

Open Letter to Romanian President and Government – Natural Forest Heritage

Klaus Iohannis
President

Ludovic Orban
Prime-Minister

Costel Alexe
Minister of the Environment, Waters
and Forests

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11 February 2020

Open letter to Romanian President and Government – Natural Forest Heritage

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

last week on 4-5 February 2020 at the International Conference on forests for biodiversity and climate, convened by the European Commission, the protection of natural forests has been in the international spotlight.

As the UN Biodiversity Council made clear in May 2019 (when publishing the „Global Assessment Report“), we are facing a serious and combined climate heating and biodiversity destruction crisis, which is interlinked and fueling each other.

Climate crisis has arrived also in Europe’s forests. Unnatural forests in Europe are increasingly breaking down due to heat, drought and insect calamities, leaving large areas of bare land without protection from heat, floods or erosion.

Biodiverse natural (old-growth and primary) forests with an undisturbed canopy cover show a much higher degree of resilience against climate crisis born disturbances such as drought, heat, wind fells, insect attacks or wild fires. They provide essential ecosystem services and they are an irreplaceable haven for rare and threatened biodiversity.

Facing the progressing collapse of Europe’s unnatural plantations, natural forests potentially could become the only intact forests landscapes left in the emerging climate crisis. Thus, they will play an important role in preserving Europe’s forest cover and will help with forest restoration. Furthermore, natural forests play an important role in forest carbon capture and sequestration and thus they are an important asset with efforts for climate security.

Unfortunately, primary and old-growth forests (including „virgin and quasivirgin“ forests as defined in Romania) have become extremely rare in Europe. Less than 4% of the forests within the EU are more or less “undisturbed by man” (Forest Europe 2015).

A huge proportion of Europe’s natural forests remains is located in Romania: PRIMOFARO inventory (2019) identified more than 525,000 ha of potential old-growth and primary forests. This is the biggest share of old-growth and primary forests in EU outside Scandinavia. Out of these, more than 330,000 ha are designated as Natura 2000 sites.

The Habitats and Birds directives rule, that habitats and species in a favourable conservation status may not be deteriorated significantly by any plan or project. This certainly is also relevant for the forest sector. In 2018, the Court of Justice of the EU ruled that the logging campaign in old forest stands in the Bialowieza Natura 2000 site in Poland was violating EU legislation. This means that logging of natural (old-growth and primary) forests in Natura 2000 sites poses a serious risk of breaching EU law.

There are indications that provisions from this EU’ s Nature Directives have not been followed sufficiently by Romanian authorities and governmental institutions in the years since 2007. As a consequence, deliberate and potentially unlawful logging of primary and old-growth forests is omnipresent in Romania’s Natura 2000 sites.

The new EU Biodiversity Strategy will most likely set new nature protection targets: A target of 30 % of EU’s marine and terrestrial ecosystems to be included in protected areas and a third of this area, 10 % of the total surface, to come under a strict non-intervention management, is receiving sympathy from both the European Parliament and the European Commission.

More than 525,000 ha or around 8 % of Romania’s forests are in a very favourable conservation status, as the PRIMOFARO inventory revealed. This is equivalent to just 2.3 % of the total territory of the Romanian state. With other words: if Romania would fulfill the new EU nature protection requirement with forested areas only, around 28 % of all forests would have to be set aside as non-intervention sites. 330,000 ha, or 5% of Romania’s forests, are under protection already - at least on paper. We are convinced, that all Romanian old-growth and primary forests (> 525,000 ha) have to be safeguarded from deterioration and thus preserved under a legally binding regime, e.g. such as the Natura 2000 network.

The comprehensive and strict protection of this outstanding natural forest heritage would be a significant step towards meeting the new EU biodiversity targets and implementing existing legislation, avoiding infringement interventions by the European Commission.

We urgently call on you to rapidly initiate steps to comprehensively and permanently preserve all 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 natural forests in Romania should be included in (enlarged) Natura 2000 sites. EU’s Natura 2000 legislation provides the legal base, the PRIMFOFARO 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 compensation mechanism is urgently required.

Dear Mr. President, dear Prime Minister, dear Minister, many people in Europe condemn forest destruction in the Amazon region or elsewhere - and rightly do so. However, representatives from countries in the global South have stated clearly that they expect Europe to protect its own natural forests as well. So, this is a global responsibility.

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:



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Wolfgang Kuhlmann
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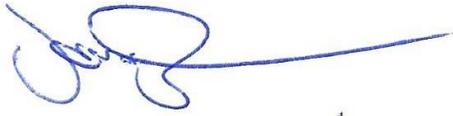
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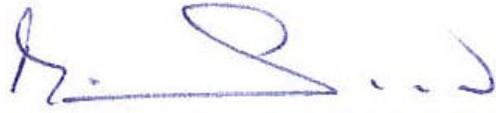
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