

EUSTAFOR Statement

by Mr. Reinhardt Neft, EUSTAFOR Vice-President
delivered at

The EP Intergroup Breakfast Meeting

Hosted by **ELISABETH KÖSTINGER, MEP**, Chair of the
"Sustainable Forest Management" Working Group of the EP Intergroup "Climate
Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development"

Europe's Forests in the Sustainability Spotlight

25 November 2015, 8:00 to 9:30
European Parliament, Strasbourg

Dear Ms. Köstinger,
Dear Commissioner Hogan,
Honorable Members of the European Parliament,
Dear Participants,

As Vice-President of the European State Forest Association (EUSTAFOR) and Director of one of its members, the Bavarian State Forest Enterprise "Bayerische Staatsforsten" in Bavaria, Germany, I am delighted to be here today. It is my pleasure to address you on behalf of EUSTAFOR.

EUSTAFOR currently has 30 members from 22 European countries. Our members have stewardship of approximately 42 million hectares of forest land, which represents one third (1/3) of the forest area of the EU. With our approximately 100 000 highly skilled professionals we guard an annual increment of about 200 million cubic meters (m³) and provide Europe with a very valuable, renewable resource – wood – as well as many non-timber forest products and a wide array of ecosystem services.

That forests really are in the spotlight with regard to today's numerous challenges is reflected by many EU and international policy processes affecting forests and forestry and is experienced in the day-to-day operations of forest owners and managers who are experiencing a growing demand for our most versatile, renewable resource: Wood.

Currently, our members provide European society with approximately 123 million cubic meters (m³) of round timber from sustainable, multifunctional forestry. Nearly 40% of the annual growth remains unused and therefore represents a significant potential "to support increasing rates in the consumption of wood and paper products as well as wood-based energy."¹

¹ EFI report, State of Europe's Forests, Part II, page 195.

But wood is by far not the only demand on forestry and forests. There is a growing call for non-productive forest functions such as the conservation of biodiversity, recreation and other ecosystem services – be it the protection of air, water, soil or the prevention against avalanches and landslides.

In general, society is placing greater demands on forestry and these demands are becoming both more diverse and specific. There is increased pressure on public forests to address the entire spectrum of demands in a balanced way, which is, to say the least, not a simple task. Demands are often contradictory and the responses to these demands result in necessary trade-offs that leave some societal groups dissatisfied.

In this discussion we increasingly observe that the important productive function of forests is neglected. We should not export our problems to other parts of the world by importing timber in order to set aside our forests. Instead, we need to use and preserve our forests at the same time. Through their sustainable, multifunctional forest management, Europe's state forests prove this is possible.

Recent studies related to biodiversity conservation² come to the conclusion that sustainably managed forests result in higher biodiversity than unmanaged forests. Especially when it comes to the diversity of habitats and structure (so-called beta-diversity), sustainably managed forests prevail.

Other data also suggest that forests are in good shape in terms of biodiversity. For example, the last indicator report in connection with the national biodiversity strategy for Germany (Report of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, 2014) shows that forests have the highest indicator value of all monitored habitat types. Even more, forestry was the only form of land use for which the related biodiversity indicators did not decline.

A wise, sustainable utilization of our forests will be key to finding solutions to major policy topics on the current EU agenda and this must continue to be the case in the future, be it for strengthening

- the rural sector,
- sustainable development within current initiatives towards a resource-efficient green economy in the EU (keywords: bioeconomy and circular economy), or
- the debate on climate change and the associated discussions on a European energy union and wood-based renewables in the energy mix.

While creating and maintaining jobs and adding value, especially to the rural sector, sustainable, multifunctional forestry can also act as a major supplier of renewable raw material for a green European bioeconomy.

Most importantly, actively managed forests are a major carbon sink, helping to mitigate climate change. In recent years, forests in the EU-28 sequestered over 400

² Ammer, 2015; Paillet et al., 2010

million tons of CO₂ each year, the equivalent of approximately 9 % of Europe's net greenhouse gas emissions.

At the same time, wood-based products substitute for products that are not renewable resource-based and that have a much greater CO₂ footprint. The sequestered CO₂ is stored for the lifetime of the wood-based product (and beyond, if the product is recycled).

In a nutshell: Against the background of the ever-increasing demands and complexities of today's world, forests and the forest-based sector, with their deeply rooted and well-implemented concepts such as sustainable forest management (SFM) and multifunctionality, provide the means and the solutions to overcome some of today's most pressing challenges, such as climate change mitigation, substituting fossil fuel and materials, maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity, strengthening the rural sector as well the economic viability of Europe.

In view of this, EUSTAFOR and its members greatly appreciate the creation of this working group as a platform for discussion and the exchange of views between policy makers and stakeholders. We are pleased to note that there is such a substantial interest in the topic and look forward to offering our professional experience and know-how in order contribute to the success and productive results of this working group.

Thank you for your attention.

Reinhardt Neft
Vice-President
EUSTAFOR