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### **Open letter from European Forest Owners: A Call for a Sustainable Deal for a Secure and Prosperous EU for the benefit of its people and the planet**

Despite the fact that Croatia is one of the smaller members, its natural forests and preserved nature can be an example that sustainable forest management can simultaneously preserve biodiversity while providing public benefit functions (ecosystem services) and supplying the market with renewable raw materials. We invite You to see for yourself the beauty of our forests and to meet some of the 600,000 proud forest owners who are a small part of 16 million European forest owners.

**Forest owners of Europe condemn in the strongest possible terms Russia's invasion of Ukraine.** Russia's armed attack is more than an attack on Ukraine, it is an attack on every country's right to decide its own future. It constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

**Forest owners of Europe stand united in solidarity with Ukraine and its people.** Together EU and its member states are supporting Ukraine in words and in action. With economic and humanitarian aid. With a place of refuge for Ukrainians fleeing the war. We applaud your strong leadership to unite EU in these challenging times.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine poses huge challenges for the EU27 in the midst of the recovery of the COVID-19 pandemic, growing inequalities, and impact of climate change. Dependencies on (fossil) raw materials from Russia must be reduced quickly to stop financing the war. People and economy must be supplied with reliable and affordable electricity and heat (energy) from sustainable sources. All renewable forms of energy, and especially renewable raw materials, play a decisive role in this regard. The EU27 can only reach energy independence, achieve climate goals and build equal and just societies, if forests are actively utilized and sustainably managed for the benefits of all.

An immediate consequence of Russia's invasion is a complete standstill of huge amounts of roundwood and wood based materials imports from Russia and Belarus. This means, that more (but not less) wood supply is needed in EU market to address the same level of demand for supporting EU energy independence, and raw material needs for construction and for bioeconomy.

Forest owners of Europe have during the last year, hence long before the war, tried to highlight the enormous potential active sustainable forestry provides to people and to our planet. At numerous occasions we have stressed the multiple benefits that we provide every day, such as mitigating and adapting to climate change, safeguarding reliable renewable energy, and providing sustainable source of wood for construction and raw material for a growing bio-based economy, while at the same time provide a space for the wellbeing of both people and nature. So far, the voices of forest owners have been poorly heard.



For the security of Europe as a whole, many countries are reconsidering and repositioning themselves to adapt to new realities. It is time for the EU Commission to wake up and to do the same. It is time to place 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the center. A coherent framework seeking to end poverty and hunger, realize the human rights of all, achieve gender equality, foster sustainable management of natural resources and tackle climate change, while at the same time facilitating partnerships and ensuring peace.

When you became the President of the European Commission, you articulated a clear ambition to deliver on the 2030 Agenda. In your first work programme, you stated that EU Commission “*will put the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals at the heart of our policymaking. They will guide our work across all sectors, both in our internal and external action, and will show our commitment to sustainable development at home and abroad.*” It is time for you to deliver on this promise and live up to Policy Coherence, which is inscribed in the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht.

**Forest owners of Europe call on the EU Commission to transform this Green Deal to a Green Deal for a sustainable, secure and prosperous EU.**

**Forest owners of Europe pledge our full support to contribute to overcoming the energy supply crisis and tackling climate change.** However, the extortionate import dependence on Russian natural gas, oil and coal can only be reduced if we, forest owners, are allowed to continue to sustainably use our forests based on national competencies and best local practices. Managing trade-offs and building synergies between SDGs are best done locally and on a voluntary basis.

Wood is constantly growing back and is harvested based on sustainable and multifunctional forest management. The wood supply in the forests of the EU27 has increased by 275 million m<sup>3</sup>/year in the last 30 years. Annual wood increment has exceeded wood use for decades. At the same time, many biodiversity-related indicators are developing in a positive direction. Energy wood assortments, which are by-products of forest management and wood processing, have always been the most important locally available renewable energy source.

We can no longer afford large-scale prohibitions on the use of forests. An analysis by the Thünen Institute shows that if the 10% strict protection target is to be implemented, wood supply in the EU27 will fall by around 40%. This means that other EU goals of decarbonizing housing construction, implementing the bioeconomy and the speed up the energy transition simply cannot be achieved unless EU becomes even more depended on wood import from Russia. **We implore the European Commission to pursue a more balanced approach applying more voluntary and flexible land protection schemes that are readily available, and protect biological diversity, mitigate climate change while at the same time strengthen a safe and secure a booming bioeconomy in Europe.**

**Forest owners of Europe are committed to biodiversity.** We will continue to manage our forests in such a way that ensures forest biodiversity as an integral part. For centuries, forest owners of Europe have been the custodians of Europe’s biodiversity. Restoration of degraded ecosystems should be in focus. We all need to restore ecosystems that have lost their functionality and productivity, in particular those with the most potential to capture and store carbon, and to prevent and reduce the impact of natural disasters.



Wood is indispensable for a sustainable energy transition. The competitiveness of wood is no longer a given due to the intended tightening in the REDIII directive. All cost-driving and obstructive factors, such as additional sustainability criteria, certification of CO<sub>2</sub> savings and mandatory cascade use, must be removed from the directive. Moreover, the delegated act on climate change and the planned delegated act on biodiversity, as part of the Taxonomy, should be withdrawn as they are not practical for forest owners. **Forest owners are doers, and we want practical solutions that work for us. One size does not fit all. Forest owners are the bread and butter of rural Europe.**

The EU Commission's **LULUCF** approach must be fundamentally reconsidered. Maximizing carbon storage in EU forests is a misguided path towards destabilizing and increasing the climate vulnerability of existing forests. The greatest possible climate mitigation comes from the sustainable use of wood and the substitution of fossil raw materials and energy-intensive materials with renewable resources. Young forests are more adaptable and store more carbon. The goal must be to permanently establish climate-adapted forests, using at least the annual increment and thus helping the bioeconomy to make a breakthrough and put a halt on our dependency of Russian import of wood to EU.

And, we **forest owners of Europe are global citizens**. We want to share our sustainable solutions and foster partnerships around the world. Together with forest owners globally, we want to build prosperous and healthy forests for coming generations.

Yours Sincerely,

Zdenko Bogović  
President  
Croatian Union of Private Forest Owners Associations

