

JOINT STATEMENT

by the Ministers responsible for forests of Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Slovakia and Sweden

**Informal Meeting of Forest Ministers
5 October 2021, Vienna, Austria**

„Fit for all - Paving the way for Sustainable and
Multifunctional European Forests“

Joint Statement

Fit for all – how to address the growing pressure on forests

Forests are Europe's most dominant landscape feature: They cover around 40 percent of the EU's territory and have a decisive influence on its citizens' quality of life. They provide unique habitats for animals and plants and offer renewable resources as well as clean air and other benefits for human health. They protect us against natural hazards, safeguard many jobs and are a major source of recreation.

Forests are among our most important partners in the fight against climate change. They regulate water cycles, absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and thereby contribute to climate change mitigation. In addition, they provide the sustainable, renewable material wood to foster an innovative circular bioeconomy. The dynamic concept of Sustainable Forest Management is leading the way since generations. In that respect, the three key components of sustainability – environmental, social and economic aspects – have to be integrated in a balanced way.

Forests in Europe are growing in terms of area and biomass. However, forests and the forest-based sector are also facing increasing challenges, stemming from fragmentation, air-borne pollution and the effects of climate change, but also by the multiple and sometimes conflicting demands of society.

It is of utmost importance that we, the Ministers responsible for forests in Europe, continue to demonstrate political guidance in forest policy and set pathways for solutions. At the same time, cooperation amongst EU Member States, with the European Commission and other relevant partners, also at pan-European level, needs to be enhanced, in order to safeguard a prosperous development of our forests and the forest-based sector. It is time to reiterate our common vision of the multifunctional role of forests in Europe, the common understanding of EU-wide cooperation in forest policy and of Sustainable Forest Management as guiding principle.

We, the Ministers responsible for forests reaffirm the following:

- 1) To reinforce the principle of Sustainable Forest Management**, as developed by the FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe and implemented and continuously adapted to societal needs by its signatories, to safeguard healthy, diverse, and regionally adapted forests and their multifunctional role in Europe.

This includes its continuous work on defining Criteria and Indicators, as well as monitoring and reporting. Any addition to and further development of Sustainable Forest Management has to be fully in line with the FOREST EUROPE process and its working methods.

- 2) To acknowledge the broad expertise** and vast knowledge of forestry and the forest-based sector in Europe as key for future oriented solutions.

Within the frame of national forest policy and legislation, a high quality level of expertise has been established over generations, resulting in a wealth of regionally and even locally differentiated solutions, supported by practical experiences of forest owners and managers, sound scientific knowledge, including thoroughly collected data provided by national forest inventories, and integrating all aspects like biodiversity conservation.

- 3) To foster cooperation, coordination and joint activities** between Member States of the EU, the European Commission as well as other important partners in the pan-European region on forest policy related matters.

Many forest related matters affect our forests across borders and sectors, like enhancing their resilience to climate change, their biodiversity and their contribution to a circular bioeconomy. It is of utmost importance to cooperate and coordinate in a transparent and inclusive way.