Save European forests!

Forests are a powerful natural resource that have a positive effect on the climate, soil and the conditions necessary to provide for surface water run-off. The sustainable use of forestry resources is a prerequisite for the preservation of nature and ensuring a sustainable Europe.

Over the last 50 years, 70% of the world's forests have been destroyed. Every year, 14 million hectares of forest are lost.

Large-scale deforestation means more than just the loss of greenery. It is a global factor in climate change and the loss of biological and landscape diversity, causes the degradation and destruction of ecosystems, affects the level of underground and surface waters, and activates soil erosion processes, desertification, etc.

Deforestation, and the continuing transformation of old-growth forests to single-age monocultures by clearcutting and replanting, is becoming a major environmental problem for Europe, which is rapidly losing its natural heritage, which will be very slow, if not impossible, to restore.

In Europe, it is caused by the extension of urban areas or infrastructures, wildfires which will increase massively over the years due to climate change but mostly by the increase of worldwide timber consumption.

The causes of deforestation include land and resource grabbing by logging corporations, as well as the unsustainable demand for cellulose-based biofuel (which can play a transitional role when they have a low carbon footprint and do not compete with food production or cause biodiversity loss).

A striking example of ignoring the basis of sustainable development is the destruction of the ancient Białowieża Forest through massive loggings and plantings, then construction of a new road, everything carried out while neglecting European environmental standards.

The ancient Hambach Forest in Germany is also under attack from the RWE company which wants to destroy it in order to expand an existing coal mine.

The increase of demand for oak and beech from emerging countries such as China and the lack of regulations about international timber trade push the French forestry industry to over-harvest its forests and affects the local forestry economy.

Of particular importance is the loss of forests in Central Europe, in the Carpathians. Despite the partial preservation of the ancient forest, logging in this region has become more and more intensive in recent years. Northern Europe is also losing its forests. In Estonia, the old-growth forest outside of strictly protected areas has almost disappeared and the minimum age of trees allowed to be logged was lowered in 2017 in favour of the industry.

The planned new cellulose factory and the 'greenwashing' scheme – in which the wood is added to the oil-shale-fired thermoelectric power generation – will also dramatically worsen the condition of Estonian forests in the coming years.

Illegal logging is a crucially important challenge facing sustainable development, and has severe economic, environmental and social impacts, including deforestation, serious human rights violations and climate change impact.

It also undermines the competitive position of legal operators adhering to the laws of both exporting and importing countries and causes significant income loss for the state.

The European Union Timber Regulation (EUTR) was established in 2012 to prohibit the placing of illegally harvested timber on the European market in an effort to tackle the problem of illegal logging on a global scale. It sets out requirements that companies within the European Union (EU) must meet to minimise the risk of illegal timber being traded, and concerns placing timber or timber products on the European market, either imported or domestic.

The vast timber smuggling from Ukraine or the fact that the EU couldn't prevent the illegal logging of Białowieża Forest in Poland and Belarus are such examples which highlights the dysfunction of EUTR.

The protection of virgin forests and protected areas from adverse political decisions must be guaranteed in Europe. The response of the responsible authorities must be fast and determined and coupled with sanctions. The EU must put pressure on governments in member states and associated countries to accelerate the pace of protection and restoration of forests' ability to supply ecosystem services.

Sustainable forest management requires ongoing cooperation between foresters and biologists, ecologists ornithologists etc. so as not to disrupt a delicate balance between the economic benefits of the timber trade, the climate benefits as CO2 removals, and the ecological benefits as habitats for various species, to maintain biodiversity and rich and sustainable ecosystems.

At least in forest areas under Natura 2000 protection, any economic use of forests requires co-decision of environmental experts and nature protection NGOs.

We, the European Greens, demand the unconditional compliance with the principles of sustainable forest management, including putting a halt to the overharvesting of timber, increasing carbon sinks and maximising the cascading use of wood.

We insist on the reinforcement of the EUTR through special decisions from the European Parliament and European Commission.

We also demand that an efficient continental system of forest-fire prevention be set up and the extinguishing of such fires based on consolidated efforts and resources from both EU and non-EU countries.

We appeal to the European Commission to implement a European Forest Recovery Programme, covering both EU countries and the Association Agreement states. Any further delay in the introduction of such measures will have catastrophic consequences for the environment.