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**EU4Environment**  
Green Economy in Eastern Partner Countries

**Report on the  
Roundtable discussion on the preliminary findings of the reports**

**Recommendations for the development of SFM  
and certification guidelines and the introduction of innovative  
timber trade control technology in Armenia**

**21 November 2024**

Action implemented by:



## Introduction

A roundtable discussion was held in Yerevan in the Ani Grand hotel on the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 2024 centred around the preliminary findings of the following two reports developed under Activity 4.3. of the EU4Environment Programme *"Support for Promoting Legal and Deforestation-Free Timber Trade and Preventing Illegal Sales in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine"*

- Recommendations for the development of Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) and SFM certification guidelines in Armenia
- Introduction of innovative timber trade control technology in Armenia

The event was attended by some 22 participants (excluding project representatives) from diverse Governmental Organisations, NGOs and the research community. A full list of participants and their functions is presented at the end of the report.

Opening remarks were provided by Mrs Lucine Avetisyan Head of Strategic Policy Department, Ministry of Environment, Mrs Irina Ghaplanyan World Bank representative for EU4Environment and Mr Areg Karapetyan local project Coordinator. All speakers stressed the importance of the project for the development of the Armenian forestry sector and the preservation of the country's forest resources and forest-based ecosystems.

Mrs Ghaplanyan stressed that the overall objective of the project was to provide a package in which issues and clear solutions might be identified and presented to decision makers respectively, with such solutions being potentially included in the current 5-year plan being developed by the Government in the form of policy.

The meeting was moderated by Mr Areg Karapetyan, with presentations being made on the following topics in reference to the two specific project reports:

### **Report 1: Recommendations for the development of SFM and SFM certification guidelines in Armenia**

- Definitions and policy instruments for SFM
- Current situation concerning SFM in Armenia and its alignment with the Pan-European criteria and indicators/guidelines for SFM practices
- Recommendations for the development of SFM guidelines in Armenia
- Conclusions on SWOT analysis on applying SFM guidelines in Armenia

### **Report 2: Introduction of innovative timber trade control technology in Armenia**

- Prevention of illegal logging and control of wood and wood product trade in Armenia and identified gaps and proposed pathways for improvement
- Recommendations on innovative technologies for preventing illegal logging and control of wood and wood products trade in Armenia
- Potential of Armenia in terms of the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) in the trade of wood and wood products within the EU

## Main remarks and feedback

The main remarks and ideas raised by participants are summarised as follows:

### **Alignment with the Pan-European criteria and indicators/guidelines for SFM practices and importance of a National Forest Programme (NFP)**

- Regarding the indicator on scientific research and professional education standards there are three points with unsatisfactory ratings and one point that received a partially satisfactory rating when compared with the Pan-European criteria and indicators/guidelines for SFM practices. The unsatisfactory ratings were linked to the absence and implementation of a legal and regulatory framework that includes a national program for scientific research and professional education in the forestry sector.
- Participants stressed that the existence of a NFP is of the utmost importance to the forest sector, as it will provide the normative foundations needed to implement legislative and policy-related changes and could address several existing weaknesses and gaps in forest policy in particular as it refers to alignment with the Pan-European criteria and indicators (C&I)/guidelines for SFM practices.
- From a legal standpoint, considering that a NFP is currently absent (and considering the need for improvements to the Forest Code), there is a need for a more flexible approach to addressing erosion and forest water regulation and soil protection functions. Such an approach would lead to the development of other subsidiary legal acts.
- The question as to the identification of the obstacles faced in developing a NFP was raised, as was the importance that the responsible authority attached to the existence of such a document. In response it was stressed that a NFP and policy have been developed, circulated and presented to the government in 2023. However, the proposition was returned for revision as the government has since adopted an approach according to which each ministry should present one joint overarching environmental protection strategy which includes the NFP and not a specific branch-strategy as currently proposed by the document.
- As such, it is necessary to possess an approved framework for the development of strategies and policies. Such a framework is currently under circulation within the government. After its approval, those strategies and policies presented will follow the same required methodology.
- It was suggested to discuss the issue of the implementation of a NFP at a higher level, giving it a certain political weight. It was stressed however that environmental protection is not an end in itself and that the country is currently facing serious economic issues.

### **Reforming forest policy legislation**

- In terms of making potential changes to legal acts, it was emphasized that there was no constraint in this regard, and that it is possible to amend such acts without linking them to strategic or forest policy measures. Indeed, it was stressed that if the project leads to specific conclusions and recommendations, these could serve as a basis for implementing certain reforms to legal acts.
- SFM is an interdisciplinary concept that relates to various sectors of the economy. This is where its importance and relevance lie. Therefore, it is realistic to address it not through a single document, but through several umbrella documents, which can then be distributed into different sectoral legal regulations. Ultimately, this will give the forestry sector a certain level of priority, from which other sector-specific legal acts will then follow.

