

EP Intergroup biodiversity, hunting, countryside

“Main challenges for the future of forest management in the EU”

January 23rd, 2018, Speaking notes

Dear Mr. Chairman, honourable MEPs,
dear participants of today's Intergroup-Meeting

Thank you for the invitation and for giving the opportunity to a representative of European forest owners to present his opinion on this so important discussion about the role of the EU Forest Strategy and its current review.

As you can see – or just not see – I've brought no presentation with me this time. But be sure I'll table some very clear messages and of course you can get my notes which I wrote down. Last time I showed you lots of pictures about the broad variety of European Forests when we talked about LULUCF, but this time I think we have to talk about facts and about **responsibility** – so sorry, no pictures for today ☺.

Forestry is not – like for example agriculture – a common EU policy. There are lots of good reasons for that, but it's not the time here and today to discuss this. On the other hand I'm quite sure we all in the room can agree about that.

Nevertheless forests play a crucial role in many of EU policies and not at least they are a base for society welfare and for human life as it. Most of the policies created in the EU have a very concrete and often significant impact on EU forests, on forest management and on forest owners.

Concerning the EU Forest Strategy I would like to stress that we have been very active **to push for** the adoption and a smart advancement of this Strategy already since 2013. Not all the commission services were convinced about its importance that time and unfortunately – as we think – also not yet. Therefore we welcome this initiative although we have severe concerns about some orientations like for example the discussion about sustainable criteria or cascade use principles.

Rather we believe that the EU Forest Strategy is a **coherent framework** that established strong fundamental guiding principles which should be mandatory considered and used by all policies that have impact on forestry and forest management.

How the EU Forest Strategy was really used since its adoption – by the MS, by the EC, by stakeholders and by forest owners – is part of the current evaluation-study and we all will learn more about this when it will be published by the end of 2018.

However, from our perspective the importance of the strategy and its objectives was so far **not enough taken into account** in the preparation and discussion of most of the important legislations which have influence on our sector.

We'll discuss some specific examples in the panel later on, but let me stress that **Europe's forests face new and increasing challenges** through climate change, forest fires, rural exodus, global competition amongst other social and economic development and factors.

At the same time we have lot of opportunities and chances – such as bioeconomy, creation of rural jobs, growth and to benefit from innovative solutions to enhance the sustainable management of our forests.

Taking these elements into account we consider that the **importance** of a EU Forest Strategy **is not yet fully recognised** – not from the EC, not from MS, other sectors, from different stakeholders and even not from your colleagues from the European Parliament.

Promoting for example in the context of the **RED II package certain approaches** such as cascade use of biomass or adding more rules that have impact on the subsidiarity will not help our sector to contribute to rural development or climate change. The outcome of the last plenum in this context was good, but unfortunately there are still two or three points in the package which would strongly jeopardise a sustainable forest management in the EU.

On this stage I would like to stress the **role of forest owners** in this context. 16 million private forest owners are responsible for managing about 60% of EU forests – always with next generations in mind. Active and responsible management is a precondition for balancing and enhancing all forest functions. They all have a long tradition in managing their forests in a responsible and sustainable manner. Their activities have finally succeeded in growing forest areas and standing volumes in Europe, while contributing to climate mitigation, biodiversity, providing clean water, fresh air, soil stability, securing our landscape and natural heritage as well as protection against natural disasters. Not to mention all the forest-based products and services that have contributed to economic development and today's wellbeing of people in Europe.

Forest Owners are not stakeholders – as often mentioned in a wrong way. They are more or less sole shareholder if you want to name it in a bank-technical wording. There is a clear difference if you are only interested in something or if you are carrying the whole responsibility in questions of legality and liability, in a financial and economic way, in the liability to care for the environment, for the climate, for the people and for a huge variety of ecosystem services. Forest owners have to care for and to ensure all the multifunctional services in a holistic way!

The role of forest owners and forestry needs to be recognised in a more proper way for example in the context of the current Bioeconomy Strategy as well as in the Biodiversity Strategy and we hope that their revision will address this in a **more coordinated approach**.

On this point I would also like to mention one point on the **governance on forestry** at EU level. We strongly believe that the role of the Standing Forestry Committee and of the CDG FC should be enhanced and that they should get full support from all relevant DGs.

Finally we think that we have a great opportunity at EU level to increase even more the role of the EU Forest Strategy supporting our sector and SFM after 2020 by **addressing and ensuring synergies between various policies in a coherent manner**. The future CAP as well as the research and innovation policies, the revision of different EU Strategies, the implementation of Paris agreement and the SDGs.

For that we need the full support of the European institutions. We need your support for a better promotion and for a better standing of the EU Forest Strategy. The EU Forest Strategy has to match all the other EU Strategies on the same eye level. We need a stronger role of forestry and forest owners to achieve the overall goals – a less fossil-based economy, a healthy environment, a live-able climate change and all the ecosystem services forests can provide.

I would like to finish with the sustainable “credo” of European forest owners – which is in this context also valid for the EU Forest Strategy.

“Nothing about us – without us!”

Please help us to ensure this in society overall interest!

Thank you for your attention!

bb, January 23rd, 2018