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The EU Forest Strategy post-2020 must also be a strategy with and for forest owners and managers!

On Wednesday, 3 February, the main stakeholder organisations representing the forestry sector met with the European Commissioner for Agriculture, Janusz Wojciechowski, to discuss the sector's growing concerns on the way in which the implementation of the EU Green Deal currently addresses forestry issues. Our forests need to be responsibly managed, especially in the face of climate change and its impact on forest holdings.

With the Green Deal, forestry issues are being debated ever more intensively in Brussels. Although forest management is a national competence, the future of our forests is at the heart of many EU initiatives, whether it be the Forest Strategy, the Biodiversity Strategy, the CAP or sustainable finance. The European forest sector has welcomed the announcement of the Green Deal and is keen to play a key role in the implementation of its main policy objectives and targets.

Nevertheless, several recent debates show a worrying lack of understanding of the multifunctional role of forests and the importance of the work conducted by forest owners and managers on the ground. Often, key EU initiatives and strategies confuse global forest-related issues with the actual situation of EU forests, overlooking national forest inventory data which proves the successful implementation of sustainable forest management within EU. The latest Forest Europe report¹ on the state of Europe's forests gives clear indicators: the European forest area has increased by 9% over the last 30 years, the area of forests designated for biodiversity conservation has increased by 65% in 20 years, the volume of wood and the weight of carbon stored in European forests has grown by 50% over the last 30 years.

It is therefore important that the implementation of the EU Green Deal builds upon the proven contribution of sustainable forest management (SFM) and the multifunctional forestry sector already fully operational in the field. The forest sector stakeholders are concerned with certain EU initiatives which emphasise almost exclusively the aspects of biodiversity and carbon sequestration while disregarding the balanced three-pillar approach of SFM developed by both the EU and the member states under the Forest Europe process. A concrete example of such a process is the Taxonomy Regulation and the related first draft delegated act under discussion. Similar approaches can be observed at the discussions related to the implementation of ambitious forest-related targets and objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.

As we have tried to demonstrate in a [recent campaign](#), we need to steer clear of myths surrounding forests. In the face of climate change, we must enable the resilience of our forests in order for them to play their full role as carbon absorbers, reservoirs for biodiversity and suppliers of local and sustainable woody biomass that replace fossil-based materials and further develop the bio-based circular economy in the EU.

¹ <https://foresteurope.org/state-europes-forests-2020/>

However, all this can only happen if the EU Forest Strategy supports forest owners and managers in managing their forests, including by promoting investments into the maintenance and the training of more than 2.6 million workers in the forest sector². In addition to a decreasing workforce, it is no secret that the forestry sector will have to face a generational renewal in the coming years³. It is therefore essential that the Green Deal considers the social dimension as being equally important as the environmental and climate-related dimensions. It is essential to evaluate the wider impact of the various policy initiatives put forward and to reward the good practices which this vital sector has already put in place to achieve the EU's objectives.

There will be no viable Forest Strategy post-2020 without forest owners and managers as enablers of a vibrant forest sector in the EU.

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² <https://foresteurope.org/state-europes-forests-2020/>

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/12069644/KS-FK-20-001-EN-N.pdf/a7439b01-671b-80ce-85e4-4d803c44340a?t=1608139005821>