éviter qu'il y ait des concurrences déloyales qui soient possibles sur le plan international en lien avec ces ambitions climatiques. Vous connaissez notre ambition pour 2050 et le travail que nous devons mener afin d'identifier les objectifs en lien avec 2030. Nous considérons aussi que nous devons agir sur ce terrain là, dans les enceintes internationales, dans les enceintes multilatérales pour faire en sorte qu'il y ait une mobilisation plus générale sur le plan international en lien avec le changement climatique. On a aussi eu l'occasion de discuter de l'agenda digital et de l'importance, dans ce cadre là, de garantir la confiance. Garantir la confiance signifie que l'on doit lutter contre les menaces pour la cybersécurité, que l'on doit lutter contre toutes les techniques de désinformation qui minent la confiance, qui est un élément et un facteur totalement indispensable.

The third point was Hong Kong and human rights. We expressed our grave concerns about the proposed national security law for Hong Kong. We called on China to follow the promises made to the people of Hong Kong and to the international community regarding Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and guaranteed freedoms.

Je voudrais ajouter que nous soutenons naturellement le principe un pays, deux systèmes, que nous notons que 50% des investissements européens en Chine transitent par Hong Kong. Nous notons qu'il y a 1.600 entreprises européennes qui sont actives à Hong Kong et nous considérons qu'on doit respecter la neutralité politique de ces entreprises, nous n'acceptons pas les pressions qui seraient faites pour mettre en cause la neutralité politique de ces entreprises européennes qui sont ancrées à Hong Kong. Nous avons eu l'occasion aussi, plus généralement, d'évoquer la question des minorités et d'évoquer la question des droits de l'homme en mentionnant expressément des cas: un citoyen suédois, d'une part, deux citoyens canadiens d'autre part. Vous connaissez les cas en question pour lesquels nous pensons que les détentions semblent être arbitraires.

Enfin, nous avons eu l'occasion d'évoquer des questions internationales, aussi bien la question de l'Iran, nous avons échangé nos points de vue sur ce sujet, la question de l'Afghanistan, la question de la péninsule coréenne. Nous avons appelé à être mobilisés, engagés pour favoriser des solutions pacifiques dans un cadre multilatéral.

On a eu aussi l'occasion de mettre en exergue l'importance de la sécurité du transport maritime. Vous savez que 90% du transport international transite par voie maritime, et la question de la mer de Chine méridionale est une question naturellement importante d'un point de vue stratégique pour la sécurité du transport et donc du commerce, et donc du développement économique.

Vous l'avez compris, nous avons eu des vidéoconférences qui ont été l'occasion de mener des échanges intenses, approfondis sur l'ensemble des sujets qui sont des sujets d'ordre international et multilatéral, mais aussi dans le cadre de la relation bilatérale. Ce type de vidéoconférence est l'occasion de promouvoir les valeurs européennes auxquelles nous croyons: la démocratie, l'État de droit, le respect des droits humains, la protection et la défense des minorités. Nous avons mené ce dialogue sans tabou, sur un ton direct, franc. Nous avons aussi eu l'occasion d'envisager les points sur lesquels nous souhaitons pouvoir progresser en matière commerciale, en matière économique.

C'est l'occasion de mettre en évidence de façon concrète, pas avec des mots, mais avec une action que l'on veut entreprendre, cette question de l'autonomie stratégique de l'Union européenne, qui est un enjeu extrêmement central à nos yeux.

Et enfin, nous considérons que cette relation doit être fondée sur la transparence, sur la réciprocité. C'est le message qui a été donné et dans cet esprit là, nous avons l'intention de poursuivre de manière régulière ce dialogue politique à haut niveau. Cela devrait être le cas après l'été puisque nous aurons de nouveau, après l'été, l'occasion de poursuivre ce dialogue, de faire le point sur l'état d'avancement des différents sujets qui ont déjà été évoqués et de revenir sur des sujets, y compris sur des sujets difficiles.

Et vous savez que ce sommet de Leipzig, qui était prévu au mois de septembre, n'est pas possible, une annonce a été faite sur le sujet. Mais nous gardons le souhait, dès que les conditions le permettront, de tenir un sommet qui rassemblerait les autorités chinoises avec l'ensemble des 27 chefs d'État et de gouvernement européens. Voilà quelques éléments que je souhaitais partager avec vous cet après midi.

[Visit the meeting page](#)

[Press release – EU Strategy on COVID-19 vaccines must guarantee safety and accessibility for all](#)



When presenting the new [European strategy](#) for COVID-19 vaccines to the Committee for Environment, Public Health and Food Safety on Monday, Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides underlined that a joint EU Strategy is the most efficient and solidary way to develop, manufacture and distribute a safe COVID-19 vaccine accessible for all. She also said that all 27 member states expressed their support for the Commission to secure Advance Purchase Agreements with vaccine producers via the [Emergency Support Instrument](#).

Temporary derogation from clinical trials on GMOs

To facilitate the development, authorisation and consequently availability of COVID-19 vaccines and treatments, the Commission proposal from 17 June proposes to establish a temporary derogation from certain rules for clinical trials of drugs involving GMOs.

While Members welcomed the need to adapt the rules, they stressed that standards for vaccine quality, safety and efficacy must be maintained.

The Vaccine Alliance by France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands

Some MEPs asked about the division of labour between the EU and its member states and enquired how the Commission viewed the Vaccine Alliance created by France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands, which aims to secure the supply of a potential COVID-19 vaccine for Europe. The Commissioner replied that the Vaccine Alliance was an inclusive initiative by four member states and open to all.

Public hearing

A public hearing on “How to secure access to COVID-19 vaccines for EU citizens: clinical trials, production and distribution challenges” is tentatively scheduled to take place by videoconference before the summer recess.

Watch the full recording of the debate [here](#).

Background

The EU and member states are closely cooperating in the race to find safe and effective vaccines to counter the spread of COVID-19. In the world, there are over 50 different vaccines under development.

On 4 May, the EU hosted the [Coronavirus Global Response pledging event](#), which until now has raised close to 10 billion EUR to boost the work on vaccines, diagnostics and treatments against the virus.