## **Importance of learning from international partners and continual dialogue between stakeholders**

- The importance of learning from the experience of international partners who have already gone through the process of achieving SFM was emphasized.
- A document on SFM has already been prepared by the Forest Policy Department of the Ministry of Environment. This document is quite valuable for the forestry sector, and the NGO Forest Alliance for one looks forward to further developments and future collaborations of this nature with the Ministry and other actors in order to help the country move towards ensuring SFM. The role of the State Revenue Committee (SRC) is very important as such its participation in and feedback on the Project is crucial.

## **Traceability of timber products**

- The issue related to deviations in harvesting sites can be considered as resolved based on changes made to regulations which now require harvesting sites to have boundary coordinates. Furthermore, when maps from management plans are uploaded onto tablets deviations are minimized.
- Regarding the marking and traceability of firewood, concerns were expressed about its practical implementation and the interpretation of its results. Specifically, it was agreed that there is a need for more detailed information regarding the tools, equipment, and financial analysis required for such an approach.
- The timber marking process in Armenia is regulated by a specific order. In this case, it would be more efficient, if possible, to replace labels with QR codes.
- The establishment of the newly formed eco-patrol service under Hayantar SNCO will further strengthen conservation efforts and reduce illegal practices.
- The SUMAL II timber traceability system developed and implemented in Romania was of strong interest to participants in addition to the cost of establishing and running the system. A future study might take into consideration the detailed financial analysis of the latter which is currently not known by participants and the project team.
- There is a need to recalculate volume tables based on improved inventory data sets for the main species harvested, any attempt to do so would lead to a significant visible outcome for the sector.
- Comprehensive solutions are needed, which will allow for improved overall control at all stages. This includes the importance of close cooperation between the public and private sectors, as well as the implementation of detailed monitoring in order to control the effectiveness of the various systems.

## **Progressive reforms underway within Hyantar SNCO**

- Participants mentioned that not all aspects of Hayantar SNCO should be conceived as being in need of updating/modernization. Indeed, it was stressed that the organization is currently in a dynamic phase and a number of progressive reforms are underway. Indeed, compared to previous inspections conducted by the oversight body, positive progress has been made. Of course, those negative issues mentioned such as illegal logging and the lack of a robust regulatory framework etc. exist, but they are correctable through comprehensive solutions which can be achieved through unity.

**Conclusion :** All participants noted that the roundtable had resulted in very productive discussions and that it had opened the door to future collaborative solutions. The meeting was concluded by Mr A. Karapetyan, who thanked all the participants for their presence and for the constructive discussions held, adding that the project's recommendations would be shared with Hayantar SNCO for further discussion aimed at a better identification of more targeted issues and feasible recommendations for their resolution.

#### Participant lists and functions

	Senior Climate Change Specialist at the World Bank Group Armenia Office
	Head of Strategic Policy Department, Ministry of Environment
	Head of Forest Policy Department, Ministry of Environment
	Deputy Head of Department of Specially Protected Areas and Biodiversity Policy, Ministry of Environment
	Chief Specialist of Forest Policy Department, Ministry of Environment
	Chief Specialist of EU Programmes Management Division, EU Economic Cooperation Department, Ministry of Economy
	Deputy Head of Eco-Patrol Service, Ministry of Environment
	Director of HayAntar SNCO, Ministry of Environment
	Deputy Director of HayAntar SNCO, Ministry of Environment
	Advisor to Director of HayAntar SNCO, Ministry of Environment
	Deputy Director of Hydrometeorology and Monitoring Center" SNCO, Ministry of Environment
	Environmental Protection and Mining Inspection Body, Head of Flora Control Division, Biodiversity Control Department
	Environmental Protection and Mining Inspection Body, Chief State Inspector of Flora Control Division
Arman Torosyan	Environmental Protection and Mining Inspection Body, Chief State Inspector of Flora Control Division
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	Coordinator of the Promoting Ecological Corridors in the South Caucasus programme, WWF-Armenia
	Tourism Component Manager of the " <i>Living Landscapes of Armenia for Market Development</i> " project, Strategic Development Agency
	Founder and CEO of the NGO My Forest Armenia
	Agroforestry Expert at the "Shen" Charitable NGO
	Administrative Assistant at the "Shen" Charitable NGO

	Deputy Director of A. Takhtajyan Institute of Botany, National Academy of Sciences
	Researcher at A. Takhtajyan Institute of Botany, National Academy of Sciences
	Sustainable Forest Management Expert, ONF-International
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