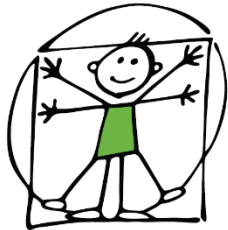


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**REMOTE
Primary Forests**

Research on Mountain Temperate Primary Forests

Mr. Klaus Iohannis
President

Mr. Ludovic Orban
Prime-Minister

Mr. Costel Alexe
Minister of the Environment,
Waters and Forests

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24th June 2020

Dear Mr. President Iohannis,
dear Prime Minister Orban,
dear Minister Alexe,

we would like to address you on concern of a letter sent to you on February 11th 2020 by a group of leading NGOs from all over the European Union. Until today we have not received an official answer to our concern.

This concern is based upon numerous reports about massive logging in primary and old-growth forests in Romania - even in protected areas such as Natura 2000 sites, national parks and buffer zones of UNESCO World Heritage sites.

However, there are indications that Romania could still host more than 525.000 ha of forests with a very high degree of naturalness (never managed primary forests or long time untouched old-growth forests) as suggested by the PRIMOFARO inventory published in September 2019. There is a broad consensus among scientists, international institutions, politics and civil society that biodiversity and carbon rich forests deserve protection and non-intervention management to be able to tackle both the global climate and nature crises.

The majority of these high biodiversity value forests in Romania is located in Natura 2000 sites. The EU Habitat Directive determines that Member States are obliged to take „appropriate steps to avoid, in the special areas of conservation, the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species as well as disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designated, in so far as such disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of this Directive.“ Any intervention at the site (plan or project) should only be approved after it has been ascertained that there is no adverse affect to „the integrity of the site“.

As there are serious doubts whether these legal provisions are implemented properly in Romania, facing the large scale of logging in protected habitats, endangering protected species and having obviously „adverse effects“ to the ecological integrity of natural sites, the EU Commission launched an infringement procedure against the Romanian authorities in February this year.

Furthermore we would like to bring to your attention, that an anonymous expert group represented by the Rector and the Dean Forest Faculty of the Transylvanian University of Brasov published several statements lately, drawing the picture that Romanian primary and old-growth forests are a result of Romanian long term forest management system and accusing scientists and NGOs of spreading „erroneous information regarding the forests of Romania and the way of their management“. They state that aspects of the EU infringement procedure are being the proof of „misunderstanding the realities in Romania“, caused by „misinformation, subjective interpretations and unfounded science“.

There have been many cases of evidence of old-growth and even primary forests being severely degraded on a large scale. Usually this happened on the pretence of so called „sustainable forest management“. This kind of forestry obviously results in systemic and deliberate cutting of tree stands which are in a very close to nature status and which very likely host rare and protected species. The assertion, that „sustainable forest management“ is sort of equal to protection of old growth forests is gravely misleading and not based on sound science.

The documents issued by this „expert group“, read like political papers, advocating the interests of forest industry players. Furthermore, the fact that the members of the „expert group“ are kept secret reminds at pre-democratic times and strongly contradicts contemporary and modern customs with scientific debates. Thus, we express strong concern about the misleading statements of a public academic institution by the Rector and the Dean (Forest Faculty) of the Transylvanian University of Brasov for sectoral economical interests, especially when the subject matter relates to comprehensive research, analysis and informed opinions of reputable scientists and NGOs.

There is a broad consensus in science and society, which is also backed by the just published EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, that an integration of conservation and restoration measures is urgently needed. We reemphasize, that Romania gave a commitment with adopting the UN-Convention on Biological Diversity to contribute to global biodiversity protection and is bound to implement the EU Nature Directives. On EU-level, the new Biodiversity Strategy states that it is „particularly important to strictly protect the EU's remaining primary and old-growth forests“. The strategy aims for strict protection of 10 percent of the EU marine and terrestrial ecosystems.

There are indications, that approximately 8% of the forests in Romania are in a very close to nature status. The protection of these forests would perfectly fit into the contemporary protection schemes in Europe and would signal internationally that Romania is willing to give an appropriate contribution.

Thus, again, we urgently call on you to take steps to comprehensively and permanently preserve all remains of old-growth and primary forests in Romania. It is important to do this based on scientific grounds and transparent rules.

Therefore, we ask you to take the following steps:

- All primary and old-growth forests in Romania should be included in (enlarged) Natura 2000 sites. EU's Natura 2000 legislation provides the legal base, the Primofaro inventory gives indications about the locations of potential natural forests.
- Old-growth and primary forests on state property should be put under non-intervention management immediately.

- Owners of natural forests on private or municipal property need to be compensated for accepting non-intervention management for high biodiversity value sites. Therefore a long-term compensation mechanism is urgently required.

We strongly urge you to ensure the full protection of Romania's unique natural forest heritage – and we do offer co-operation in this huge undertaking.

Yours sincerely,



Gabriel Schwaderer
Executive Director
EuroNatur Foundation

On behalf of:



Gabriel Paun
President
Agent Green



Hermann Edelmann
Coordinator International Programmes
Pro Regenwald



László Maráz
Coordinator
German NGO Working Group on
Forests



Anna Kárníková
Director
Hnutí DUHA - Friends of the Earth Czech



Friedrich Wulf
Programme Coordinator
Friends of the Earth Europe



Olaf Bandt
Chairman
BUND – Friends of the Earth Germany



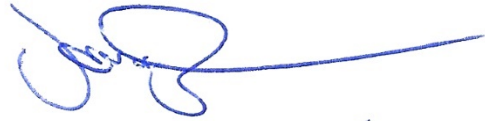
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