

EP Intergroup breakfast meeting
Forests and Climate: The impact of forests and forestry on the EU Climate and Energy policy

hosted by **Elisabeth Köstinger MEP**

Chair of the “Sustainable Forest Management” Working Group of the EP Intergroup “Climate change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development”

24 January 08.00-09.30
Members Salon, European Parliament, Brussels

Statement by Zdenko Bogovic, CEPF Board Member and President of the Croatian Union of Private Forest Owners’ Associations

Dear Mrs Köstinger,
honourable Members of the European Parliament,
dear guests,

Thank you very much for inviting me, as one representative of the 16 million forest owners across the EU, to share with you some thoughts on Forests and Climate.

I am from Croatia, where I am the President of the Croatian Union of Private Forest Owners’ Associations, and I am myself a forest owner.

What is our view on the role of forestry for climate?

I firmly believe that forests and forest owners have a key role to play to mitigating and adapting to climate change – we are a part of the solution.

To tackle climate change, and to reach EU targets on for energy security, jobs and economic growth – Sustainable Forest Management is needed.

If we know the biology of forest ecosystems, we shall take from nature only what nature gives us.

A forest ecosystem cannot be represented as a monument or a stone that can be frozen through various protection programs. In that way we just do the opposite of what is needed and it does not contribute to mitigation climate change.

Through Sustainable Forest Management we get a win-win-win situation, where the carbon sequestration in forests can be maintained or increased and the health of the forests can be improved, creating more resilient forests that can adapt to a changing climate.

If we manage the forests in harmony with nature, we can take care of the natural processes and we can help to stop climate change.

We also get a renewable and climate friendly raw material, that can store carbon in products and replace fossil resources.

And on top of this, if we have a vital forest-based sector, we generate jobs and incomes, especially in rural areas.

What is the situation in Croatia?

In Croatia, we have a huge potential to further develop forestry and the forest-based sector to benefit both climate and society.

In Croatia, the forest cover is around 46%. 26% of the forest is privately owned by very small-scale forest owners. Average holding size less than 1 ha, characterized by a low level of forest management.

97% of forests in Croatia are semi-natural forests (self-regenerated) and just 3% are plantation forests. With around 75%, broadleaved forests are predominant forest type. In the last decades, harvesting levels has been around 50% of the increment in Croatia, which could be sustainably increased.

Sustainable Forest Management in Croatia is based on the commonly agreed definition and criteria set out in the pan-European FOREST EUROPE process and implemented in national legislation. 250 years organized forestry and more than 80% of forests cover by Forest Management Plans.

In the context of a changing climate, in the Croatian case forest management is crucial to adapt to climate change. We need to remove biomass and manage the forests to reduce risks of fire that would release all carbon at once – a huge risk for the climate.

Another challenge in Croatia is to support the many small-scale forest owners to engage in the sustainable management of their forests.

What do we need from the EU?

When talking about a EU climate and energy policy, we should look into options that help to further boost forest growth and use of wood based products to replace fossils.

By developing the forest-based sector in Croatia, and creating a demand for wood, both economic benefits could come in parallel with climate benefits from increased investments into Sustainable Forest Management and development of the bioeconomy.

In the LULUCF policy, currently under discussion in the European Parliament and the Council, the Forest Reference Level (FRL) is crucial to get the best climate benefit from forests in the long run and it should be carefully set.

In Croatia we have a huge potential to sustainably increase harvesting levels, which may in the short term result in a smaller forest sink – but in the long term this will generate investments into SFM which can increase forest growth.

Climate change can be reduced if natural processes of forest ecosystems are used. We should follow the biology of forests and give our support and assistance, and in that way securing maximum benefit for humanity and nature.

Putting larger forest area under protection outside the competence of foresters and forest owners absolutely weakens forest ecosystems, as regeneration and adaptation to climate change cannot be ensured.

And the only way to keep the carbon sequestration in the long term is by managing the forest, harvesting the forest and leaving room for new generation of trees. An old forest will stop growing and we risk lose all the stored carbon at once through natural disturbances.

Young vital forests can ensure the reduction of climate changes and development of rural areas. Only by education and incentives to forest owners and by encouraging them to join and consolidate we can give our contribution.

For a forester it is a fundamental principle to not harvest more than the growth – ensuring that we maintain the forest and also the net carbon sequestration. But we must be able to use the forest resource, and with this we can also maintain the investments into the management of the forest.

Furthermore, EU forests are managed according to the principle of multifunctionality, aiming to balance the three pillars of sustainability and provide a multitude of goods and benefits. This looks different across Europe, with its wide variety of forests – and the EU must respect the subsidiarity principle of forestry.

In order to generate meaningful solutions and reach our common goals, those who own, live off and manage our most important resource in Europe have to be taken seriously at eye-level.

Let us follow and listen to nature!

Thank you!