

Forest Forum – from illegal logging to protection and responsibility

Declaration

Bucharest, February 25th 2016

Forests are vital in regulating the climate and water cycle - they protect against soil erosion and desertification, are a biodiversity reservoir harbouring over half of all land species, fulfil recreational and cultural roles and are a renewable and alternative economic resource. Their essential role in fighting global warming has been recently underlined in the 2015 Paris Climate Conference, where the necessity to stop deforestation and the need for extensive reforestation were stated.

Romania still has some of the few remaining European old growth and virgin forests that are home to rare and endemic flora and fauna. It is alarming that official numbers show that 8.8 mil cubic meters of wood¹ disappeared annually from the forest between 2008 and 2013 without being officially registered. These losses were due in part to natural processes and uncontrolled felling outside the forestry stock, but mostly to illegal logging - only a small percentage of which was actually detected by the relevant authorities.

Romania's forests urgently need to be guided towards efficient and responsible management and development to perpetuate their inestimable value for the benefit of present and future generations.

Consequently, during street protests across Romania during May and June 2015, civil society called for a proper legal framework (Forest Code) and pointed out the urgency in developing a National Forestry Strategy with the consultation of all the stakeholders. Civil society judges that this strategy needs to build the basis for long term forest management that will promote the ecological health of the forest, harmonizing its ecological, social, cultural and economic functions, and also the role it plays in the framework of sustainable development.

Environmental NGOs formulated claims and concrete proposals aimed at stirring the forestry sector towards the maintenance, enhancement and equitable and long-term distribution of environmental, social, economic and cultural benefits of the forest, and maintaining or restoring the ecosystem, its biodiversity, resources and landscapes.

For its part, the Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests as responsible authority, after December 2015, developed a Strategic Sectorial Plan² that includes forests, and respectively a Forests Priority Actions Plan that was presented in the working groups. In the wake of these meetings and negotiations the undersigned environmental NGOs and the responsible authority acknowledged consensus on some priorities and the need of a constructive approach through dialogue. Consequently, the undersigned environmental NGOs and the responsible authority agree on the aforementioned strategic development goal. The signatories agree to the following high priority and concrete objectives for the responsible management of the forests:

I. For 2016:

1. Reaching the objectives stated in the EU Regulation **995 / 2010 (EUTR)**;
2. Developing the **Wood Tracking & SUMAL** applications as efficient control instruments, increasing transparency of the information generated and the development of a series of inspection monitoring and record-keeping systems;

¹ According to the National Forest Inventory, results from the first cycle, <http://roifn.ro/site/rezultate-ifn-1/>

² http://gov.ro/fisiere/programe_fisiere/MMAP_Plan_strategic.pdf

3. Adopting the guide for sectorial participative strategic planning with the purpose of elaborating the **National Forestry Strategy**;
4. Setting up a structure specialised in forestry inspections, to function within the responsible public central authority under the forestry division;
5. Instituting criteria, performance and conduct indicators and monitoring measures for Forest Guard personnel through the organisation and functioning normative act;
6. Modifying and completing the **Capitalisation Regulation** for the wood mass from the forest fund in public property (Governmental Decision 924/2015), so that it adequately transposes the principles of capitalisation instituted in the Forest Code;
7. Modification of the 171/2010 law for forest contraventions in order to fully cover with sanctioning measures the deeds that constitute forest contraventions;
8. The execution of the legal framework that would ensure compensation for the equivalent of the products that the forest owners do not harvest, due to the protection functions established through forest management plans for their properties that determine restrictions in harvesting timber;
9. Instituting the „**National Catalogue of Virgin and Quasi-virgin Forests**” (according to the Forest Code art. 26. par. 3) as an official instrument for recording and managing in order to ensure their strict protection;
10. The establishment of the „**National Forestry Council**”.

II. For 2017 - 2020.

1. Developing the Forest Management Information and Monitoring System through the integration of forest management plans in GIS format;
2. Ensuring the continuity in the supply and capitalisation of the updated results of the **National Forestry Inventory**;
3. Starting a plan to transfer privately-held forest lands into the public domain of the state in the case of strict and integral protection areas in the National Parks and virgin forests;
4. Improving inter-organisational collaboration in order to **increase total reforestation area** by identifying appropriate reforestation plots and adequate technical solutions.

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